

INVESTIGATING DISPROPORTIONALITY THROUGH
THE EXPERIENCES OF FORMERLY INCARCERATED
PEOPLE OF COLOR WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

by

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Abstract

Since the United States' inception, the foundation of the country has been built upon inequities. From unfair assessment practices to ability tracking and arbitrary discipline, the African American/Latino K-12 educational experience has been exclusionary, subsequently paralleling the disproportionality for people of color incarcerated within the justice system. The disproportionality observed in special education programs and the prison system creates what some have called *second generation segregation* (Alexander, 2010; Ahrum, Fergus, and Noguera, 2011; Ferri and Connor, 2005). While an emerging body of literature shows that persons of color who have disabilities and records of disciplinary infractions are more likely to be incarcerated (Peguero and Shekarkhar, 2011; Noguera, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2004; and Ahrum, Fergus and Noguera, 2011), this literature does not highlight the factors that set these students on the school-to-prison pipeline. Using Structural Inequity, Cultural/Social Reproduction, and Critical Race Theories, this qualitative case study examines the multiple factors in early home life and K-12 educational and discipline experiences of six formerly incarcerated individuals that may contribute to a pathway to prison. Findings suggest that for the study's six participants, historical and home trauma, environmental factors, and the quality of primary social relationships adversely impact K-12 educational functioning and precede the onset of criminal activities resulting in incarcerations for African American and Latino students. Drawing on these findings, I offer implications

for schools, including the need for Trauma Informed Care pedagogy, early identification of special needs, Full Service Community schools that provide mental health support to students who have experienced trauma, and Restorative Justice practices including collaboration with local law enforcement. Implications for prisons include the critical need for education, employability skills, career readiness, and Restorative Justice practices.

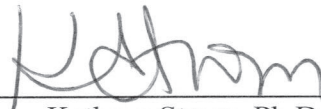
Keywords: disproportionality, special education, discipline, school-to-prison pipeline, African Americans, Latinos

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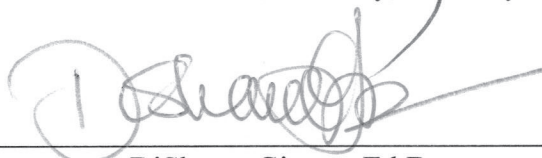
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Segregation and racism have roots deep within social and political U.S. institutions. From unfair assessment practices to ability tracking and arbitrary discipline, the African American/Latino K-12 educational experience has been exclusionary. This exclusionary experience parallels the disproportionality for people of color incarcerated within the justice system. The disproportionality observed in special education programs and the justice system creates what some have called *second generation segregation* (Alexander, 2010; Ahran, Fergus, Noguera, 2011; & Ferri, Connor, 2005). While an emerging body of literature shows that persons of color who have disabilities and records of disciplinary infractions are more likely to be incarcerated (Peguero and Shekarkhar, 2011; Noguera, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Ahran, Fergus and Noguera, 2011), this literature does not highlight how this happens. Therefore, this qualitative case study examines the multiple factors in special education and K-12 discipline experiences that may contribute to a pathway to prison.

As cited in Holdaway and O'Neill (2006), institutional racism is defined by Macpherson (1999) as the collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their color, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behavior which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. Daily micro-inequities and practices, such as culturally and linguistically biased assessments leading to the over-identification of

minority students in special education programs, exclude African Americans and Latinos from accessing mainstream educational programs on comprehensive school campuses. These unfair practices create a push out of the K-12 educational system into segregated non-public schools and/or the juvenile justice correctional school settings. For example, according to the 2013-2014 School Accountability Report Card (SARC) for James Baldwin Academy, a Seneca Non-Public School in San Leandro, California, almost half of its African American student population, which makes up 47% of its total students, is segregated from the mainstream public school system.

In turn, this segregation leaves many African American and Latino students unprepared to academically compete in the public school mainstream programs and without options for postsecondary education and advancement in careers after high school. This cycle reproduces generations of limited options for oppressed populations of Blacks and Latinos. Following Ahram, Fergus & Noguera (2011), I argue that disproportionality serves as a modern form of segregation separating Black and Latino students from educational opportunities and outcomes afforded to their White peers. To provide a background of this issue, described below are historical accounts of African American and Latino experiences within the United States. Understanding the political and historical contexts of these two oppressed groups provides insight into the current challenges they face in today's educational institutions.

Political and Historical Context

The first half of the 19th century saw an influx of immigrants arriving to the U.S. With this large of number of immigrants arriving to American shores, the institutions of the time found ways to incorporate and accommodate the various languages and cultures coming into the U.S. However, as the end of the 19th century neared, a change in the

political climate saw a swing toward more repressive policies: “The period spanning the 1880s to the 1960s was a turning point in which a number of repressive policies were promulgated, but for different reasons” (Gándara, et al., 2010, p. 23).

Around this time, laws like *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), a landmark United States Supreme Court decision that upheld racial segregation in public facilities, thus ushering in an era of “separate but equal,” became part of American institutions (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537, 1896). A string of Civil Rights cases including *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), have been brought to the courts in efforts to resolve these inequities experienced by these groups. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) making segregation unconstitutional (*Brown v. Board of Education* 347 U.S. 483, 1954). *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) provided linguistically diverse students access to education in a language comprehensible to them (*Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563, 1974). Most recently, the *Eliezer Williams, et al. v. State of California, et al.* (2004) case was a statewide class action lawsuit upholding the rights of low income communities and communities of color by ensuring them the basic necessities required for an education (instructional materials, safe and decent school facilities, and qualified teachers). As these cases demonstrate, inferior education and exclusionary practices were explicitly exercised in the past, and they continue to manifest into new forms today, such as exclusionary discipline and special education referrals (Herr and Arms, 2004).

African Americans have also struggled with cultural biases in their educational experiences. In the mid-1960s, the class action lawsuit *Hobson v. Hansen* (1967) was filed against the Washington, D.C. public schools on behalf of Black pupils, alleging they were assigned disproportionately to lower ability groups or tracks (*Hobson v. Hansen*, 269 F. Supp. 401 D.D.C., 1967). Circuit Judge Skelly Wright concluded that this was discriminatory under the due process clause of the Fifth Amendment, because the lower

track classes provided less educational opportunity. Salvia and Yseldyke (1988, cited in California Department of Education, 1989) assert, “Since this case, both ability grouping and standardized testing have come under judicial scrutiny” (p. 1).

Another case tackling this issue included the landmark case *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979), which addressed the issues of racial and cultural bias within IQ testing practices (*Larry P. v. Riles*, 495 F. Supp. 926, N.D. Cal., 1979). Powers, et al. (2004) “declared that intelligence tests should not be used to qualify African American students for educable mentally retarded (EMR) classes or their equivalent” (p. 146). Due to disproportionality observed in the special education program as a whole, in 1986, the court expanded the injunction on intelligence tests from banning their use in placing African American students into EMR programs and to determining the eligibility of African American students for *all* special education programs (Powers et al., 2004). As a result of the ruling in the *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979) case, IQ testing with African American students was banned because they had discovered that intelligence tests were not normed on minority populations, but instead on White middle class children. Finally, in 1975, the State Board of Education issued a moratorium on the use of IQ tests for all pupils if the test was to be used as part of the classification of pupils (California Department of Education, 1989).

While African Americans certainly have a long history of exclusion within the U.S. public school system, they are not the only group to experience discrimination and the effects of institutional racism. Latinos, in particular, suffered the effects of the Americanization Movement in the early 1900s, which advocated for English-only laws and the elimination of culture within U.S. institutions. This ideology and the resulting policies have caused many students to lose their languages and cultural identities. For instance, Latinos were not allowed to speak Spanish as their form of communication and were even punished for speaking their native language at school. Crawford (1989) noted, “Spanish detention, or being kept after school for using Spanish, remained a formal

punishment in the late 1960s” (p. 26). The loss of language and culture has had a terribly adverse impact upon immigrants. In order to achieve upward mobility, the achievement of English proficiency is required. As Gándara and colleagues (2010) note: “It is noteworthy that the United States continues to consider linguistic assimilation of immigrants, or the achievement of English monolingualism, as the final step in the multigenerational assimilation process” (p. 24). This task of acquiring English is imperative to social and economic success. Without the currency of the English language, it is very difficult for immigrants to achieve opportunities commensurate with native English speaking persons.

Because their language and culture have been excluded from schools and society, Latinos have remained in a socially stratified subordinate rank unable to break the cycle of oppression imposed upon them from the structural inequities of the system. As Wiley and Wright (2004) state, “From the perspective of social control, ideologies supporting linguistic assimilation have generally had two broad goals. One has attempted to achieve deculturation for the purpose of subordination; the other has sought to promote acculturation for assimilation” (p. 146). These institutional practices of language exclusion positioned Latinos at a significant disadvantage. With limited language proficiency in English, Latinos were unable to access academic curriculum to compete adequately in scholarly affairs. Inadequate preparation led to few or non-existent options for advancement in college and careers, especially because they were not able to speak English: “Minority languages are always culturally subordinate to the majority or ‘official’ language and thus so are their speakers. Such cultural subordination always carries economic consequences” (Gándara et al., 2010, p. 20). With the inability to use Spanish, along with limited English language proficiency skills, Latino students have struggled academically in school settings—both in K-12 and beyond. According to Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (2016), “only about 30% of Latinos in community colleges successfully transfer to a 4-year university within 6 years.”

However, like African Americans, Latinos have also triumphed in civil rights wins. La Raza Unida Party, a militant Chicano group, organized school boycotts to protest the unequal treatment of Spanish-speaking students (Crawford, 1989). In 1974, the major court decision, *Lau v. Nichols*, which addressed the rights of language-minority students, was the only ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court to do so in history. In this case, a class action suit filed on behalf of Chinese students who were being denied education on equal terms (the high court's standard in *Brown v. Board of Education*) made it to the Supreme Court, who unanimously overruled the lower courts in favor of the language learner children. In their now-famous ruling, the justices wrote, "There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education" (*Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563, 1974). Despite the 1974 ruling, the achievement gap of linguistically diverse students still lags behind White students some 42 years later.

Although there have been some advances, due to governmental assimilation practices, generations of Latinos in this country lost their Spanish language: "By the second generation, only 4% of Hispanics counted themselves as Spanish-dominant, down from 72% in the first generation" (Gándara, et al., 2010, p. 21, citing Pew Hispanic Center, 2002). Instruction that strives to change students into something else inevitably discourages academic achievement and leaves significant cultural wounds. Crawford (1989) argued, "when children are painfully ashamed of who they are, they are not going to do very well in school, whether they be taught monolingually, bilingually, or trilingually" (p. 27). With the exclusion of their language and culture, Latinos have suffered both academically and psychologically. Despite the *Lau* decision, and, given instruction that often did not meet their needs, Latino students learned English too

slowly to keep up in other content areas, there was little improvement in their long-term academic achievement, and many were assigned to special education (Crawford, 1989):

Based on their performance on IQ tests administered in English, disproportionate numbers of language-minority children ended up in special classes for the educationally handicapped. As late as 1980, Hispanic children in Texas were overrepresented by 315 percent in the learning-disabled category. (Crawford, 1989, p. 27)

Disproportionality in K-12 Schools

African American and Latino students within United States educational institutions continue to grapple with unjust practices in K-12 schools. In special education, racial imbalances have harmful effects. Disproportionality places Black and Latino students in triple jeopardy – first in their increased likelihood of being misclassified as disabled, then in their greater likelihood of being placed in the most restrictive settings (classroom settings with little or no interaction with general education students), and then in their greater likelihood of receiving poor-quality services within those settings (Losen, 2002). Additionally, “For both Black and Latino students, the increase in the percentages of students suspended in the transition from elementary/K-8 schools to middle schools was threefold” (Arcia, 2007, p. 464). These negative academic experiences and disproportionate discipline practices further compound the experiences of African American and Latino students in the K-12 setting, positioning them towards a trajectory of limited life options and prison.

For example, Wacquant (2000) argued that there is a growing correspondence between inner city schools and prisons, and that the similarities are not an accident.

He suggests that linking the two institutions is a by-product of what he terms a “deadly symbiosis between ghetto and prison” (p. 16-24). In schools, common school misbehavior and minor offenses as class disruption have been criminalized, with thousands of students – some as young as age 6 – receiving Class C misdemeanor tickets each year for minor misbehavior at school that used to mean a trip to the principal’s office (Fowler, 2011). Clearly, what we do or do not do in the K-12 educational systems can shape pathways to prison: “The single greatest predictor of future involvement in the juvenile system is a history of disciplinary referrals at school” (Fowler, 2011, p. 16). Given these outcomes, K-12 educators need to rethink policies, practices and programs that will better serve African American and Latino students, can provide constructive pathways into adulthood, and can mediate the pipeline to prison many face.

Study Purpose

As outlined above, various forms of legislation have been passed in the last several decades to mediate racial and cultural biases in disability identification for African American and Latino students, but they continue to remain overrepresented in special education programs and grapple with inequitable discipline practices. Although numbers of African American students in the Intellectually Deficient (ID) category have decreased in California, numbers in the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and Emotional Disturbance (ED) categories have increased, and the overall numbers of African American students in special education have remained relatively stable (Dizon, 2013, p. 10). In most schools and districts, an examination of which students are most likely to be suspended, expelled, or removed from the classroom for punishment reveals that minorities (especially Blacks and Latinos), males, and low achievers generally, are vastly overrepresented (Arcia, 2007; Meier and colleagues, 1989). Moreover, persons

of color who have a disability and records of disciplinary infractions are more likely to be incarcerated (Peguero and Shekarkhar, 2011; Noguera, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Ahrum, Fergus and Noguera, 2011) than those who do not have these labels and experiences. Just as some children are being primed for prestigious professions, others are being prepared for prison (Ferguson, 2001). However, the literature does not highlight how this tracking happens, or what factors contribute to it, for students of color with special needs.

In this dissertation, this qualitative case study investigates the experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals who are persons of color with special needs and focuses on an examination of the multiple factors that may have contributed to a pathway to prison. The research questions that guide this study are: 1) What are the early home life and K-12 educational experiences of formerly incarcerated people of color with special needs? 2) What K-12 factors may have contributed to creating and/or mediating the disproportionality of formerly incarcerated people of color with special needs? In concluding this study, I examine and identify connections that may exist between special education, discipline and prison for the participants. The study provides insights to inform specific strategies that may be incorporated into K-12 educational institutions aimed at mediating the existing structural inequities, which have the potential to improve K-12 academic services to African American Latino students and prepare them for various college and career options.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Race has been and remains by and large undertheorized in education (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). As a result, few conceptual or theoretical frameworks have been developed to understand the disproportionality of African American and Latino students in special education, K-12 discipline practices, and the prison system. The failure on the part of researchers to critically examine the role that race plays in the pursuit of an equitable education may reveal insights into why previous measures have had limited effectiveness for marginalized student populations (Howard, 2008). Among the few frameworks featured in this literature, Structural Inequity Theory (Sullivan and Artiles, 2011) may have pinpointed the root causes of disproportionality, and thus I have chosen this framework to explain the phenomenon of disproportionality. Below I describe Structural Inequity Theory, which depicts the structural inequities resulting in the differential learning experiences for students of color, thereby maintaining a new form of segregation know as *second-generation segregation*. In addition, I draw on insights from two other conceptual/theoretical frameworks in this dissertation, including Cultural/Social Reproduction and Critical Race Theory. These are explained next.

Structural Inequity Theory

According to Sullivan and Artiles (2011), who explored the problem of disproportionality through the theoretical framework of Structural Inequity Theory, this perspective provides a framework for understanding the roots of disproportionality and the mechanisms through which disproportionality occurs. It does so by locating the basis of racial inequity in the structure of society and racialized social systems, rather than in the beliefs or actions of individuals. Race relations are at the heart of educational stratification and disproportionality can be conceptualized as a means of maintaining educational stratification. Stratification refers to the patterned and differential distribution of resources, life chances, and costs/benefits among groups of the population. These social systems are dynamic, hierarchical and socially constructed, resulting in racial ideology (or racism) that influences the behaviors of individuals within the system. The importance of the social construction of the categories is particularly salient in the consideration of disproportionality because of the convergence of race and disability, the latter of which is based largely on the judgment of professionals within schools and clinical settings (Sullivan and Artiles, 2011). Thus, professional actions that arise within these stratified systems may result in differential treatment of certain groups within those systems.

Additionally, Structural Inequity Theory also involves the notion of racial competition. In other words, there is competition for limited resources, which results in the use of racial ideology to advantage White communities. For example, racial competition allows for the consideration of institutional racism (biased racial outcomes associated with policies and practices) that may intentionally or unintentionally have racially disproportionate consequences (such as special education disproportionality) and can collectively reinforce advantage or disadvantage. From a structural perspective,

the sorting process that underpins special education identification and placement and schools' patterns of allocating human and material resources is primarily concerned with reproducing racial and economic hierarchies within the broader social system that serves the interests of the dominant group (Sullivan and Artiles, 2011).

The stigmatization and exclusionary practices involved in special education for many minority students reduces the competition for otherwise sacred resources and operates as *second-generation* discrimination. The process of categorizing initially acts as a means of stratifying students, and the results of the stratification—differences in knowledge attainment and achievement between groups of students—serve as justification for continued differential placement and long-term disparities in outcomes (e.g., college enrollment, employment, and so on) (Sullivan and Artiles, 2011).

An institutional infrastructure built upon structural inequities sets in motion a trajectory that socially reproduces the interests of the dominant group and disadvantages for subordinate groups. I argue that Structural Inequity Theory provides a valid explanation to understand the disproportionality phenomenon evident for African American and Latino students in today's educational institutions. To further develop this argument, described below are insights from Cultural/Social Reproduction and Critical Race Theory frameworks that support the premise of Structural Inequity Theory.

Cultural/Social Reproduction

Skiba and colleagues (2006) explored the problem of disproportionality through the conceptual/theoretical framework of Cultural Reproduction and Interpretive Study. Originally this conceptual/theoretical framework was used as an explanation of the perpetuation of class-based differences. However, the theory has been further developed in an effort to show how racial and class inequity are reproduced over time through institutional and individual actions and decisions that maintain the status quo at the

expense of less privileged groups. One important implication of Cultural Reproduction is that such actions or processes may be driven by individual or institutional habit patterns without ever reaching a conscious level of awareness on the part of those who participate in those institutional actions. For example, the interactional and evaluative techniques routinely used by teachers may not be adequate to fully identify the intellectual resources and talents of low-status children, who are subsequently assessed as poor performers. Unchallenged, such patterns can unintentionally re-create and reinforce existing inequities in school processes.

Furthermore, an ethnographic exploration of the referral-to-placement process illustrates the socially constructed nature of disability decision-making. At each step in the process ultimately leading to a student's placement in a special education program, both individual teacher judgments and institutional constraints made a strong contribution to the ultimate decision to label a student as disabled. Although psychological testing is often perceived as an objective procedure less likely to be influenced by individual judgments, in fact, the process is often highly idiosyncratic because psychologists choose tests or test batteries that are more likely to produce the results that they, or the teachers making the referral, wish to see. The contributions of racial and socioeconomic inequity through micro-level reproductive and perhaps unconscious process suggests a strong need to study local processes and perspectives on inequity, yet few published studies have sought to describe the local processes that may create or maintain disproportionality at the school or district level. The absence of local interpretive data may in fact be a critical barrier to understanding and remediating disproportionate representation.

As described-above with Cultural Reproduction, Social Reproduction similarly explores the forces of production and relations of production. As cited by Sallaz and Zavisca (2007), Bourdieu (1973) theorized an emphasis on social structures and how they reproduce generations of social stratification. "Social structures inculcate mental

structures into individuals; these mental structures in turn reproduce or (under certain conditions) change social structures” (Sallaz and Zavisca, 2007, p. 24). Bourdieu articulated concepts to describe these processes: capital, field, habitus, and symbolic power. For example, a field has rules on how to play a game, forms of value, and strategies for playing the game (Sallaz and Zavisca, 2007). One’s ability to navigate the social and political terrain determines whether one remains in a social class or advances to a higher ranked social class. Social Reproduction today is upheld by neoliberalism, as described below by Macris (2011):

As with all (dominant) ideologies Neo-Liberalism has become naturalized, legitimized, universalized and firmly embedded in everyday discourse, operating as a mechanism for upholding and reproducing the asymmetrical power relations in society that favor the haves over the have-nots, men over women, the conventional over the dissenting, the dominant over the subordinate (p. 21).

Bourdieu believed that the educational system contributes to the reproduction of the structure of power relationships between classes, which controls the distribution of cultural capital (Viegas Ferndandes, 1988). Demaine (2003) further argues, “the school and the family are said to play their part in social reproduction as each new generation takes up social roles and occupations left by the previous generation as well as newly emerging occupations” (p. 126). Rather than serving as great equalizers, educational institutions play a key role in reproducing inequalities.

The correspondence tenet of Social Reproduction further explains the phenomenon of K-12 education and incarceration rates. As cited by Demaine (2003), Bowles and Gintis proposed that different levels of education feed workers into different levels within the occupational structure and, correspondingly, tend toward an internal organization comparable to levels in the hierarchical division of labor. The

social structures of education and job/career opportunities reinforce the stratification of the classes.

Disproportionate numbers of African American and Latino students over-identified in special education, along with their higher rates of suspensions, expulsions, and incarcerations, are pushed-out from the K-12 system with limited preparation and future life options. Noguera (2003) posited that the increasing prison population disproportionately comprised of poor Black and Latino men can be directly attributed to them being pushed out of school due to their lack of advocates or defenders. There is a tendency by educational institutions to punish the neediest children, especially those who are Black and Latino. Social Reproduction captures the experiences from childhood through adulthood for people of color and illuminates the phenomenon of disproportionality observed in society today. African Americans and Latinos are entrenched within this inequitable systemic infrastructure unable to escape, causing them to remain in a subordinate status. With these institutional structural inequities, dominant classes maintain an advantage when cycles of generations are reproduced and subordinate groups continue to remain oppressed (Macris, 2011).

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

With an understanding of how the institutional manifestations of *second-generation* occur, thereby reproducing and maintaining structural inequities for African American and Latino students in the K-12 educational system, the voices of the oppressed are beginning to surface more frequently in the scholarly literature to draw attention to the phenomenon of disproportionality and the various ways it is manifested (i.e. special education programs, discipline practices, and incarceration rates). Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a lens with which to explore how race factors into the phenomena of disproportionality. According to Howard (2008), the failure on the part

of researchers to critically examine the role that race plays in the pursuit of an equitable education may reveal insights into why previous measures have had limited effectiveness for marginalized student populations. African American students are the victims of detrimental racial politics, which play out in many U.S. schools. Unpacking the historical legacy of race and its contemporary remnants for all citizens is critical. This unpacking has obvious implications for the victims of racial oppression and inequity because many of them have experienced schooling in a manner that has had negative consequences for them, and educational researchers can play an important role in examining these circumstances in order to improve their educational and life chances.

Critical race theorists assert that racism is and has been an integral feature of American life, law, and culture, and any attempt to eradicate racial inequities has to be centered on the socio-historical legacy of racism (Howard, 2008). Through this lens of race and all of its manifestations, CRT is able to pose this challenge to racial oppression and subjugation in legal, institutional, and educational domains. A central part of this analysis is the notion of Whiteness as property, wherein historically the law has been used as the primary vehicle to protect the interests and rights of Whites over the rights of persons of color. Thus, CRT interrogates the positionality and privilege of being White in the U.S., and seeks to challenge ideas such as meritocracy, fairness, and objectivity in a society that has a legacy of racial discrimination and exclusion (Howard, 2008).

CRT provides an important lens because it not only centers race at the core of its analysis, but it also recognizes other forms of oppression, namely class and gender, which have important implications for African American males in particular. The critical centering of race (together with social class, gender, sexual orientation, and other areas of difference) at the locations where the research is conducted and discussions are held can serve as a major link between fully understanding the historical vestiges of discrimination and the present-day racial manifestations of that discrimination (Howard, 2008).

A conceptual framework with an explicit examination of the ways that race and racism manifest themselves and their juxtaposition with gender in education may offer new analysis into the underachievement of African American males, and provide new insight and direction for reversing their school achievement. All too often, African American males have been caught in a web of stereotyped notions of race and gender that place them at considerable disadvantages in schools and ultimately society. The mere exploration of the social construction of the Black male image in the U.S. over the last four centuries reveals a highly problematic depiction, ranging from the docile or the bewildered slave, to the hyper-sexed brute, to the gregarious Sambo, the exploitative pimp or slickster, to the super athlete and entertainer (Howard, 2008). The social and political ramifications of each of these images still influence the perceptions of scores of young Black men today, including through their own perpetuation of these images.

One of the central tenets of CRT that offers important implications for educational research concerning African American males and other marginalized populations is the importance of counterstory telling and narrative theory as a methodological tool. Counterstory telling is the sharing of stories of individuals whose experiences have not been told, and a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse. Given the troubling state of affairs experienced by an increasing number of African American males in pre K-12 schools, paradigms must be created which will allow their voices to shed light on the day-to-day realities in schools and challenge mainstream accounts of their experiences (Howard, 2008). The CRT framework involves African American males in questioning if and how racial micro-aggressions are present in low teacher expectations for African American males, suspicion or surprise about their academic success, common acceptance of their underachievement, lack of positive reinforcement for their accomplishments, differential

forms of punishment, demeaning comments, failure to place them in leadership positions and reluctance to refer them for advanced classes (Howard, 2008).

Furthermore, there are several areas of education that are amenable to a CRT analysis—namely, curriculum, instruction, and assessment. According to Ladson-Billings (1998), a close examination of these areas suggests that students from racially diverse backgrounds experience significantly different accounts of what is taught, how it is taught, and the ways schools evaluate what student know. Additionally, although zero-tolerance policies were designed to curb school violence, these have clear racial overtones in terms of who is most affected. As cited by Ladson-Billings (1998), the 2000 Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR) report indicates that African American students are 2.6 times more likely than White students to be suspended from school. The OCR data also revealed that African American males are more likely to be expelled from schools than any other racial or ethnic group. Disproportionality increases as students move from referral to expulsion, detention, and state prison. The ultimate exclusionary school discipline consequence is isolation and segregation from dominant, or mainstream, educational, and societal opportunities. Mayes Pane and colleagues (2014) further assert, due to its disproportional negative impact on students from non-dominant racial backgrounds, exclusionary school discipline is considered an oppressive educational practice and condition.

Summary

The known conceptual/theoretical frameworks outlined above, Structural Inequity Theory, Cultural/Social Reproduction and Critical Race Theory, describe the phenomenon of disproportionality as a form of *second-generation segregation*. However, disproportionality remains under-theorized. Specifically, there are few theories that precisely determine the origins of disproportionality or how to mediate it. In the body

of literature on this topic, the conceptual or theoretical frameworks for understanding why disproportionality occurs are rarely well developed, and as such, the causes of disproportionality remain unclear. At this time, Structural Inequity Theory appears to be the theoretical framework that explains disproportionality best, as it pinpoints systemic structural inequities as the root cause of the phenomenon. More sophisticated theories are needed in this area to fully understand the underpinnings of disproportionality.

Literature Review

In the following section, I review literature regarding the disproportionality of African American and Latino students in special education programs and discipline practices, arguing that these structures have become a form of *second-generation segregation*. Manifestations of disproportionality for students of color can be observed through highly restrictive settings, overrepresentation in special education programs, and arbitrary discipline practices resulting in high rates of suspensions and expulsions, thus, setting a trajectory onto the school-to-prison pipeline. Ultimately, these inequities have pushed African American and Latino students out of the K-12 educational system and into segregated non-public schools and/or the juvenile justice correctional school settings, thereby leaving many African American and Latino students unprepared to academically compete in public school mainstream programs.

Many scholars (e.g., Ahrum, Fergus, Noguera, 2011; Ferri, Connor, 2005; Skiba 2011) have argued that the special education referral process and discipline practices are discriminatory and discussed whether or not poverty, among other factors, plays a significant role in this disproportionality. Described below are studies that discuss these factors, including educational practices, sociocultural factors, and other

possible contributing elements that sustain disproportionality in the United States K-12 educational system.

Second-Generation Segregation

Ahram, Fergus and Noguera (2011) indicate that disproportionality serves as a modern form of segregation, separating Black and Latino students from educational opportunities and outcomes afforded to their White peers. Today, *second-generation segregation* is structured mainly through ability tracking (Ferri and Connor, 2005). By examining the long-standing critiques of special education practice, Ferri & Connor (2005) found that special education like ability tracking further reified the racial divisions that *Brown* was designed to dismantle. For example, “students in segregated special education classrooms are denied access to the general education curriculum” (Ferri & Conner, 2005, p. 95). Half a century after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), African American and Hispanic students face increasing rather than diminishing school segregation. Students in special education continue to experience separate existence in schools, despite being ensured a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (*Brown v. Board of Education* 347 U.S. 483, 1954). Many forms of creating segregation have been accounted for not only through institutional ability tracking, but parental choice has also played a role, as well. For example, “Tracking was seen as a strategy to curb the phenomenon of White families enrolling their children into private or suburban schools, a practice that came to be known as White flight” (Ferri & Conner, 2005 p. 96). As a result, segregation once achieved by building separate schools could now be achieved by building separate classrooms.

In a second study, Skiba and colleagues (2006) investigated the extent to which the overrepresentation of African American students in more restrictive special education settings is attributable to their overrepresentation in disability categories more likely to

be served in more restrictive educational environments. Within five disability categories (emotional disturbance, mild mental retardation, moderate mental retardation, learning disabilities, and speech and language), African American students were overrepresented in more restrictive educational environments and underrepresented in less restrictive environments relative to all other students with the same disability. Disproportionality was most evident in those disability categories served primarily in general education settings. Given the social consensus regarding inclusion, disproportionality in restrictiveness of educational environment may represent a more serious challenge than disproportionality in disability categories.

Similarly, to Skiba and colleagues (2006), McNulty-Eitle (2002) also found an overrepresentation of minority students in educable mentally handicapped (EMH) programs. In this study, McNulty-Eitle (2002) used a unique sample of U.S. public school districts ($N = 981$) and examined the effects of local racial and political-economic structures, school district characteristics, and school desegregation politics on the representation of black students in educable mentally handicapped (EMH) programs. Results indicated that a minority presence in the school district and economic resources and black political resources in the community as well as various dimensions of school desegregation politics were associated with the representation of black students in EMH programs. The study found further evidence that racial differences in educational placement were related to structures of opportunity in school districts and the communities they served and that the placement process should be the focus of continued study.

Educational Practices in Special Education

Educational practices greatly influence the trajectories that set students onto pathways of special education referrals, thereby creating the school-to-prison pipeline.

The literature shows that African American and Latino students are overrepresented in special education programs and receive unfair discipline measures as compared to their non-disabled White counterpart peers (Peguero and Shekarkhar, 2011; Noguera, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Ahram, Fergus and Noguera, 2011). Described below are educational referral processes and assessment practices that orient students of color away from the mainstream program, a form of institutional exclusion. The outcome, whether intended or unintended, has demonstrated that African American and Latino students are identified as students with disabilities who are placed into special education programs at higher rates than their White counterpart peers. Such practices have been viewed as a form of *second-generation segregation*.

Referrals. Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera (2011) explored how the social construct of norm child becomes racialized through the special education referral and classification process, subsequently producing disproportionality. Norm child refers to the children represented in normed referenced tests. The study examined assumptions of cultural deficit, which resulted in misguided conceptualizations of disability and result in the labeling of students in special education through a pseudoscientific placement-process. The research was conducted in two multiracial suburban school districts in New York State that were identified as having an overrepresentation of students of color. Participants consisted of teachers and administrators within the two identified districts. Intensive technical assistance was provided to these districts to identify the root causes of disproportionality and was subsequently followed by customized professional development. The authors concluded that disproportionality is a modern form of segregation, separating Black and Latino students from educational opportunities and outcomes afforded to their White peers.

A second study, McCall and Skrtic (2009) further acknowledged that the disproportionate representation of poor, working class, and racial/ethnic minority students

in special education is a policy problem, stating, “Three decades of disproportionality research has shown that the special education referral, identification, and placement process continues to be discriminatory” (McCall & Skritic, 2009, p.5). The study examined a two-part meta-frame for conceptualizing the disproportionality problem, which shows how an interplay of individual and structural forces has shaped the relationship between oppression and activism in the disability rights and Civil Rights movements, and to argue that framing disproportionality solely as a problem of special education practice ignores a key institutional function of special education in an unequal, stratified, and racialized education system.

Assessment Practices. Testing issues are in dire need of continued attention. Test biases in assessment practices contribute to the overrepresentation of African American and ELL students in special education (Ford, 2012). To address these inequities, legislation has been passed to ensure equal opportunities and access for culturally and linguistically diverse students: “Several landmark legal cases, such as *Diana v. State Board of Education* (1970) and *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979), challenged biases inherent in the standardized testing procedures used to identify students as eligible for special education” (Ferri & Connor, 2005, p. 94). In *Diana* a class action suit was filed on behalf of nine Hispanic children who were forced to take an individually administered IQ test in English and, as a result, were classified as labeled with educable mental retardation (EMR); however, when retested by a Spanish-speaking examiner, only one of the nine students was classified as EMR (Ferri & Connor, 2005).

In *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979) the overrepresentation of minority children in educable mental retardation (EMR) classes throughout San Francisco was determined to be due to unfair educational practices, including teacher bias (Ferri & Connor, 2005). The *Larry P.* case focused primarily on the question of bias in measures of general intelligence (*Larry P. v. Riles*, 495 F. Supp. 926, N.D. Cal., 1979). The class action lawsuit was filed on

behalf of Black pupils in the San Francisco Public Schools who were placed in special education classes for the mildly mentally retarded (California Department of Education, 1989). However, “despite the focus of *Larry P.* on IQ testing, as well as the ban on IQ tests announced in the opinion, there has been relatively little change in traditional assessment practices outside of California, particularly in the area of intellectual assessment” (Prasse and Reschly, 1986, p. 344). It does not appear, at least since the landmark case of *Larry P. v. Riles* and the court-ordered injunction banning IQ testing, that the use of standardized, norm-reference intelligence tests with African American students is the reason for their overrepresentation in special education. Dizon (2013) stated that shifting the concentration and focus of the issue of overrepresentation from the IQ test to more plausible reasons in the general education program maybe a better approach to resolving this phenomenon.

Both cases *Diana v. State Board of Education* (1970) and *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979) illustrated the role of school personnel, tests, and testing practices in erroneously labeling students of racial and linguistic minorities with a disability and placing them in restrictive special education classes (Ferri and Connor, 2005). The following two studies demonstrate the continuing trend of disproportionality of African American and Latino students in special education programs. In the first study, Oswald and colleagues (1999), investigated the influence of economic, demographic, and educational variables on the identification of minority students in special education and the representation of African American students as mildly mentally retarded (MMR) and seriously emotionally disturbed (SED) was explored. The study sample consisted of districts selected for the fall 1992 *Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Compliance Report* survey. Odds ratios were constructed for MMR and SED to describe the nature and extent of disproportionate representation. Regression models were tested to investigate the influence of a set of school-related demographic and fiscal variables on disproportionate

representation. Results indicated that African American students were about 2.4 times more likely to be identified as MMR and about 1.5 times more likely to be identified as SED than their non-African American peers. Economic and demographic variables were significant predictors of disproportionate representation but influenced identification of students as MMR and SED in different ways.

A second exploratory study by Sullivan and Artiles (2011) applied a structural theoretical lens as a means of understanding racial inequity in special education across analytical scales, racial groups, and disability categories. Based on the theory adopted, several hypotheses were tested regarding the relations of relative risk to district structural features, with conflicting results. Data on general and special education enrollment for the 2004-2005 academic year were drawn from publicly available annual reports by the Arizona Department of Education, 2005, summarizing the distribution of students from five racial categories (48% White, 5% African American, 39% Latino, 5.5% Native American, and 2% Asian). In addition, approximately 44% of all students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. The sample of students included 185 local educational agencies (LEA) with a total of 943,369 students. Results confirmed differential risk of educational disability across racial groups. Throughout the state, 11.5% of students were identified for special education. Risk was greatest for African American and Native American students, of whom 13.95% and 14.43% were identified as disabled, respectively. Latino students were equally likely to be identified relative to their White peers and Asian students were substantially less likely to be identified.

Discipline Practices

Once students of color become identified as special education, discipline becomes another layer that further compounds and reinforces exclusion from the mainstream program. Suspensions are a risk factor and race/ethnicity further increases a segregated

educational experience for African American and Latino students. Data suggests that subjective and arbitrary discipline practices adversely impact students of color and set them on a trajectory toward expulsion and incarceration. The studies described below highlight arbitrary discipline measures resulting in higher rates of school suspensions and expulsions for African American and Latino students, respectively.

Arbitrary Discipline. Skiba and colleagues (2011) investigated the patterns of office discipline referrals in 364 elementary and middle schools during the 2005-2006 school year. Data was aggregated with school personnel uploading daily/weekly office discipline referrals to the web-based School-Wide Information System database. Data indicates at the K-6 and 6-9 levels, African American students are significantly overrepresented in office discipline referrals across all infraction types. Data further substantiated differential selection at the classroom level and differential processing at the administrative level make significant contributions to the disproportionate representation of African American and Latino students in school discipline. Upon closer analysis, African American and Latino students with similar infraction types received higher levels of school discipline when compared to all other groups. This study revealed, “Race/ethnicity contributes to administrative decisions regarding discipline independent of type of infraction, above and beyond any prior disparity in classroom referral” (Skiba et al., 2011, p. 95). Descriptive and logistic regression analyses found that students from African American families were 2.19 (elementary) to 3.78 (middle) times as likely to be referred to the office for problem behavior than their White peers. Results further indicate that students from African American and Latino families were more likely than their White peers to receive expulsion or out of school suspension as consequences for the same or similar problem behavior.

A second study regarding arbitrary discipline measures conducted by Peguero and Shekarkhar (2011) further found that Latino students face a number of educational

challenges, such as disproportionate school punishment. The study draws from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 and utilized hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to analyze the relationships between gender, generational status, misbehavior, and school punishment for 7, 250 Latino/a and White students. Results indicated that Latino/a students, regardless of gender or generational status, are not misbehaving more than White students. However, for school punitive measures, third generation Latino and Latina students are more likely to be punished than their White peers. With such arbitrary decision-making regarding discipline, African American and Latino students find themselves further removed from the mainstream into alternative placements and structurally positioned with a trajectory set towards the justice system.

Suspensions. The three following studies discuss the disparities in suspension rates among students of color. High-risk populations and environments appear to include African American students with emotional and behavioral disabilities and schools with minimal supports and lack of timely interventions. Data indicates that gaps remain for African American and Latino students in comparison to their White counterpart peers.

First, in a statewide analysis of suspension data from 1995-2003 in Maryland by Krezmien, Leone, and Achilles (2006), the disproportionate number of suspensions of minority students and students with disabilities were investigated. Results indicated substantial increases in overall suspension rates, as well as disproportionate rates of suspensions for African American, American Indian, and students with disabilities. The odds ratios for suspensions increased for African American and American Indian students from 1995-2003. Additionally, the odds ratios for students with disabilities varied by disability category and by race. For most disability categories, students with disabilities had higher odds ratios than students without them. Students with emotional and behavioral disorders had the highest odds ratios for suspensions, especially for African American students. Furthermore, even when studies reviewed schools that provided

extra support to mediate and reduce suspensions, discipline gaps remained for African American and Latino students, in comparison to their White counterpart peers.

In a second study, Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2011) examined the relationship between structure and support in high school climate and suspension rates. The characteristics of authoritative schools, defined as highly supportive and highly structured with academic and behavioral expectations, were also examined. Schools low on both structure and support had the largest racial discipline gaps. Findings suggest that risky settings may not meet the developmental needs of adolescents and may contribute to disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for Black students. When teachers have poor classroom management skills, along with limited resources and underfunded schools, these stressors contribute to the micro-inequities students of color experience, resulting in disparities with more referrals for special education, suspensions, and expulsions.

In the third study, Vincent and colleagues (2012) conducted a large-scale evaluation of Check In/Check Out (CICO) across districts and CICO by race/ethnicity. Check In/Check Out is a progress monitoring strategy to ensure students' success by checking in and out with students at the beginning and ending of the day, respectively. Given the documented racial/ethnic disproportionality in disciplinary referrals, the study examined whether students from various racial/ethnic groups have equitable access to secondary supports. These findings contribute to the understanding of disproportionality by confirming that the lack of early and timely interventions has an adverse impact upon students of color. In this study, researchers found that African American students who received CICO late also experienced an increase in office discipline referrals (ODR). Findings suggest, in most cases, implementation of secondary level support did not decrease the discipline disparities. An important message emerging from the study was that "timely access to CICO was critical for behavioral success, while delayed access

to CICO resulted in further increases in office discipline referrals ODR” (Vincent et al., 2012, p. 448).

Socio-Cultural and Environmental Factors

Despite decades of research examining the disproportionate representation of racial minority students in special education and discipline practices, the complexity of disproportionality remains incompletely conceptualized. Much of the research reviewed above was designed without a clear theoretical framework (Sullivan and Artiles, 2011). While no studies have discussed the causes of disproportionality ecologically, several plausible contributing factors to disproportionality have been discussed in the literature individually. These factors include poverty, teacher perceptual bias/cultural mismatch, and cultural deficit. Described below are studies from each of these areas, which provide possible insights into the phenomenon of disproportionality.

Poverty. Most students of color attend schools where the majority of students are economically disadvantaged (Ferri & Connor, 2005). However, the body of literature reviewed here does not provide clear answers about the effects of poverty on the disproportionality of African American and Latino students in special education programs and discipline. For example, Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger et al. (2006) explored the relationships among race, poverty, and special education identification to arrive at a more precise estimate of the contribution of poverty to racial disparities. The complexity of identifying whether race or poverty has more of an influential impact upon special education identification is an ongoing discussion in the literature. However, in this particular study researchers found, “Results of regression analyses indicated that poverty makes a weak and inconsistent contribution to the prediction of disproportionality across a number of disability categories” (Skiba, & Poloni-Staudinger et al., 2006, p. 130). Furthermore, poverty could theoretically account for a relatively small proportion of

minority overrepresentation, even in the face of substantial overlap between race, poverty and achievement (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger et al., 2006).

A second study by Skiba and colleagues (2005) explored relationships among race, poverty, and special education identification to arrive at a more precise estimate of the contribution of poverty to racial disparities. They hypothesized that there are two predominant explanations of special education disproportionality: race and poverty. Poverty or socioeconomic disadvantage on the academic readiness of minority students was explored. District-level data for all 295 school-corporations in a Mid-western state were analyzed in this study. Records included information on disability category, general and special education enrollment by race, socioeconomic level, local resources, and academic and social outcomes for one school year. Simple correlations among the variables demonstrate that correlations between race and poverty of even moderate strength do not guarantee that the two variables will function in the same way with respect to outcome variables, such as identification for special education services. Results indicated that rates of suspension and expulsion consistently predict district rates of special education disproportionality. Inconsistent relationships between special education disproportionality and achievement may indicate a developmental trend in the systemic contribution to racial disparity. Some investigations have found that poverty indeed creates higher rates of minority placement, while others have reported the opposite. Given that poverty is also widespread among Latino students, the finding of inconsistent Latino disproportionality fails to conclusively support that poverty may contribute to the issue of disproportionality.

In a third study, Krezmien, Leone, and Achilles (2006) reviewed discipline practices and found that school discipline policies have had a disproportionate impact on minority youth and students with disabilities. Views differ regarding the reasons for racial disparities in disciplinary suspension practices. One possibility is that the

disproportionate discipline of African American students is a result of socio-cultural factors within the classroom and school setting, which influences a teacher's decision to remove a student from the classroom. Data indicates that disparity in suspensions is due to higher rates of suspensions in low-income schools and within predominately minority populations. Several school-related risk factors include high student-teacher ratios, insufficient curricular and course relevance, inconsistent adult leadership, students with emotional behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, ADHD, and students who were not living in two-parent families and who had experienced multiple school changes – factors typically associated with poor performing and impoverished schools. Findings indicated that school and community factors are critical to understanding disproportionate suspension practices.

Race. Since the premise of poverty has been inconclusive, other studies have investigated race as a plausible explanation for overrepresentation in special education and discipline practices. The following two studies explore race as cause for disproportionality. Oswald and colleagues (1999) provided current information on the representation of African American students as mildly mentally retarded (MMR) and seriously emotionally disturbed (SED) and described the influence of economic, demographic, and educational variables on the identification of minority students in special education. Data suggests that disproportionate minority representation in special education is linked to a variety of possible other factors, including poverty, discrimination or cultural bias in referral and assessment, unique factors related directly to ethnicity, or school-based factors. The study concluded that ethnic disproportionate representation in special education is, in fact, a function of racial/ethnic factors rather than solely a function of other environmental variables that are associated with race/ethnicity. For example, in communities with virtually no poverty, a non-African American student

had a less than 0.9% chance of being identified as SED, whereas the African American student's chances were more than 1.7%.

A second study by Skiba and colleagues (2011), found that race contributes to disproportionality. Data indicated several plausible causes of disproportionality in discipline disparities of African American and Latino students, including poverty (low socio-economic status, SES), differential rates of inappropriate or disruptive behavior in school settings, and cultural mismatch or racial stereotyping. However, they found that race continues to make a significant contribution to disproportionate disciplinary outcomes independent of social-economic status (SES). Data further suggested that with a predominately White and female teaching force, the possibility of cultural mismatch or racial stereotyping, as a contributing factor in disproportionate office referrals cannot be discounted. The unfamiliarity of White teachers with the interactional patterns that characterize many African American males may cause these teachers to interpret impassioned or emotive interactions as combative or argumentative. Researchers concluded that some teachers do make differential judgments about achievement and behavior based on racial characteristics.

Teacher Perceptual Bias/Cultural Mismatch. While poverty and race have been reviewed, teacher perceptual bias, cultural mismatch, and cultural deficit are areas to further explore for insights into disproportionality. Studies described below found teachers had a tendency to recommend special education referrals for students whose background was different from their own. Additionally, teachers acknowledged feeling unprepared to meet the needs of disadvantaged students. Moreover, cultural gaps, misunderstandings, and a reluctance to discuss issues of race further intensified students' behavioral challenges. With these institutional subjectivities and micro-inequities, African American and Latino students continue to experience marginalized and exclusionary school experiences.

For example, cultural differences among students, families, and teachers, which lead to perceptual biases, have been offered as a major explanation for over-referrals and, thus, overrepresentation. When miscommunication between cultures happens causing misunderstandings and over-reactions to situations deemed serious by the dominant culture but trivial in the subordinate culture, the dominant culture with the power decides the outcome of the interaction, thereby, negatively impacting the scholarly efforts subordinate cultural groups. Ford (2012) notes, “Specifically, differences in values, beliefs, attitudes, customs, and traditions between White teachers and their racially, ethnically, and linguistically different (RELD) students contribute to low expectations and deficit thinking on the one hand, and cultural misunderstandings and cultural clashes on the other” (p.392-393). According to Ford (2012), the four attitudes, alone or combined, can and do result in unwarranted referrals for special education evaluation and services. With the cultural mismatch between teachers and their students, miscommunication often occurs, which results in the mislabeling of students of color’s abilities. Further, Ford (2012) argued that attitudes, expectations, and testing are the fundamental contributors to overrepresentation, and the future of these students will remain rather bleak if changes are not made. The study concluded that “teachers can and do make unwarranted referrals because they often lack behavior management skills in general and culturally responsive management skills in particular” (Ford, 2012, p. 402).

The following three studies suggest perceptual bias and cultural mismatch as primary explanations to disproportionality. In the first study, Tobias and colleagues (1982) examined the interaction between the ethnic backgrounds of students judged as needing referral and teachers making the referrals. The study investigated the influence of student and teacher ethnicity on recommendations for referral to special education services. A total of 199 teachers from different ethnic backgrounds responded to a specially constructed case history in which the ethnic background of the student was

varied, by indicating whether they felt the student could be maintained in a classroom or should be referred to for specialized services. There were significant differences among the three ethnic groups of teachers. Teachers of Hispanic background had a high preference for maintaining the student in the classroom. White teachers tended to respond by recommending special education. Black teachers were less likely to refer students for specialized services when they were identified as being Black than when they were identified as being White or Hispanic.

The study found that teachers responded by referring students from ethnic backgrounds other than their own for specialized educational services more frequently than students identified as belonging to their own ethnic group. Results indicated that minority students are actually referred more frequently for such services than students from majority ethnic backgrounds because students of color are less likely to have teachers of their ethnic group. The study concluded that teacher's judgment played a significant role in referring minority students to specialized services. Teachers responded to the case history by recommending referral of students whose ethnic background was identical to their own less frequently than they did for students of other ethnic backgrounds.

A second study by Skiba and colleagues (2006) found that team decisions regarding special education eligibility were often influenced by non-data based processes, including teachers' informal diagnoses of children's problems and the influence of school personnel's impressions of the family and external pressures for identification and placement. Finally, a third study by Graves and Mitchell (2011) found that African American students are most overrepresented in the categories of special education whose criteria are based on the clinical judgment of the evaluator. The study concluded that there is a need to recruit a greater number of African American psychologists to

help address and reduce the problem of culturally biased and discriminatory assessment practices.

Cultural Deficit Thinking. Given the inherent teacher perceptual biases, as outlined above, another plausible theory to the root causes of disproportionality posits origination from a view of cultural deficit thinking. With the high level of needs from environmental stressors, it appears challenging for teachers to discern between struggling learners and those with disabilities. Additionally, from misguided conceptualizations of students of color abilities further compounded by cultural misunderstandings, behavioral challenges may be intensified producing unfavorable educational experiences for African American and Latino students causing their needs to be addressed inappropriately. In the six studies described below, three studies explore the phenomenon of cultural deficit as a premise for disproportionality, followed by two studies that question whether cultural deficit thinking may be a contributing factor to disproportionality, and a final study summarizing the complexity of the multiple factors to disproportionality.

First, Skiba and colleagues (2006) investigated local processes that may contribute to special education disproportionality. Researchers interviewed 66 educators about their perspectives on urban education, special education, available and needed resources and the specific topics of diversity and disproportionality. A number of clear themes emerged. Teachers and schools feel unprepared to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged students, and classroom behavior appears to be an especially challenging issue for many teachers. Cultural gaps and misunderstandings may intensify behavioral challenges. Many teachers perceived special education as being the only resource available for helping students who are not succeeding. Finally, there was a surprising reticence among many respondents to discuss issues of race. These results paint a surprisingly complex picture of the factors that may cause and maintain minority disproportionality in special education.

A second study, Ahram, Fergus and Noguera (2011) provided a synopsis of how institutional racism occurs and covertly reinforces structural inequities, thereby reproducing the segregation of African American and Latino students from the mainstream program, known today a *second-generation segregation*. The study utilized a mixed methods approach in collating district data, conducting technical assistance sessions with districts to identify factors contributing to disproportionality, and creating a 3-year professional development plan to address overrepresentation. The research was conducted in two multiracial suburban school districts in the state of New York, which were identified as having an overrepresentation of students of color, and participants included teachers and administrators within the two identified districts.

The study examined how the overrepresentation of Black and Latino students in special education suggests a convergence of two distinct processes: Making assumptions about cultural deficit that result in unclear or misguided conceptualizations of disability, and the subsequent labeling of students in special education is through a pseudo-scientific placement process. The study further examined how the social construct of the ‘normal child’ becomes racialized through the special education referral and classification process, and subsequently produces disproportionality. Furthermore, the study found that the research literature on the disproportionate representation of Black and Latino students in special education tends to view the phenomenon from three distinct but interrelated vantage points – the classroom, the school, and the school context. The study highlighted some of the root causes of disproportionality that are located in each, while at the same time demonstrating two key findings. First, the teacher and student interactions that begin the processes that lead to disproportionality are mired in teachers’ cultural deficit thinking. Second, although teachers’ beliefs about students may change at rates that are slightly slower than a glacial pace, effective school practices can interrupt the influence of deficit thinking. Data suggested teachers’ judgments about their students’ behavior,

actions, and even looks influence their judgments about their students' ability. These judgments can become the trigger to turn a struggling student into a disabled student. What we do know about the placement of students in special education is that it begins with the practices and beliefs of several individuals who in informal evaluations construct notions of student ability.

In examining teachers' beliefs around the causes of disproportionality within the context of teachers' perceptions of Black and Latino students, it becomes apparent that teachers' perceptions of student ability and disability are mediated by racial and cultural factors – specifically cultural deficit thinking. Bias may be operative at a less overt, less conscious and even institutional level. The disproportionate representation of Black and Latino students in special education suggests a convergence of two distinct conceptualizations that occur in school districts – cultural deficit thinking and an unclear or misguided conceptualization of providing academic services for struggling learners. Cultural deficit thinking has the effect of pathologizing academic and behavioral discrepancies of low-income and minority students relative to White middle class students – labeling them as disabled.

A third study by Mayes Pane and colleagues (2014) examined the interpretation, analysis and interactive power to illuminate ways of transforming exclusionary school discipline practices. The relation between classroom interactions and exclusionary school discipline practices within and across four classrooms in a disciplinary alternative school was investigated. Results indicated that exclusionary school discipline practices are mediated through the power relations held by teachers with insights into implications for transforming exclusionary school discipline practices found in teachers' discipline goals, ideology, and views of culture. By educating teachers to be culturally responsive in their classrooms, miscommunications and misunderstandings between dominant and subordinate groups can be mediated for students of color. Unfortunately, students of color

experience the adverse consequences (intended and unintended) from teachers who are ill equipped to navigate the cultural diversity of the students in their classrooms.

Data from these studies suggest that, from assumptions about cultural deficits to misconceptions about abilities, teachers refer and over-identify African American and Latino students to special education programs as well as suspend them at higher rates for the same or similar behaviors to White students. It appears that erroneous assumptions about African American and Latino students are prevalent and ramped within the K-12 educational systems today. These falsities regarding cognitive and academic abilities are civil rights violations causing misguided educational practices and adversely impacting life chances of students of color.

However, not all research supports this notion. A study by Bean (2013) examined if teachers, mothers, and African American children in special education rated children's externalizing behaviors differently and to understand what factors impact the externalizing behaviors of African American children in special education. The study found that teachers' scores were similar to mothers' scores of externalizing behaviors for a sample of African American children in special education, which is not consistent with previous research findings of cultural mismatch. In this study, teachers and mothers had similar perceptions of children's externalizing behaviors. Data indicated that even though teachers may not be the same ethnicity or socioeconomic status of their students, teachers may perceive children's behaviors similarly to children's mothers.

A second study by Bolden (2009) further examined teacher bias toward students of color. However, the study was not fulfilled because the researcher did not receive the 162 surveys required for the study. Due to its limitations, the study may or may not have confirmed that teacher bias may be a contributor in the disproportionate number of referrals for ethnic/minority students in Special Education. Thus, based upon the data collected, the findings for the study were inconclusive. Bolden (2009) concluded that it

cannot be stated that teachers are biased by student race or gender when making referrals for special education services. Bolden (2009) suggests that further research is needed to determine a conclusive outcome for teacher bias.

With the complexities of the possible multiple factors to understanding the phenomenon of disproportionality, it continues to remain unclear as to the root causes for such racial disparities. The last study by Skiba and colleagues (2006) conceptualizes the complex factors of the phenomenon and its current status. In the study, the factors that create the context within which disproportionality occurs were examined. To gain an understanding of the local processes that may contribute to special education disproportionality, 66 educators were interviewed about their perspectives on urban education, special education, available and needed resources, and the specific topics of diversity and disproportionality. A number of clear themes emerged, including poverty and educational disadvantage, general education classroom management expectations, insufficient general education resources and lack of funding, special education is seen as the only resource, no other student supports, slow time-consuming special education referral to placement process and pre-referral teams having mixed results, African American behavioral style, perceptions of minorities, various levels of stereotyping, difficulties in speaking about race, and high stakes testing and accountability.

Overall, the significance of the study by Skiba and colleagues (2006) affirms the limited body of research on the factors that create the context within which disproportionality occurs. The causes of disproportionality remain unclear, and theoretical frameworks for understanding why disproportionality occurs are rarely well developed. The disproportionate representation of students of color in educational environments has been relatively unexplored, which makes it difficult to offer clear recommendations for practice. Further research development in this area is needed to understand if the

exclusionary educational practices described within this dissertation substantiate special education as part of the pipeline to prison for students of color.

Understanding and Mediating Disproportionality

Given the structural inequities that maintain and reproduce the achievement gap between students of color and Caucasian students, little research has been conducted on the mediating aspects that counteract disproportionality. There are several reasons for this, but primarily, it seems that the dominant group is unwilling to talk about or research race-related matters, thereby causing this gap in the research to be under-theorized. In other words: “With identities, long-held beliefs, and futures at stake, it is not surprising that Americans find it difficult, and even painful, to engage in open and honest conversations about education and race” (Public Education Network and Public Agenda, 2000, p. 13). Tatum (2002) further confirmed the widely divergent and often hidden views held by individuals of different racial/ethnic groups make it critical to hold such conversations as a start toward understanding the complexities of issues involving race. However, of the research conducted thus far, studies from the Critical Race Theory (CRT) theoretical framework are advancing the scholarly knowledge base on this topic. Described below are two studies that identify specific possible remedies, such as counterstory-telling and the recruitment of a culturally diverse staff, in mediating disproportionality.

Howard (2008) examined how the use of Critical Race Theory as a paradigmatic lens to analyze the schooling experiences of African American males in pre K-12 schools. The focus of the study was to shed light on how African American males believe race and racism play as factors in their schooling experiences. The study utilized qualitative data from a case study of African American males who offer counterstory-telling accounts of their schooling experiences. The study also explored the utility and

appropriateness of Critical Race Theory as a methodological tool to examine and disrupt the disenfranchisement of African American males in U.S. public schools. Results indicated that the participants were keenly aware of how race shaped the manner in which they were viewed by their teachers and school administrators. Data further revealed how the participants explicitly fought to eradicate negative racial stereotypes held about African American males. Furthermore, the use of counterstory-telling within a Critical Race Theory framework seemed to provide the participants a platform to discuss race-related issues in a manner that many of the participants felt was lacking in their school environment.

A second study by Graves and Mitchell (2011) reviewed the well-being of African American children in special education. The purpose of the descriptive study was to give an overview of the changes and how they affect the assessment of African American children. A national sample of African American psychology professionals was surveyed and the majority indicated that Response to Intervention (RTI) methodologies, alone, is not sufficient for special education placement. In addition, there was uncertainty if RTI procedures reduce African American disproportionality in special education. Results were discussed in terms of needing to increase the number of intervention articles that include African American children and recruiting more African American school psychologists. More inclusion of students of color in the scholarly literature is needed to continue to find remedies to disproportionality.

Summary

The review of the extant literature surrounding racial and ethnic disparities in special education and discipline practices are not solely a special education problem, but are also rooted in a number of sources of educational inequity in general education. The multi-dimensional nature of disproportionality likely means that there is no single cause

that can be called on to explain racial and ethnic disparities in special education in all states or school districts (Skiba et al., 2008). The phenomenon is multi-faceted, and some explanations for understanding disproportionality have been offered in this dissertation. The literature review suggests various factors, including: poverty, race, teacher perceptual bias/cultural mismatch, and cultural deficit thinking contribute to the over-identification of students of color in special education, suspension, expulsion, and prison. Teachers can and do make unwarranted referrals because they often lack behavior management skills in general and culturally responsive management skills in particular” (Ford, 2012, p. 402).

Although the root causes of disproportionality are inconclusive, it is clearly evident from the research presented in this dissertation that African American and Latino students have the highest rates in discipline (suspensions/expulsions) and over-identification in special education. This study aimed to explore whether any of these push-out practices from the educational system may set a trajectory towards the prison system. Furthermore, data indicates that conceptual and theoretical frameworks for understanding disproportionality are rarely well developed causing its origins to remain unclear. After reviewing the literature, it is evident that structural inequities exist for African American and Latino students, but the dominant scholarly community has given it little attention. Consequently, disproportionality remains under-theorized and further research is needed in this area to fully understand this phenomenon. “The field of special education needs to examine the pipeline to special education, which often begins with suspensions and expulsions, primarily among Black and Hispanic males” (Ford, 2012, p.402). Our call to action is summarized below:

If we are to learn from the history of *Brown*, we must consider how many of our current educational practices serve as tools of social control and exclusion and not, as we might prefer to think, as democratic tools for social transformation.

By focusing on technologies of *exclusion* rather than examining strategies that support and justify *inclusion*, we aim to question traditional progress stories, in which special education is characterized as building on previous civil rights movements and struggles. In other words, we argue that it is time to rethink the origin of special education and to acknowledge the ways that special education has contributed to the subversion of *Brown*. We hope that by attending to our failures and our complicities, we can, from the shadow of *Brown*, create a different and more inclusive future. (Ferri & Conner, 2005, p. 99)

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This study investigated the experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals with special needs to identify factors that may have contributed to their trajectory to prison. It is hoped that this data will help better understand the phenomenon of disproportionality, thereby providing insight on how to restructure institutional practices, reverse the trajectories toward special education and the prison system, and better serve African American and Latino students in K-12 settings. The research questions that guide this study are: 1) What are the early home life and K-12 educational experiences of formerly incarcerated people of color with special needs? 2) What K-12 factors may have contributed to creating and/or mediating the disproportionality of formerly incarcerated people of color with special needs?

Methodological Design

This study uses a case study approach to learn about the experiences of formerly incarcerated African American and Latino individuals with special needs. Yin (2014) defines a case study as an in-depth investigation into a contemporary (real-world) social phenomenon. It provides background, purpose, goals, questions, hypotheses, propositions, theoretical frameworks, and logic models, which emphasize researchers' lines of inquiry. Typically, case study researchers develop a standardized protocol for procedures and rules to be carried out. A clear schedule of data collection activities is

made and collected within specified periods of time. Additionally, because researchers do not have control over the environment and must acquiesce to the real-life changes that occur, they need to have an adaptive posture. By using a qualitative case study method, real world knowledge can be gained from formerly incarcerated people of color with special needs, as well as, contributing and/or mediating factors to disproportionality, as it relates to over-identification as learning disabled and excessive disciplinary actions leading to prison. By conducting interviews and supplementing with questionnaire and survey data, the qualitative case study method allowed an in-depth investigation into the contemporary social phenomenon of disproportionality for African American and Latino adults with special needs who have been formerly incarcerated.

Participants and Context

The target population of this study was formerly incarcerated persons of color with special needs. The study consisted of two Latino males, two African American females, and two African American males. In this study, each participant was given a pseudonym name: Alejandro, Natasha, Lionel, Marcel, LaTonya, and Berto. I provide in-depth profiles of my participants in chapter 4. Several agencies were researched for the recruitment of participants, as well as, the utilization of some of my personal and professional contacts. The agencies included: 1) Center For Positive Change (CPC) located in Vallejo, California; 2) Project Rebound (California State University, San Francisco, California); 3) Root & Rebound (Oakland, California); 4) Roots Community Health Center (Oakland, California); 5) Rubicon Programs (Oakland, California); and 6) Options Recovery (Berkeley, California). After investigating these agencies, I recruited the majority of the study's participants from one program, Project Rebound, a program through California State University, San Francisco which supports formerly incarcerated

individuals go back to school after prison. I recruited the sixth participant through a personal friend who was a co-worker of the participant.

The Center For Positive Change (CPC), located in Vallejo, California, opened in April of 2013 as a result of the implementation of AB109, which made fundamental changes to California's correctional system. AB109 changed the sentencing and supervision of people convicted of felony offenses and amended a number of statutes concerning definitions of felonies, where sentences are served, and how defendants are supervised. Designed as a "one-stop-shop," the CPC provides comprehensive rehabilitation services designed to reduce recidivism. The goal of the CPC is to assist and provide services to offenders returning from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), and moderate to high-risk offenders who are under the jurisdiction of the Probation Department. Several appointments made with the CPC were arranged to meet prospective participants for the study. A flyer was made and posted at the CPC and ongoing collaboration with probation officers employed at the CPC was done to recruit participants. Although several promising participants were contacted, none of them ever actualized.

Before and after receiving minimal response at the CPC, I had shared with my friends and anyone who I thought might know of an interested potential participant, including two probation officers from the CPC, who take my fitness class at the gym. It was through my gym contacts and friends, where I received another interested participant. My friend (also a gym participant) was a co-worker of an ex-gang member. I asked her to share with her co-worker about my study and to inquire of any possible interest from him. Her co-worker was interested, and he agreed to participate in the study. I telephoned him and set up a date and time, and we conducted the interview. With one interview already completed, I was still recruiting participants, but not getting any new responses of interest. After exhausting all of my contacts and resources from the CPC

to no avail, I then attempted to recruit participants from Five Keys Charter School, the school located within the CPC, but permission from the program's administrator was not granted. Although it was not feasible to recruit participants from Five Keys Charter School, I was given a referral from their administrator to contact an organization called Project Rebound, a program at California State University, San Francisco (CSUSF). It was through Project Rebound that I recruited the remaining participants to my study. I made contact with the program coordinator at Project Rebound. I sent a flyer describing my study, along with the criteria for the participants I was recruiting, to him, and he posted it on their Facebook page. I had my name, phone number and email address listed on the flyer. Shortly, after the flyer was flown, I received interest from a prospective participant. We spoke on the phone, and she agreed to participate in the study. We set up a time to meet and conducted the interview. It was from this initial participant from Project Rebound that I recruited the remaining four participants in the study. I was still having some challenges finding participants, so I asked this initial participant if she knew of others who may be interested in being in the study. I sent a text message to her asking if she knew of others, and she replied within five minutes and provided three names and phone numbers. I contacted these three individuals, and they all agreed to be in the study. Outlined below is a description of the Project Rebound program.

Project Rebound is a special admissions program assisting formerly incarcerated individuals wanting to enter San Francisco State University. From its founding, Project Rebound has focused on education as an alternative to incarceration and turning former prisoners into scholars. The program is an alternative to the revolving door policy of the criminal justice system. Rebound discourages this policy by offering a program, which encourages students to excel in a course of study. The program seeks to admit full-time students to SFSU who are motivated to succeed in a field of a study, which leads to a Baccalaureate Degree. Project Rebound offers a liaison with campus services

and programs as well as with community organizations in order to serve as an advocate for people on campus and in the community. By offering resources and connections with supportive entities, Project Rebound attempts to help students with their basic needs so that they can concentrate on gaining expertise in their field of study to achieve educational and personal empowerment.

Data Sources

The data sources utilized in this study included: an intake interview (see Appendix C), survey questionnaire (see Appendix D) and a semi-structured interview (see Appendix E). These data sources provided insight into factors that contribute and/or mediate the disproportionality of formerly incarcerated persons of color with special needs. First, I developed and utilized an intake questionnaire to establish rapport with consenting participants. Background knowledge of the participant's childhood home life, educational experiences, and social-emotional functioning were probed. Questions such as involvement in various school programs, discipline histories, grades, and questions regarding current probation status and future goals for re-entry into society were covered. Furthermore, as an initial activity, participants were provided a survey questionnaire eliciting additional preliminary information for me to probe areas to explore further during the semi-structured interview activity.

Lastly, semi-structured interviews were conducted specifically focusing on the participant's thoughts regarding their K-12 educational experiences as it may or may not have related to their incarceration histories. The interviews probed for contributing and/or mediating factors the participants view as setting them on a trajectory towards prison. Additionally, the semi-structured interview probed the participants for their thoughts on how to improve the K-12 educational system to better serve students of color in preparing them for adulthood with ample skills and opportunities for college and career. The intake

interview, survey questionnaire, and semi-structured interview were conducted in one meeting with the participant. In efforts to clarify any questions or uncertainties of the reported data, member checks for data accuracy were done both during and after the participants' interviews.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection procedures commenced when contacts were made and authorizations granted from Ruben Vang, Supervising Deputy Probation Officer, located at the Center For Positive Change in Vallejo, California and Jason Bell, Project Rebound Coordinator, from California State University, San Francisco. Authorizations to pass out my recruitment flyer (see Appendix A) were granted from the Center For Positive Change (CPC) and Project Rebound. A recruitment script (see Appendix B) to solicit participants and consent form were developed to officially document volunteers in the study. Six participants were selected and individual appointments were arranged for their interviews. Each interview was audio-taped and recorded by date and time. The interview involved the development of rapport building with the intake interview. Next, the survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview were conducted. The three interview activities took approximately one hour. After collecting the data, I transcribed the audio-recordings and followed up with the participants if any of their responses were unclear.

A total of six audio-recorded interviews were completed. As a first step, audio-recordings were transcribed into 229 written pages. All participants' interviews were conducted, audio-recorded and transcribed by myself. A second review of the transcripts was done to correct any errors from the first written transcriptions. Interviews commenced on November 18, 2016 and were completed by February 11, 2017. During the three-month timeframe, interviews were transcribed and typed into written text.

Outlined below are the dates each participant was interviewed and the length of their interviews.

PARTICIPANTS	INTERVIEW DATES	LENGTH OF INTERVIEWS
Participant 1	November 18, 2016	1 hour, 1 minute, 40 seconds
Participant 2	November 21, 2016	1 hour, 1 minute, 40 seconds
Participant 3	December 28, 2016	1 hour, 10 minutes, 10 seconds
Participant 4	December 28, 2016	1 hour, 16 minutes, 48 seconds
Participant 5	January 2, 2017	1 hour, 37 minutes, 25 seconds
Participant 6	February 11, 2017	53 minutes, 27 seconds

Table 1: Interview Dates and Lengths

Analysis

I conducted initial coding by highlighting sections of text with tracking changes for meaningful concepts in the data. Initial coding allows the researcher to see “actions in each segment of data rather than preexisting categories to the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 47-48). Although initial codes were provisional and comparative, they were grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48). To distinguish between participants’ responses and my questions, the interview questions were color-coded. To further differentiate between the two, the participants’ responses were preceded by (P1), (P2), (P3), (P4), (P5) (P6) to identify each of the participants’ responses.

During a first round of initial coding, I simply focused only on the data I was analyzing and assigned codes without comparing it to other parts of the data. I placed the codes into an Excel spreadsheet and was able to sort alphabetically to find the codes that repeated several times. From this information, I selected the repeating codes to serve as my axial codes and launch my second round of coding. Codes that were repeated multiple times on the Excel spreadsheet and across multiple participants included

primarily Socio-Cultural and Environmental Factors, including: Crime, Race/Ethnicity, Gangs, Peers, Safety, Parent Issues, Divorce, Trauma, Emotional Issues, Disability, Transiency, Falling Behind in School, School Gaps, and Lack of Support/Resources.

On a second round of coding, the initial codes were reduced to broader codes for better synthesis of the data. With the tracked changes highlighting key concepts from the first round of coding, the initial codes were re-categorized. During this round of coding, participants' responses were color coded, as to distinguish between the multiple participants. Some initial codes were overlapped and two and or three codes applied to multiple categories. Initially, these codes were placed into multiple categories, but later upon further analysis, one code was selected for the segment of data. Next, key words or concepts were highlighted from each of the texts and grouped under initial codes from the first round of coding. Titles of codes were renamed, as well. Outlined below describes how the codes were collapsed during the second-round coding phase.

Before I started the second-round coding process, I reviewed my research questions and the first three chapters of my dissertation, making linkages with some of the topics in my Literature Review. As I reviewed the data a second time, I assigned data into existing codes and/or created a new code to acknowledge all aspects of the emerging data. I specifically noted areas where my data from the six participants aligned with the Literature Review, along with new and emerging themes. After finishing my second round of coding, four emerging themes appeared, including 1) Home and Environment; 2) Relationships; 3) K-12 Education and Prison Institutions; and 4) Recommendations.

After having an opportunity to reflect upon the codes that emerged during the second round of coding, more refinement was needed. On the third round of analysis, axial coding was conducted with the key words and concepts and placed into sub-categories under the initial broader codes. Axial coding was chosen for its ability to integrate and synthesize the data more succinctly. As Charmaz (2006) notes, "axial

coding relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis” (p. 60).

Through axial coding, I also discussed emerging themes through the documentation of memos. It was during the third round of coding that I was able to collapse similar codes into one category, thereby further reducing initial codes into further condensed categories. With three rounds of initial and subsequent axial coding analysis, condensed overarching categories remained, along with their individualized subcategories from axial coding. For example, some codes were collapsed into broader categories. Two new sections called Aftermath and Improvement Suggestions were added, and all other sections were revised with the addition of refined sub-codes to further organize the data. In addition, when reviewing and sifting through the data, memos were written for any irregularities and/or any topics in the data that may be noteworthy to mention. When I was unclear of any of the participants’ responses, further probing of the participants was done both during and after the interviews to gain further clarity.

Survey Questions

Survey questions were tallied onto one document and identified the frequency of participants’ responses by noting (P1), (P2), (P3), (P4), (P5), (P6), respectively. Data was organized into three groupings: 1) School Experiences; 2) Impact On Learning; and 3) Incarceration Experiences. All survey questions were accounted for under each category and are listed as follows: School Experiences – included survey questions: 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 20; Impact On Learning – included survey questions: 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10; and Incarceration Experiences – included survey questions: 5, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19. Data was interpreted for themes and triangulated with interview data for comparison and trustworthiness.

Limitations and Trustworthiness

The few selected adults for this study were a small sample represented of this population. No generalizations can be made from this data, but should be utilized for further research and investigations into this particular population. All profile data was analyzed and reviewed holistically to find relationships and themes among the data. Two primary case study techniques were utilized and included *Explanation Building* and *Time Series Analysis* to trace and describe the process on how the data is retrieved, documented, and carried out in an explicit and transparent way. Member checks during and after the interviews were done to include the participants' feedback and provide clarifications to ensure the quality of the data collection process. Interview data was triangulated with survey questionnaire data to compare answers for trustworthiness.

Reflexivity

My personal background has informed the shape of this study. I am a Latina/Caucasian, first person to graduate from college in my immediate family, former urban bilingual teacher, school psychologist, and administrator in both public schools and correctional settings, as well as, have a close family member who has been incarcerated. Both personally and professionally, I have first-hand experiences related to the topics discussed in this study. It is these life and career experiences that have led me to pursue research for better outcomes for people of color with special needs in the K-12 educational setting and prison system.

My Family Trauma

I chose this topic of study because it shares some similarities to my own background in breaking educational and cultural barriers. I am of Hispanic descent and

come from a working-class background. My mother was a high school dropout, and my father had a high school diploma. Financial hardship struck my family when I was in the 5th grade. The factory where my parents worked closed down, and my parents became unemployed. This financial trauma impacted me very deeply. I saw my parents struggle, and vowed I would get an education, as my mother always tearfully encouraged me to do. I put a lot of pressure upon myself to do well in school--I stayed up late into the early mornings studying, and at times, the anxiety was so great, I suffered from stomach aches.

I am one of two children in my immediate family. I have an older brother who coped with the family hardship in another manner. We lived in a low-income neighborhood where drugs were present. An adult neighbor who lived two doors down the street encouraged my brother to sell drugs at school while he was in middle school. My brother was disciplined at school for using drugs and was unable to graduate with his eighth-grade class. Over the years, my brother had a tendency to associate with others who had drug issues, as well. Later, in his mid-twenties and early thirties, my brother was arrested a couple of times due to domestic violence, and he served some time in county jail.

It is these life experiences that inspired me to become an educator and psychologist and continue pursuing higher education and ultimately propelled me to conduct this research study. For the last 24 years, I served in the roles of bilingual teacher, school psychologist, special education program specialist, and administrator in public school and in the California Department of Youth Authority for incarcerated youth. As I learned to break educational, cultural, and socio-emotional barriers within my own life, I desire to support others in doing the same thing with their own lives.

CHAPTER 4

TRAUMA AND ENVIRONMENT

In the next three chapters, I present the findings from this study. In chapter four, I begin with a description of the participants' profiles. The chapter is further divided into two main sections. I first describe participants' home trauma, including parent relationships, divorce, substance abuse, domestic violence abuse, and emotional trauma. The socio-cultural and environmental factors section covers poverty, transiency/residential moves, race/ethnicity/culture, discrimination, and second-generation segregation. I found that all six participants experienced a range of traumatic experiences connected to their home environments, which I will argue at least partially contributed to the circumstances leading to their incarceration.

Participant Profiles

Alejandro is a 49 year old male, and he identifies as Hispanic/Latino. A bilingual Latino who came to the United States as a toddler, his family eventually became citizens of the U.S. Spanish was spoken in his household and his parents did not understand English. Alejandro shared, "Back in the days mostly Spanish; I couldn't talk with them in English because they didn't know English" (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016). Alejandro's parents were farmworkers with limited education. His father attended school through the 6th grade, and his mother attended school through the 8th grade. Alejandro's

highest educational attainment is a General Educational Development (GED). Currently, Alejandro is married, and he has five children and four grandchildren.

Natasha is a 38-year-old female, who identifies as Black, Japanese and Native American. English is her primary language. Her mother and father held working class jobs, including licensed vocational nurse (LVN) and owner of a liquor store, respectively. Natasha further shared her mother had some college experiences, but whether she actually graduated from college is unknown. Likewise, her father was in the Navy, but his level of college attainment is unclear. Natasha continued her education beyond what her parents achieved and has earned an Associate of Science (A.S.) degree in Business Management. Currently, Natasha is single with a one-year-old daughter.

Lionel is a 34-year-old male who identifies as Black. English is his primary language. Lionel was primarily raised by a single-parent mother. Lionel never had a relationship with his father, whose whereabouts are unknown. Lionel shared that his mother was a high school dropout who worked in a check-cashing business. Like Natasha, Lionel also earned an Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree. Currently, Lionel is single with no children.

Marcel is a 53-year-old male who identifies as Black, and English is his primary language. Like Lionel, Marcel was primarily raised by a single mother. Marcel's parents divorced when he was in the fourth grade, and his father moved out of the state to Alabama. Marcel reported that his parents were working-class, and the highest educational attainment they completed was a high school diploma. Like Natasha, Marcel continued his education beyond what his parents achieved and has earned a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree. Currently, Marcel is single with one 24 year-old-daughter.

LaTonya is a 47-year-old female who identifies as Black/African American. Her primary language is English. LaTonya's parents also divorced in her early childhood years, and she spent time living with both parents until her father passed away when she

was in high school. LaTonya's mother and father were also working-class—her mother was employed at Libbey's Cannery as an assembly line worker, and her father was a maintenance man. Both of LaTonya's parents held high school diplomas. LaTonya's highest level of education completed included both a high school diploma and a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Currently, LaTonya is single with two adult children, a son, 30 and a daughter, 28.

Berto is a 49-year-old male, and he identifies as Mexican-American. English is his primary language. Berto was raised solely by his grandmother, and while he was growing up, Berto did not have much contact with his own biological parents. Berto further shared that his grandmother could not read or write, but provided for them by earning money as a housekeeper. Berto achieved post-secondary education and has earned a Masters of Arts (M.A.) degree. Currently, Berto is separated from his significant other, and he has two children.

Home Trauma

In this section, I discuss the home trauma of the participants. All six participants described early home life experiences that presented a variety of different stressors or challenges. These included turbulent parent relationships, divorces, exposure to substance abuse, and abuse by guardians. These issues contributed to lack of support systems, safety issues, and significant emotional trauma.

Parent Relationships and Divorces

Five of the six participants lived in either single parent or blended families, which added to the stressors of the family unit. With a fractured family unit, only one income was available and the emotional support was limited, as well. Working excessive

hours to make ends meet meant the parent figure was often absent from the home or unavailable for participation in school extra-curricular activities. Three of the study's participants (Natasha, Marcel and LaTonya) came from divorced families, which they found traumatic. The sudden disappearance of a parent without an explanation was difficult for them to absorb. There was no closure on this change in family dynamics. Only one participant, Alejandro, lived in a two-parent household. However, his parents were monolingual Spanish speaking only with strong cultural values of their homeland of México. As Alejandro assimilated into the U.S. culture, often times he and his parents did not communicate very well. These cultural clashes will be discussed further below. Below each of the participants' individual family situations are discussed in further detail.

LaTonya spent most of her school years feeling a sense of a void in her life. LaTonya indicated that she really did not understand the impact her parents' divorce had on her until her time in prison, when they were required to create a timeline of the events in their lives that led up to their incarceration. It was only after completing this timeline that LaTonya acknowledged the profound and adverse impact her parents' divorce had made on her. She described:

But it went back to like when I was like five years old, and I came home from preschool, or whatever, and my dad was packing his things, to go, and my mother told me, you're going to have to stay with me for the week, and then you can go with your dad on the weekends, no explanation, nothing, they didn't tell me nothing, why my dad had to leave or anything as a kid five years old you don't identify with feelings, I could not identify with what I was feeling. (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017)

Unlike LaTonya, the other five participants shared they had parents who were either frequently absent, emotionally unavailable, and/or had issues of their own, which

distracted them from caring for their child and meeting their needs. For example, some of the challenges Alejandro experienced with his parents were primarily related to the cultural differences between México and the United States. Specifically, Alejandro felt his parents could not relate to the United States culture. His parents were traditional with strong values held from México. According to Alejandro, his parents were stubborn in their ways and unable to understand the new culture he was adapting to within U.S. schools. Moreover, since his parents only spoke Spanish, there was limited communication between them. Alejandro spoke Spanish with them, but he was unable to speak English with his parents. Alejandro lived and navigated in two worlds, México and the United States. Alejandro reflected, “back in the days [they spoke] mostly Spanish, I couldn’t talk with them in English because they didn’t know English” (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016). As a result, Alejandro and his parents often had difficulties understanding one another. The value systems were different between the two countries and cultural misunderstandings were frequent and challenging to coordinate.

Natasha found her parents’ divorce left her in an emotionally challenging home situation. She indicated that she primarily preferred to live with her father and his girlfriend, as her relationship was very toxic with her own biological mother. She shared that her relationship with her mom had been satisfactory, until her mother started drinking with her friends. Natasha mother had a substance abuse issue, and it affected her relationship with her family. Trying to understand her emotions and adjust to the new life circumstances was a lot for Natasha to absorb.

My parents divorced so I had some sort of attachment to that feeling like it was my fault or I had done something wrong, my father remarrying, I felt like I need to choose between my parents, and it was a lot of mental work for a child to endure, and I became a chameleon to where I could adjust and adapt to any

environment that I was in that I shouldn't have had to. (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016).

Although Natasha related that she would have preferred to move in with her father after the divorce, living with him was difficult because of his new wife. Natasha expressed that her stepmother resented her and her brother, because they were not her children, and she could not have her own. Natasha shared, “[Natasha’s stepmother] could not have children, so she resented the fact that there was a life before her, and that we were something that she could never have on her own” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). Although the situations were not ideal in both parent’s homes, Natasha chose to live with her dad, as it was less of a stressor for her.

Lionel indicated that he lived with his mother and several of her ever-changing boyfriends, which created an unstable environment. Lionel shared that his biological father was never a part of his life, stating, “Yeah, [my father] was never, never a big part of my life or even the small part, I’ve only seen him twice” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). Because he never knew his father, Lionel often tried to speak with his uncle to learn more about him. He described, “So, I talk to him on the phone to ask questions about my father, and so they tell me the year my father was a Crip.. and ... that there’s some rumors that he ... smoke Sherms, something like that” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). Although he lived with his mother, Lionel vividly described that she was emotionally unavailable for him, and so he often felt alone. He spent time with his brother for companionship, since he did not get much attention or support from his mother. Although these dynamics caused Lionel to become independent at an early age, he expressed a desire for family closeness and emotional support.

It wasn't no relationship... I would just come home or she would come home from work or whatever it may be like, you know, be in her room, and I'll be in

my room, there was no like, let's hang out together, let's talk, you know, I'm not saying it never happened, but it was like, it's not very, it wasn't definitely very often. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Before Marcel's parents divorced, he lived with both parents. Often, they would try to have family outings, but his father always seemed to ruin them. For example, Marcel expressed mixed emotions about his father. Marcel said he loved him, but he was always conflicted because his father would ruin family outings and/or activities because of his drinking. For example, he explained, "I got along with him, but I was always disappointed. Like the weekends, we would have plans to go Disneyland or Knotts Berry Farm Amusement Park, and it always, he always came out drunk and spoiled it" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). Although, Marcel felt conflicted about his father's inappropriate drinking and how it caused distress for the family, it is evident that Marcel loved his father very much. Marcel shared, "It was a good relationship, except for my father, [he] just spoiled our activities, but I still love him, I still, you know, he's my dad" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). Marcel's mother often tried to salvage the outings and keep the family together.

At the age of nine, Marcel's parents divorced, and his father moved to Alabama, which Marcel felt left a huge void in his life. Leading up to the divorce, there was a lot of violence in his home, which also impacted Marcel's schooling. Marcel shared, "My mom and dad was going through a divorce, always fighting and stuff. I always woke up to my mom with either a busted lip, or a black eye, crying, so I had to go to school with all that" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). After the divorce, Marcel remained with his mother in Los Angeles. After his father moved to Alabama, Marcel said his father was not present for him and his sister.

Like Marcel, Berto also had mixed emotions about his grandmother, who raised him in place of his parents. Berto shared that his grandmother had a mental illness, which frequently affected her functioning—for example, his grandmother could be both very mean and loving at different times. Often, Berto’s grandmother had a negative outlook on life, and she communicated these beliefs to Berto, who attempted to make sense of them. He described,

She would tell us things, like umm, just give us all this, this bad information about the way people were and how, you know, umm, how people lived their lives and it’s like... we didn’t know any better...so we... just took what she said at face value and that’s how we saw things, you know and we’d behave in certain ways that.... represented those beliefs. (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017).

For example, Berto’s grandmother was very distrustful of other people, and impressed upon him that wariness, influencing his thinking in a negative way. At an early age, Berto learned to be cautious of others, even if there were no signs warranting a need for such caution. This impacted his relationships, including those with friends, because the poor role modeling Berto received from his grandmother caused confusion about appropriate behaviors and trusting the accuracy of other’s intentions. For instance, she would tell him, “You’re going to go...through life and... ‘maybe’ you’re going to have one friend, if you’re lucky, you know, there are no real friends out there, you might have one” (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017).

Last, Berto never had an opportunity to have a relationship with his own biological parents, since they left him, as a toddler, with his grandmother for her to raise. Berto shared, “my mom just left me with my grandmother...When we went back to Nebraska I never saw my parents, I never heard from them” (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017). Berto’s parents had their own issues with drugs and were unable to provide

adequately for his needs. Berto father tried his best to take responsibility for the family. However, his parents' substance abuse challenges consumed their ability to care for Berto adequately, despite his father's efforts to ensure military benefits for the family. Berto explained the rationale of why he was sent to live with his grandmother as follows: "My father like he couldn't because he... thought that the best thing to do... he joined the army and then he gets benefits for my mother, for us, and so that's why he joined the army" (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017).

The fractured family units of Alejandro, Natasha, Lionel, Marcel, and Berto added stressors to their already vulnerable circumstances, and in particular, limited the support systems available to these participants. The emotional situation of living in single parent households and/or experiencing the effects of divorce became difficult tasks for many of the participants in the study to process. As a result, extended family members like an aunt, uncle, grandparent, or stepparent assumed the parental role and provided added support and guidance. This was the case for three of the six participants.

For Natasha, her aunt, whom she lived with on occasion, assumed responsibilities and duties associated with the parental role. An area where Natasha's aunt provided additional assistance was in Natasha's education. Continuing to have Natasha progress in education was a priority for Natasha's aunt, and thus she made extra efforts to provide Natasha tutoring outside of school. Natasha explained, "My aunt took me, I had tutoring there... She had talked to my father about it, and my aunt is really big on education, that's who pays for my schooling now" (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016).

For Marcel, his uncle took the extra time to guide Marcel, while in high school. With his uncle's guidance and support, Marcel was able to get a part-time job and focus on making up school assignments to earn his school credits. As a result, Marcel did better in school. His grades improved, and he was able to continue earning school credits. He shared, "with one of my uncles, he was like look, umm, he took me under his wing try to

help me, and I was doing good” (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). For example, Marcel’s uncle was able to get him a job and supported him in catching back up in school. Marcel shared, “My uncle ...got me a job working at a shoe store, so I would go to school, and...lunchtime, until the end of school, I’d be at work, ... working with him at the shoe store” (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016).

At a very young age, Berto’s parents left him with his grandmother to raise, and he never really knew his own parents. Berto’s grandmother assumed the parental role of both mother and father. She had mental health challenges of her own, so Berto was often emotionally on his own in navigating his home and school environments. For example, “Like I said my mom just left me with my grandmother, and, so yeah, I never I never saw my parents, when we went back to Nebraska, I never saw my parents, I never heard from them” (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017). Without having a male role model, dealing with bullying was especially challenging for Berto in a neighborhood infested with gangs and violence, as will be discussed in the Peer Relationships section.

Substance Abuse

In addition to fractured family units, five of the six participants’ parents were dealing with substance abuse issues of their own. Three of the six participants indicated alcohol usage by their parents, and two of the six participants indicated their parents used harder drugs such as “sherm” (i.e., tobacco mixed with weed, dipped in PCP, angel dust) and heroin. One of the participants shared that his parents was involved in drug usage, but did not specify which type.

Natasha, Marcel, and LaTonya indicated that alcohol was a drug of choice by at least one of their parents. Along with the alcohol came physical abuse to family members in both Natasha and Marcel’s homes, as will further be discussed in the next section on domestic abuse. Parental out of control behaviors were commonly witnessed by

Natasha and Marcel. Natasha described her mother's tendency for violence as follows: "She'd come home under the influence and beat my brother, and I, and so there was a fear base there, that like anything could cause her to snap, and that was constant" (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). Marcel further indicated that his father was an alcoholic and physically abused his mother, and the incidents became so serious that law enforcement was called to the home. Marcel described that his father was "...hitting her, hitting her on the face, you know she had a black eye some mornings, she couldn't go to work because her lip was busted or her eye" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). In LaTonya's situation, her father used alcohol and drugs, but the family kept it hidden from her and enabled her father's substance abuse, until the family secret was revealed. "[My mother] finally told me my dad was on drugs, and he didn't want me to know, he didn't want to be around me, he still wanted me to look up to him, and I would have never ever thought that about that man, never!" (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). With further questioning, LaTonya learned that her father was actually shooting heroin. The drug issue was far more serious than LaTonya had anticipated.

So, you know, I'm a curious kid, I'm 16 years old now, I'm sniffing on him and trying to kiss on all him, and I don't smell a bit of alcohol, and my mother said that's what my grandmother thought that's what he was doing, hitting the bottle, but he was actually shooting dope and he umm shooting it in his toes, so nobody would know. (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017)

Moreover, the family secrets made it challenging for LaTonya and other family members to have authentic, trusting and healthy relationships with one another. However, unlike several other participants' experiences, no physical violence was reported in LaTonya's family.

Lionel also shared that his parent was abusing harder drugs. Lionel indicated that it was his uncle who told him that his father smoked Sherms. According to Lionel, it was unclear how the drugs impacted his father, since he never really had a relationship with him. The only information Lionel received was from his uncle, but Lionel still does not know much about the quality of life his father had. He related, “his life changed and shifted into something a little different from when he started smoking Sherms, and I don’t know” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016).

Domestic Abuse

Many of the participants in the study were either victims of and/or witnessed verbal, physical, sexual abuse. Domestic violence in these homes, which as discussed in the last section, was sometimes tied to substance abuse--led participants to experience significant emotional trauma. For instance, Natasha, Lionel, and Marcel all experienced physical abuse. Natasha actually reported that she was a victim of sexual as well as physical, verbal, and mental abuse. Natasha reported, “I was being molested” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). The abuse was inflicted upon her by her stepmother at a vulnerable age for Natasha, and she was unable to protect herself. Natasha indicated that both she and her brother were sexually abused, and it lasted for approximately six years, from ages two through eight. For example, “Well we were molested by my stepmother as children, I was two, he was six, and it went on for six years” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). Often Natasha’s stepmother would keep Natasha home from school, and the abuse occurred while her father was at work. Although the sexual abuse stopped when Natasha was eight years old, Natasha reflected, “when the sexual abuse stopped the physical, verbal, and mental started” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). Natasha said her father was aware of the abuse, as well. For example, “He knew, and I told everybody, and nothing changed, she found out that I told him” (Natasha,

interview, November 21, 2016). Natasha's mother also physically abused her. Natasha shared the following example:

I had been burned with hot water. My mom had burned me, and she said it was an accident, but the doctor said it looked like she set the pot on my back. I don't remember if she did or didn't, because I was facing the opposite direction. I remember it happening, but I don't remember if it was intentional or accidental. (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016)

In reflecting upon their home lives, both Lionel and Marcel acknowledged physical abuse by their mother's boyfriends and father, respectively. The physical abuse was inappropriate and excessive, causing them mental anguish that has had a lasting impact on their lives. Lionel shared that he primarily experienced physical abuse from his mother's boyfriends, not necessarily from his mother: "She definitely had boyfriends that were abusive so ...I didn't have a good relationship with any of her boyfriends" (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). The abuse Lionel experienced came under the guise of discipline, which did not make him or his brother feel safe within their own home. He couldn't trust his mother for protection, and some stranger, in his mind, was creating anguish in his household. He shared, "The [boyfriend] that was abusive towards her and towards me and my brother a little bit...my mom allowed him to be the disciplinarian of the house ... she started that rule [when I was] 11 or 12" (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Marcel indicated his father was physically abusive to his mother, but never was to him or his sister: "He never hit me or my sisters, it was just my mom" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). Although Marcel was never physically abused by his father, witnessing his mother being brutalized by him was equally traumatizing. After intensive reflection in prison, Marcel came to believe that the childhood trauma caused his father's

physical abuse of his mother as one of the contributing factors that set him on a pathway to prison. “I spent 32 years in [prison] and this is the reason why, [the abuse] was going on, nobody comes home and, my father was an alcoholic, and an abuser, and caused what happened to me, because you just don’t do that, you know what I’m saying” (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016).

Berto’s family situation stands out the most for verbal and mental abuse. As previously noted, he was raised by his grandmother, who had a mental disability. As a child, Berto didn’t understand just how different his grandmother’s behavior was, until he was older. Berto said his grandmother often changed personalities and had a negative outlook on life. According to Berto, the odd behaviors came in cycles, and when he respectfully confronted his grandmother to address the behaviors, she was unwilling to talk about them. Living in a household with unpredictable behaviors by his grandmother became the norm for Berto.

Like I said I wasn’t until I was older that I you know, I caught onto it, but she, she, it would even affect her, like her voice would change, and, and umm, yeah, she just became like a different person, you know, and she became like this, had this like this, this helpless little girl voice whenever, you know, what I mean, it would, it would come like in cycles. (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017)

Berto believes these odd behaviors also influence his grandmother’s attitudes, which also shaped and influenced his own impressionable mind as a youngster. Berto’s grandmother was distrustful of others due to her own limited support system. She did not have any positive or close relationships of her own. She was a single elderly woman living in poverty herself with the responsibility of raising Berto and his brother on limited income and resources. His grandmother’s daily experiences were focused on survival

and meeting basic needs of food and shelter, coupled with the coping of her own mental disorder.

Emotional Trauma

With a very limited support system and little support from schools, the participants were left to manage uncomfortable feelings of sadness, abandonment, and rejection on their own. Consequently, five of the six participants acknowledged that they struggled with emotional trauma, and several of the participants noted that they suffered from depression. Without professional help, the participants were left with untreated trauma that may have affected their decision-making later in life. With limited parental guidance, the participants met their needs by coping in manners that adversely impacted their best interests. Influenced by some of the neighborhood ills, many participants partook in negative peer interactions, illegal drug use, and the gang culture. These maladaptive coping strategies contributed to their decisions in criminal behavior, which ultimately led them to prison.

Natasha indicated that the abuse she experienced at the hands of her mother and stepmother adversely impacted her performance in school. She often could not concentrate on her schoolwork and would have frequent stomach aches. Natasha shared, “I couldn’t even focus on the regular classes I was actually good in because I was thinking about what it was going to be like to go home that day” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). Not only did Natasha experience stress at home, but often, in subtle ways, her stepmother would harass her at school, which caused Natasha to be fearful of going home after school. “Lunch break, was my, was going to send your brother to see what I’ve been doing in school and she tell me she would and it would freak me out so that’s where a lot of my stomach problems would come from at school” (Natasha, interview, November, 21, 2016)

The ongoing stress made it difficult for Natasha to function optimally on a daily basis because she did not know how to process or manage it. Natasha felt ashamed and had no one trustworthy to confide in. She did not feel comfortable sharing what she was going through with her peers and was left to cope with the abuse by herself. “I was ashamed of it, I was ashamed of it, I was embarrassed I didn’t know how to deal with it umm, kids were cruel, so you can’t go tell them about it because they’ll be throwing it in your face later” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016).

As a result, Natasha’s grades fell. The untreated trauma also negatively impacted Natasha’s emotional functioning, particularly in terms of her social relationships. The unhealthy relationships Natasha experienced mirrored the abuse she was receiving in her own home.

I gravitated to the exact same type of people that I was being victimized with at home and so I found friends, and I found boyfriends, and I found anybody that would accept me and would make me feel loved and included but on the flip side, if I didn’t do what they wanted me to do, then I was ... abused, ignored, ostracized (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016).

Eventually, Natasha was so desperate that she tried to take her own life. She described, “I tried to commit suicide ... I devalued myself” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016).

Lionel shared he grew up in South Central Los Angeles at a time where the crack cocaine era was really big and there was a lot of gang violence. Lionel recalled, “When I was four on up we use to have to sleep on the floor a lot because of the gang shoot-outs” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). Additionally, after surviving the physical abuse of his mother’s boyfriends, Lionel shared he had to deal with feelings of resentment, betrayal, bitterness, and confusion. In particular, Lionel was angry at his

mother for allowing her boyfriends to be violent with him and his brother. The trust was eroded between them. This contributed to Lionel pulling away both from his mother and from school: “I was so resentful towards my mom, for allowing all this stuff to happen, that our relationship even further diminished, and so ... once he was gone, I still had this bitterness, and then that’s when I started not even going to school, and that was part of that” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016).

Confused over the instability of his home environment and his mother’s unpredictability with men, and without guidance from a stable role model, Lionel was left to process his emotions and his untreated trauma by himself. The insecurity and loneliness was a common challenge for Lionel as he came to terms with his experiences. Lionel shared, “I guess I didn’t really have an understanding about world, I didn’t understand what I was going through emotionally ... I couldn’t see it” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016).

Marcel described that his emotional trauma manifested as ongoing worrying. At the early age of nine, Marcel was having difficulties sleeping at night, as well as challenges focusing in school due to the domestic violence in his home. He shared, “It affected my sleep, because I couldn’t sleep, I was always worried about, more on him if he hit the wall or scream at her or her crying, or the police in the house” (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). His teachers did not know what Marcel was going through in his home, and thus the trauma Marcel experienced continued to go untreated from all of the adults in his environment. Marcel said, “I wasn’t concentrating on my work, so the teacher didn’t really know what was the problem” (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). His teachers did not notice Marcel’s signs of trauma, and as a fourth grader, he did not have the vocabulary to articulate what he was feeling in a way that adults could help him. He expressed:

But they never asked me what was really going on, what was going on was I was worried about my mom. I couldn't concentrate on nothing in school, because I didn't want to be there, I wanted to go home to see if my mom was okay. (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Marcel's trauma continued all throughout his life, during elementary school, high school, and prison. It was ongoing and unrelenting. It was not until Marcel was paroled from prison did he feel that his trauma had ceased: "My trauma was like, a cycle that never stopped until, I actually came home from prison" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016).

For LaTonya, as previously noted, the divorce of her parents caused a lot of her emotional trauma and she did not realize the impact of her parent's divorce until she was in prison. She noted, "...It was something that I carried with me, and I didn't even realize it, I was carrying such a burden, and I didn't have to, you know because it wasn't my burden, I just wanted explanations" (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). As a child, LaTonya often felt guilt and shame that stemmed from the divorce, but back then she was unable to articulate these feelings: "Today I know it was a lot of guilt and shame and pain that I had to carry, but I couldn't identify that back then" (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). She coped by holding herself apart from others socially: "I was always the loner, and my mom always use to tell me go in there and play with the other kids, but I never felt like I fit in with those other kids" (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). The residual effects of her parents' divorce are still evident in LaTonya's adult life today and have manifested in social withdrawal and depression. Throughout her life, LaTonya indicated that she was only social with a few select individuals, because she generally did not trust others. She reflected, "You know, I couldn't trust my own parents to tell my why they were really getting a divorce and stuff, so how am I going to trust somebody else"

(LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). As a result, LaTonya is reserved and typically keeps to herself. As she describes it, “As an adult, umm a lot of people started telling me I was anti-social” (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). In dealing with all of the emotional trauma with which she is still coming to terms, LaTonya believes that she continues to suffer from depression today.

Berto indicated that his grandmother’s unstable and often negative thinking from her mental illness adversely impacted his own thinking and fostered maladaptive behaviors in his own life. This emotional home trauma had lasting effects in Berto’s decision making skills, as he was young and impressionable and his grandmother’s negative influence created profound confusion for him. Ultimately, he believes it factoring into his development of a drinking problem and his lifestyle of crime.

Four of the six participants described their emotional trauma as abandonment and/or rejection from their primary care givers. Abandonment took the form of not being emotionally available and/or physically present in the home. Rejection came from mostly primary care givers, but it also came from peers, as well. For example, Lionel indicated that although his mother was physically present in the home, she often was not emotionally available to him, as noted in a preceding section. Marcel, on the other hand, perceived his father’s move to Alabama as abandonment, which bothered him the most. Marcel expressed that he felt an emptiness after his father left, but as a child, he really did not understand the range of emotions he was experiencing. The only thing that remained with Marcel were his father’s last words: “Be the man of the house, take care of your mom and sister” (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016).

Marcel indicated that there were two pivotal junctures where he felt abandoned and rejected by his father. The first was when his father left the home and moved out of state when he was nine years old. Marcel said, “I didn’t understand at that time, the emotions that I was feeling, was I felt unloved, unwanted, and rejected. I didn’t know

how to express that at that age” (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). Second, Marcel asked his father if he could move to Alabama with him to get out of the gang lifestyle in Los Angeles. At the time, Marcel was involved in a gang, and the dangerous activities that surrounded him were escalating to the point that he feared something would seriously happen to him and/or another person. Marcel was looking for a way out of his environment, and he sought support from his father. However, Marcel was met with a polite and diplomatic rejection, which caused extreme emotional turmoil for him. Marcel explained,

So I called him and explained to him everything that was going on, so he kept saying, ‘Look, it’s not a lot of jobs out here, it’s country and it’s slow, really think about it before you want to come out’ and he just kept saying that, so I knew he had another family, he really didn’t want me out there, so I hung up the phone, and I started crying because I knew that I was going to have to continue doing what I was doing, and I really didn’t want to do it. [I was going to] kill more or I go to prison, I knew that. (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016)

LaTonya’s experience also felt abandoned by her father after her parent’s divorce. It was the sudden disappearance of her father from the home that profoundly impacted LaTonya. One day, her father left, and no one ever gave her an explanation why. This abandonment caused unresolved emotional trauma for LaTonya that was left untreated without closure for years. As mentioned in chapter four, under the Parent Relationships and Divorces section, the silence of her parents regarding their divorce haunted LaTonya. She often felt a void with her father gone from the home and did not have closure to her feelings. The lack of an explanation bothered LaTonya the most. As a result, throughout her life, LaTonya learned not to feel feelings and had a tendency to withdraw from others.

Berto experienced abandonment and rejection by both his primary care givers and peers. Berto's biological parents abandoned him as a toddler and gave him to his grandmother. With the abandonment by his primary care givers and being raised by a grandmother with a mental illness, Berto soon received rejection from his peers, as well (a topic further discussed in chapter five). The acknowledgement of abandonment and ongoing rejection from peers did little to support Berto's self-esteem and confidence. Doubt and insecurities were always at the forefront, as Berto tried to navigate and survive in a poverty-stricken and high gang violence environment. Berto stated, "It was just like, I think it, I look back on it now, and it was just like the rejection that I felt, you know, you know what I mean, the feeling different, you know, you know what I mean" (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017).

Safety

Through their interviews, participants described a need for a sense of safety stemming from situations in their childhood and teenage years where they did not feel safe. This need for safety propelled them to engage in activities—such as joining gangs—that would pave the way toward involvement in crime. Described below are some examples of when their needs for safety were shaken by their environment, which further contributed to coping behaviors, which are further discussed in the final section of Chapter 5.

Alejandro, from an early age, saw his family immersed in the gang lifestyle. His father and three of his brothers had all been to prison for gang-related activity, and many of his uncles were also involved in the gang life style. Thus, the role models in Alejandro's immediate environment either implicitly or explicitly, pressured him to conform to this life style. Because he knew about his family's activities, he thought if he did not join the gang he would be considered a risk for "snitching," and so he worried

that if he did not there would be severe consequences. He explained, “In the lifestyle of the crime syndicate you cannot snitch, ‘cause if you do, then umm, it’s all bad, it gets really bad and just worse” (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016). To preserve his personal safety, Alejandro joined the Hispanic gang called the Norteños.

Natasha expressed that she never really felt a sense of safety home or at school. Due to the molestation and physical abuse, including the burn from a pot that was suspected by the doctor to have been set on her back, Natasha was in a constant state of terror. She was always on alert, scanning her environment for ways to protect herself from further danger. Although Natasha tried to appeal to her father for protection, he did nothing to stop the abuse. As a result, Natasha was not protected, her feelings were never acknowledged, and she had to continue to endure the abuse. She explained, “I hate my feelings because I tried talk about them, but then nothing changed, so why would I put that out there again” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). In addition to the home trauma, Natasha shared that she did not feel safe going to school, as well. For example, “I was going to be jumped at school, and so I stopped going because I was like, I don’t want to be jumped” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). As a result, Natasha was being threatened by both parents at home and peers at school, but the adults at school missed the signs.

Lionel also felt the influence of a gang lifestyle early in his life. He shared that when he was as young as four years old, he slept on the floor in case there was a gang shoot-out and bullets came flying through the windows. In the aftermath of the shoot-outs, Lionel said they would see bloody shirts or syringes. Lionel indicated that as a result of the violence constantly surrounding him, he was focused on survival. “I always had a certain fear that something was going to happen to me, but I had to navigate through that” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). Furthermore, like Natasha shared in the previous

section, Lionel also faced danger walking to school. For Lionel, he had to pass through a rival gang territory, which affected his ability to go to school consistently.

It was challenging because I lived in the Crip neighborhood, as a Blood, so I would have to take public transportation to school which is always dangerous and so because of that I'm more likely not going to school because I don't want to take this risk. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016)

As with the previous participants, Marcel felt unsafe in his home environment, particularly in elementary school, when his father was abusing his mother. Marcel said, "I couldn't sleep, I was always worried about if he [would] hit the wall or scream at her or her crying, or the police in the house" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). In high school, the safety issues moved from the home to the surrounding environment. Gang violence occurred frequently. For example, Marcel said on one occasion, he was stabbed in his back by a rival gang member. Another time, he was hit from a stray bullet in a cross-fire shooting with a Mexican gang.

LaTonya's neighborhood in North Sacramento was also dangerous. In fact, her parents did not want her to go to the local high school, Grant High, because they worried for her safety. Instead, they moved her to South Sacramento, so she could attend a safer school with less violence at Luther Burbank High School. Berto's East San Jose neighborhood was also unsafe. As a child, Berto often witnessed drug activity and violence, such as physical beatings. He stated, "I saw things growing up, you know that no kid should see or hear you know what I mean" (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017).

In sum, in their childhood, all participants experienced some sort of trauma-- Many participants lived in single parent homes and/or blended families, and divorce, substance abuse, domestic violence, and incarceration were among some of the stressors for these family units. These experiences formed an unstable foundation with little to

no support for the participants as they developed through childhood and their teenage years. Given these fractured family support systems and driven by their need for safety, the participants tried to adapt and cope to the best of their abilities and survive their environments, as will be discussed in Chapter 5 Coping Strategies section.

Socio-Cultural and Environmental Factors

Common factors identified among five of the six participants included four main aspects of their environment: 1) poverty; 2) transiency/residential moves; 3) race/ethnicity/culture; and 4) discrimination. Natasha's family background did not appear to be of low socio-economic status, however, all six participants did describe aspects of transiency/residential moves, race/ethnicity/culture, and discrimination in their interviews. Having limited financial means exasperated the stressors that most participants experienced. The frequent moves and significant change in support systems also adversely impacted the social-emotional functioning of the participants. The experiences of discrimination at school and within the community also excluded them from fully participating or desiring to participate in the educational system. The combination of stressors set the participants on trajectory with limited options, due to a lack of solid educational foundation.

Poverty

Five of the six participants came from working class backgrounds and their parents struggled to provide for their families. Due to trying to meet their daily survival needs, poverty adversely impacted their access to educational opportunities. For example, Alejandro came from a farmworker background, and his parents were limited in their education. Limited resources were always a challenge for Alejandro and his family.

Alejandro shared, “We were very poor. Umm, we always got hand me downs we never got to get clothes and [when] we did get clothes, it would be only one pair of new clothes for the year” (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016). Alejandro had to join his family in migrant farm work at an early age, which often took him away from school:

I started working when I was umm, eight years old, I started working.... In the orchards, picking grapes, picking prunes, picking apples, so that’s why I didn’t really have enough credits because ... I missed a lot of school [because I] ... had to go to work. (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016)

Although Alejandro’s family struggled financially, they were very close, and Alejandro shared that the children knew it was their responsibility to help out as much as possible by working. He shared, “My dad was a hard-working person and he did everything for us, and we tried to help him too” (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016).

Berto also grew up in a Latino family, but his grandmother was employed as a housekeeper. Like Alejandro’s parents, Berto’s grandmother did not have formal education. Berto shared, “my grandmother couldn’t read or write” (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017). When Berto moved back to California with his grandmother, their standard of living decreased. The neighborhood in which he lived in San Jose, California, was high poverty and infested with drugs and gang violence. Berto said, “Yeah, and just you know the poverty and shit like that” (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017). Berto was disheartened by the lower standard of living he experienced in San Jose, California. The frustrations he experienced having to deal with neighborhood violence and bullying were stressors he preferred to avert.

Natasha, Lionel, Marcel, and LaTonya also described their families’ limited education, working class employment statuses, and daily survival challenges. Lionel

shared that his mother had dropped out of school and worked at a check cashing business. Times were financially hard for Lionel and his mother. They did not have the luxuries of nice clothes and transportation, which, at times, was embarrassing for him. Keeping up with the styles and fashion is important among peers in lower socio-economic environments, which can cause one to become ostracized. Lionel stated,

Yeah, it's emotional because it's like it's, it's not only the gang life it's, you know economic it's where our identity umm, not having a lot and going to high school with people [who] are growing in their maturity levels to a point where it's about what you have and its embarrassing not to have. And, so for one, public transportation cannot afford to make it to school every day, umm, or do I have, my appearance, my appearance, do I have all my, you know, clothes, all my clothes on me, you know what I'm saying. How do I feel in the moment, umm, so many different factors plays into it and so, it was a lot of pressure. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Marcel, Natasha, and LaTonya further acknowledged their parents had limited education with high school diplomas, but were working class individuals with good jobs capable of providing a decent living, including housing, food, clothing, and transportation. Natasha's mother was a Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN) and her father owned a liquor store. As previously noted, LaTonya's father was a maintenance man, and her mother worked at Libbey's Cannery, as an assembly line worker.

Transiency/Residential Moves

Five of the six participants were either transient or had experienced at least one significant residential move, which caused additional stressors throughout their childhood and educational experiences. Alejandro described his family, as migrant workers who

moved a lot to following the crops and sustain their income. Every couple of years, due to the nature of their work, Alejandro's family uprooted and moved to a new location. Alejandro explained,

We also umm, bounced around a lot, you know, we went to town to town, town to town, town to town, town to town, we were never in a settled place. Every year or every two years we had to move somewhere. (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016)

Natasha also experienced frequent transiency during her childhood and teenage years. Changing schools was common for Natasha. Sometimes she would know the change would be coming, but other times she would not. Transitioning to new schools and making friends also created anxiety for Natasha and adversely impacted her educational performance. Natasha described the instability as a contributing factor to her poor academic performance.

I think that's another reason why I didn't do so well in school as a child, because I had moved six times before I was even arrested in 1995, and I would transfer schools and I didn't know I was moving. I would just get picked up for school one day, and my mom would be like 'you're going to be staying over here.' (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016)

Lionel, LaTonya, and Berto did not experience the same volume of residential moves as Alejandro and Natasha, but each described at least one significant residential move that had an adverse impact upon their educational functioning and adaptation to their environments. For example, Lionel identified his move as factoring into his joining a gang: "When I got kicked out and stopped going to school in junior high school in Inglewood, that's when I became a Blood out there" (Lionel, interview, December 28,

2016). Furthermore, his auntie and grandmother lived in Inglewood, and his mother wanted him to live in South Central Los Angeles. As a result, Lionel said, “I would go back and forth” between these two homes (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016), which caused further instability.

LaTonya indicated that she was from Northern Sacramento, where her friends and family primarily resided. However, a significant change in her environment occurred when she was 15. LaTonya’s mother moved her family to South Sacramento. LaTonya stated, “Every year, umm I ended up moving from North Sacramento to South Sacramento, so I had to go to a different high school, from them and umm, I went to Luther Burbank” (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). However, LaTonya did not adapt well to her new high school. She did not make and often times just kept to herself. She said,

No, I didn’t make any friends, I lived down the street from the school. I went to all of my classes, and when the bell rung to go home, I went straight home, and plus I had a cousin that went to the same school with me. (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017)

The family stayed in South Sacramento for a couple of years, but then moved back to the North area, after LaTonya graduated from high school.

Berto also experienced a major upheaval when his grandmother moved them from Nebraska to California. There were stark differences between the two places. The homes were nicer in Nebraska and the community in which they resided was free of drugs and violence. In contrast, East San Jose, California was a culture shock to Berto and his brother, who were now exposed to poverty, drugs, and violence—a major departure from the large residences and neatly paved streets of Nebraska. Berto reflected on these differences:

I think in Nebraska we lived in a Victorian home, you know, a nice home we each had our own room, and you know we had to come out here and, you know over there were streets and lined with trees and paved with brick and nice you know what I mean and then we came out here to the shit hole in East San Jose. (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017)

Not only were Nebraska and California different in their levels of socio-economics, but the states were very different in terms of diversity. For example, in the Nebraska community Berto had lived in, most of the residents were White, but in East San Jose, the neighborhood was predominantly Mexican. In California, their neighborhood was consumed with gangs and violence, and Berto and his brother were bullied by other kids, which further traumatized Berto and his brother. Berto said, “It was ‘f’ed’ up, I was traumatized by that move. I wish I would have stayed in Nebraska” (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017).

Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

Another layer of stressors that impacted these participants were the socio-cultural responses they received from intolerant communities related to their race/ethnicity and culture. Six of the six participants described examples of discrimination they experienced due to their race/ethnicity, providing vivid examples of racial differences. Racial inequities across all sectors of the school and community were evident among the participants’ interviews. References to generational wealth were also noted in some of the participants’ responses, describing the institutional structural inequalities between the races.

Lionel expressed that Caucasian people have more privileges and support than do people of color. Not only with monetary access and resources, but in relation to

differential treatment in school suspension procedures, which have adverse impacts upon equity and access to educational opportunities.

I definitely believe that there are there definitely are disparities and certain people have more privileges than others, some people have more umm, umm support than others. Umm, and they come from different economic situations umm, and you know more likely to get a job or not get a job. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Lionel further shared that barriers are more severe for Blacks than they are for Whites, especially as they relate to school suspensions. Very real differences between the races exist. Harsher consequences are provided to Blacks and stigmas are more detrimental to Blacks than they are to Whites. Second chances are afforded to Whites more easily than they are to Blacks. Cycles of poverty have a tendency to perpetuate more frequently for Blacks than they do for Whites.

The White have ... a support system, more, a stronger household, more access ... and just [there is a] certain stigma that comes with being White, and a different stigma that comes with being Black, and so ... because we were suspended, and we can internalize that, 'I'm a bad person,' that I got caught up in this cycle. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2017)

Limited resources and lack of positive role models plague the Black community. As generations reproduce, the prior generation with limited resources often perpetuates similar cycles of poverty in the next generation's offspring. African Americans are caught in cycles, which are difficult to break from the strongly established institutional structures in society's norms of expectations and practices. These dynamics compound upon one another and reinforce future generations to perpetuate similar circumstances.

Not having support, not having a role model, not having ...money... or different options, so all of that in combination it should be used to destroy the prison pipeline or the community prison, or the family, whatever you know what I'm saying that's for always we see history plays a role because ... of the stuff that we carry from, ... [that] our ancestors went through and still to this day. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Discrimination

Several participants described instances of discrimination they had experienced throughout their lives. Alejandro experienced discrimination in school, at work, and in his community. Natasha, Marcel and LaTonya shared some examples of discrimination they witnessed in prison. The examples described below highlight the inequities among the races and acknowledge discrimination.

Alejandro felt the Latino community was harassed and bullied by more affluent people, who abused their power. This occurred both at school and in the community. From principals to police officers, Alejandro and his family experienced inequities and unnecessary harassment due to their racial and low socio-economic status. With limited resources, Alejandro often became victim to racial profiling and discrimination, prior to his incarcerations. He shared, "Not only that I was real poor, so could never meet up with ... the upper higher class people and those were the people who use to pick on us, not just me, but other Latinos and Latinos in general" (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016).

He experienced bullying and discrimination occurred at work, at school, and with the police in the community. Alejandro said, "Back in those days there was a lot of discrimination, I always tried to stick up for myself, but did it the wrong way I guess" (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016). Alejandro's concern about equal treatment for himself and others in the Hispanic community caused him to become involved in

situations that required him to exercise his ethical judgment. For example, at work, those who oversaw the farmworkers would talk disrespectfully and condescendingly to them. Alejandro said, “I would find myself umm talking, well not talking, arguing with the umm the owners, the ranchers that we use to umm work for ‘cause, they treated us you know in a poor manner, very poor manner” (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016).

Because he was attuned to injustices happening around him, Alejandro’s first arrest was related to discrimination he witnessed. Seeing police mistreating several Hispanic people, Alejandro tried to intervene on their behalves. The police responded with excessive force and arrested Alejandro for assault. He explained,

The officers got mad and one of them tackled me to the floor and then another police officer got mad got me in a choke hold threw me to the floor, umm, another officer got on top of me, somehow, I wound up grabbing one of the officers on top of me tripped him over he landed on his head and he got, umm, unconscious and I was arrested for assault. (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016)

In school, Alejandro often experienced discrimination from other students. They called him racially-charged names such as Pancho (short for Pancho Villa, a Mexican revolutionary leader), which hurt him:

There was few people that umm at my school my middle school that knew my name but they always called me ‘Pancho’ and that was considered you know, ‘Pancho Villa’ and all that stuff, so I was telling them that was not my name, and it was wrong for them to characterize me and you know that man hurt. (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016)

Alejandro tried to assert himself with the other kids and establish a sense of respect for himself, but the discrimination continued and was a reality he had to navigate daily.

Not only did the other students discriminate against Alejandro at school, but site administrators played a role too. Alejandro could not rely upon the adults at school to intervene and establish appropriate boundaries, as they also contributed to the discrimination, as well. For example, Alejandro felt that his principal singled him out unfairly, “watching” him in case he did something wrong. Alejandro said, “The principal we had, he was really like, he was always watching me, was watching us” (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016).

Berto was the only participant who indicated that he received discrimination not only by Caucasian people, but by the Mexican and Black teachers in school, as well. Berto expressed that he often was disrespected by minority teachers more often than Caucasian teachers. Berto said he was even surprised by this dynamic himself. Initially, thinking he would receive some empathy and encouragement from the teachers of color, this was not his experience.

More often it wasn't the White teachers, you know, well that's what I was going to tell you like that's one thing that I was tripped out on it was like, is why was it these Mexican and Black teachers and you know it's like the White teachers were more respectful. (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017)

Second Generation Segregation. The aforementioned socio-cultural and environmental factors, including poverty, transiency/residential moves, race/ethnicity/culture, and discrimination contribute to the phenomenon of second-generation segregation. This exclusion and marginalization from the educational and community institutions may have contributed to participants' being set on an exclusionary pathway towards prison. Four of the six participants indicated times where they felt excluded and/

or pushed out of the K-12 educational system, defaulting them to encounters with the local police and/or arrests putting them into jail. When describing his school experiences, Alejandro said, “At times I felt accepted, and at times I felt you know, like I was, separate, the out-cast” (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016). For example, the self-contained classes Alejandro took in school, as an English Language Learner (ELL), separated him from the mainstream for a significant part of his day.

Lionel viewed his exclusion in terms of institutional pipelines that led to prison. With a lot of reflection and studying in prison, Lionel has learned there were many environmental forces or pipelines that positioned him away from education and set him on a pathway to prison. Generationally, with the breakdown of the African American family, missing father figure in his home, as well as, the limited financial means and resources, Lionel now recognizes history has played a role in his trajectory in life and acknowledges the phenomenon of second-generation segregation. He noted, “Even history plays a role and so, umm, I always think that...when we talk about the school to prison pipeline, the systems are designed ... the system is perfectly, it’s working perfectly. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016)

As evidenced by the above quote, Lionel believes that the system is set up to marginalize and exclude African Americans, and that structural institutional inequities exist as modern-day pipelines, such as school suspension and expulsion practices. For example, he related, “It’s a connection and so it’s part of it, but not it’s not the only thing we talk about. Suspensions [from school] increase a person’s chances of being incarcerated, especially like Black or Brown” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). The achievement gap and incarceration disproportionality for people of color lacking in universities and overrepresentation in prison, respectively validate the disparities among the races. Lionel added, “In a sense, [the system is] designed for incarcerating people of color” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016).

Berto's experiences confirm Lionel's descriptions above regarding the suspension rates for Black and Brown students, including excessive suspensions without resolution and support for his needs, which serves as a form of second-generation segregation for Hispanic students. Berto, who had a long history of suspensions and was eventually expelled from school, had such frequent suspensions that when he was in trouble, site administrators did not even bother doing the formal paperwork and just sent him home. Berto said, "It got to the point where they didn't go through the procedures" (Berto, interview, February 11 2017). This went on continuously without the school providing resolution or support for Berto's behavioral needs.

Another example of a form of second-generation segregation was the unjust justice system, as experienced by Marcel and other young African American males. For example, as a juvenile, Marcel was accused of taking a radio, but in actuality, someone else stole the radio. Marcel found himself charged of a property crime he did not commit, but was pressured into taking a plea bargain by the District Attorney. He shared, "The public defender and District Attorney kept saying look we know you didn't do this but the judge is not going to believe you, either take this plea bargain for 20 days in juvenile hall, and that will be it" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2106). As a result, the judge instead gave Marcel six months in jail.

Last, Lionel and Marcel were the first juveniles in the state of California to be tried as adults, which, I argue, further supports the phenomenon of second-generation segregation. This is similar to the disproportionate numbers of African Americans and Latinos suspended and/or expelled from school. Exclusionary practices, such as in trying juveniles of color as adults, further segregates them from society. Their prison sentences are longer and harsher causing the reinforcement of limited educational options to function successfully in society. For example, Lionel shared that he went through a long fitness hearing to determine whether or not he should be tried as a juvenile or an

adult. Lionel believed that for no other reason other than being Black, he was tried as an adult. Lionel stated, “I was involved in my fitness hearing process for six months, umm, once it was determined that I should be tried as an adult, which they were already doing, you know, on people of color that’s like, like, crazy” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016).

With family trauma, poverty, limited access to educational opportunities, an arbitrary justice system, exclusionary discipline in the K-12 educational system, and discrimination in school and the community, many of the participants’ experiences took on a form of second-generation segregation, which excluded them from accessing resources afforded to their Caucasian counter-part peers and set them on a pathway to prison.

CHAPTER 5

K-12 INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES AND COPING

Chapter five has three main sections. The first describes K-12 Institutional Practices. In this section I discuss participants' experiences in school, including needs that went unaddressed, problematic assessment practices, disability diagnoses, teacher and peer relationships, and disciplinary experiences. Second, I describe the coping strategies that participants discussed—that is, ways that they dealt with the trauma from their childhoods and schooling experiences. These included drugs, gang activity, and crime. Third, survey questionnaire data is reviewed and triangulated with interview data to compare similarities and/or differences.

K-12 Practices

Unaddressed Needs

All participants, who experienced their educational services primarily in regular education programs, described academic and/or emotional needs that could have been addressed in school, but were not. For example, Alejandro, who spoke Spanish as a first language, was designated as a second language learner in school. Although he was an English second language learner, he struggled throughout his elementary school years. Literacy in particular was very difficult for Alejandro. The instruction he received and ESL supports were inadequate, and as a result, he struggled throughout elementary and

middle school. Although he lagged behind academically, he never received much support in the regular education program until middle school. Describing the inadequacy of his educational experiences Alejandro shared,

Through my elementary, and starting with my junior high [school], I was getting really bad grades, mostly Ds, barely passing. I believe I was in 6th grade and I finally learned my alphabets. That's how long it took me to learn them. (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016)

Although he recalled that most of his school-related struggles were related to language, Alejandro also had some behavioral issues that went unaddressed while he was in the K-12 system. At around age 14, he was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), and began receiving further supports.

Natasha found her regular education experience frustrating. She repeated the third and seventh grades twice. Although Natasha described her desire to succeed academically and remembered trying very hard to do so, a lack of resources and large classes meant that teachers did not have the extra time or capacity to devote to Natasha in terms of individual help. Natasha shared,

Umm, I remember needing help and asking for help and not getting it, and feeling frustrated because I was asking for it and still not getting it, and so I couldn't go home and ask for help because that wasn't there. So, I went to school to ask for help and they just basically told me they didn't have time and that was frustrating because I was really trying. (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016)

Adding to the frustration, Natasha missed a lot of school for various reasons. As noted, Natasha's home challenges were primary contributors to Natasha's difficulties and absences in school. At home, Natasha was dealing with domestic violence daily,

including verbal, physical and sexual abuse. Her parents' issues interfered and created unpredictability for Natasha. She never knew which parent was picking her up from school, and she learned to go with the flow and adapt to the continual changes within her environment. Natasha described her absences as follows:

My parents, umm, were beefing with each other, so they kept me out of school, my mom would take me and move me out of school, and my dad would go to pick me up and be there or vice versa or my stepmother would keep me home from school. (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016)

In addition, Natasha was frequently sick with Asthma, which also caused her to miss numerous days of school. She moved frequently from school to school and the constant uprooting further caused her to fall behind in school. It is possible that her frequent school moves may have prevented the educational system from identifying her needs both academically and emotionally. In any case, Natasha was not diagnosed with any disabilities while she was in the K-12 system.

However, while she was in prison, Natasha was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Natasha further described that her diagnosis for PTSD was from a culmination of stress she experienced as a child and teenager, as well as from the stressors of being incarcerated for a prolonged time. She explained, "The PTSD came before I went to prison, umm, from the trauma I endured as a child, and then after being in prison for 18 years, and one day [I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]" (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016).

Lionel indicated that he was always in the regular education program, but he did not consider school a priority. For example, Lionel became lost in the educational system, as he began missing classes and no teachers or administrators took note. At first, Lionel missed class but stayed at school, often just roaming the hallways. Teachers or other site

security did not notice that Lionel was out of class, but still on campus. This occurred so frequently that Lionel started leaving campus completely and then going to local parks to hang out.

I remember I use to roam the hallways when I was in the 7th grade. When it first started, I was roaming the hallways, and then started to be like, not even going to school at all. So, I was wandering around, I don't know if [teachers] knew, I use to be wandering around the school and not going to class. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016)

As Lionel's absences accumulated through middle school, he fell academically behind. Although Lionel never repeated any grades, by high school, he was a grade level behind his peers. However, the school continued to promote him to the next grade. He described, "But you still be like taking like different classes, so when I started my 10th grade semester, umm, I was taking 9th grade classes, but [they put me] in the 10th grade, in the hopes that I will make [it] up. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). Since neither the adults at school nor at home took action regarding his school absences, Lionel did not receive any additional support to help him make up the missed work.

There may have been support there, but I didn't know... no one that I can recall ...didn't much reach out to me for help. It was more so, you gotta go back to school, or take these classes and give me a pass to go back to the class, you know. There wasn't any like special offers or any special help. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Consequently, since the adults did not take action where Lionel was concerned, the trauma that he experienced as a child was left untreated. Although never formally diagnosed, Lionel suggested that he, and most other Black males, have a form of Post-

Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from the environments in which they have lived and continue to live. He expressed, “I believe that every urban youth, black youth has a form of PTSD. I’m not saying it’s to the point to where it’s paralyzing but not a lot of us just, you know, whether we internalize things is different, you know, our experiences” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). Because Lionel’s needs went unaddressed, he spent more time out of school and on the street, and at 15, he became part of the juvenile justice system.

Marcel also struggled emotionally during his school years, which had an adverse impact on his academic achievement. He shared that at one point in his elementary school years, the educational system recognized that he was experiencing academic difficulties. In response, they put him into the special education program for a few days, and they did some testing with him. Marcel said the tests were academic tests, and he did well on them. As a result, Marcel did not qualify for the special education program. However, Marcel pointed out that no one ever asked him how he was doing emotionally, which was his actual problem. He stated,

But they never asked me what was really going on, [and] what was going on was I was worried about my mom. I couldn’t concentrate on nothing in school because I didn’t want to be there, I wanted to go home to see if my mom was okay. (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016)

As noted in chapter 4, during this time period, Marcel’s father was physically abusing his mother on a daily basis. The trauma Marcel experienced from witnessing this constant violence was not recognized or treated by the educational system. Marcel stated, “It’s trauma--nobody addressed that, once you go through it, like, my trauma was like a cycle that never stopped until I actually came home from prison” (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016).

LaTonya, who carried the emotional burden of her parents' divorce for years, also felt that she struggled in school due to this early trauma. As a child, she did not understand her feelings or why she withdrew from others socially. LaTonya acknowledged that she believes that she was depressed as a child, and still continues to struggle with depression as an adult. However, she believed that had teachers, counselors, or other adults recognized that she needed help, she might have benefitted from it. LaTonya said, "Yeah, I think that I was just one of those that was just missed in the group, and I feel like I should've had counseling" (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017).

Berto struggled with behavioral challenges throughout his entire K-12 educational experiences. As a result, he frequently disrupted classes and was often suspended. Berto had difficulties getting along with both his teachers and his peers. As noted in chapter 4, Berto was bullied at school by the other students, and he had few friends. It was not until he was an adult that Berto received an actual diagnosis—specifically, it was discovered that he had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In school, however, Berto was never identified by a psychologist as possibly having special needs, and thus he did not receive any extra support in school. He noted,

No, I never got any certain extra help. Did it influence my, my success in the classroom? It probably did, you know, I don't know the extent of it because I said it wasn't diagnosed until I was older, yeah, but I'm sure it did. (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017)

Assessment Practices

The participants all described unique needs requiring attention in school. Typically, when the regular education program exhausts all of its resources to support students' needs, the next step is referral for special education psycho-educational assessment. Although all six participants displayed indicators of needing additional

support for their needs, only two participants, Alejandro and Marcel—were recognized by teachers or school officials at their respective school sites as needing additional supports, and both were given assessments of different kinds. Unfortunately, after a quick assessment process, neither Alejandro nor Marcel were found to qualify for any type of special assistance or program. Their descriptions of the tests that were given suggested that assessment practices were problematic.

Alejandro, as noted, was a second language learner whose primary language was Spanish. When asked if he was assessed in Spanish, Alejandro indicated that most of the assessments given to him in school were in English. Alejandro said, “I was mostly tested in English. I did recall a couple of times [being tested] in Spanish, but umm, even when I spoke Spanish, I didn’t know how to read it or anything” (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016). Thus, the assessor failed to determine which language was Alejandro’s dominant language before selecting an assessment battery appropriate for his diverse linguistic language needs. Furthermore, when tested in Spanish, his level of literacy in his home language was not taken into consideration.

Likewise, Marcel’s special education assessment was a partial battery, and only included academic testing. The assessor failed to include another part of the psycho-educational battery, which includes social-emotional functioning. Marcel said the assessments he received were academic in nature, and because he performed well on them, he was not referred for any kind of additional supports. He shared, “They just ran these tests, I had to do a lot of tests, their tests were more academic umm, you know, multiplication, or if you could spell the schoolwork, it was nothing to do with what was happening mentally or emotionally” (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). Further assessments in the areas of social-emotional functioning--such as anxiety, depression, withdrawal, and so on—may have provided crucial insight into Marcel’s mental state.

However, these assessments were not completed, which caused unidentified needs to go unaddressed.

As this analysis shows, assessment practices for Alejandro and Marcel were lacking. In the case of Alejandro, they did not take into account linguistically diverse language speakers' differences or literacy levels, and in the case of Marcel, they did not assess for social-emotional functioning. These inappropriate or incomplete assessment practices meant these students' needs went unaddressed. Furthermore, because they were not identified by teachers, counselors, or other school staff as potentially needing support, Natasha, Lionel, LaTonya, and Berto were never even considered for assessments at their school sites. Thus, their individual needs, including emotional, attendance, and behavioral issues, went unaddressed as well.

Alternative Education

Although additional supports through their special education programs were not provided to the participants, two of them (Alejandro and Natasha) did receive some alternative education supports to augment their regular education program. The other four participants, Lionel, Marcel, LaTonya, and Berto did not receive any extra supports other than what was offered through the regular education program.

For Alejandro and Natasha, some supports were provided for their educational needs. Although Alejandro's support was very limited in the regular education program, it did include some additional tutoring and special classes for English language acquisition. Alejandro shared, "It was between 6th and 8th grade, that's when I started getting into special classes because my English wasn't so well at that time, and they use to tutor me for, how to use my vowels and stuff" (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016).

As indicated in chapter 4, Natasha received private support outside of the public educational system. Natasha said, "My father hired a tutor for me to try to help me catch

back up and she worked pretty well with me” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). The tutor was provided from Sylvan Learning Center within her community. With the additional one to one support, Natasha’s academic school performance improved and she was able to make up missed work, skip one whole grade, and advance to the next grade level. Natasha described,

I would go there after school, and I would study with them for a few hours and do homework, and they would take those classes I took there, and it somehow transferred to my schooling. So, it showed that I was making extra steps trying to catch back up, and I skipped the 8th grade and went straight to the 9th grade. (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016)

Teacher Relationships

Four of the six participants indicated that they had positive relationships with teachers. In Alejandro’s experience, he said he loved all of his teachers, because he knew they were trying to help him. Natasha also shared that she felt her teachers liked her, but they often did not have the time and attention to give to her. She noted, “They were spread very thin, so it was very difficult for them to give one on one attention like that” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). For the most part, Natasha said she liked her teachers, as did both Marcel and LaTonya. Marcel said, “Umm, they were good (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). While LaTonya reflected, she came to learn that her teachers were caring and compassionate with good intentions for her. She stated,

I had very good teachers. My History teacher, I just thought he was a mean person, on top of me not liking History, and that was another reason why I skipped class. But come to find out he was just a marshmallow. (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017)

LaTonya also expressed that she found school very boring, and she just wanted to graduate and be done with it. LaTonya thinks that if teachers would have been more motivating that would have made school more interesting for her. For example, she shared, “That can be very boring, if you don’t have a like a little lecture on the assignment to help you and excite you to want to want to do the assignment” (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). LaTonya said teachers would just give you an assignment and say do it. “If you just hand somebody a piece of paper and be like, do this and bring it back and get it graded, I mean it’s really boring” (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017).

To further contribute to Lionel missing a lot of school, he indicated that he really did not have any relationships with teachers. Lionel was aloof to teachers. His chronic truancy and non-existence on campus made it difficult for him to develop relationships with teachers. School was not a priority for Lionel, as other daily survival needs consumed his thoughts and behaviors. For example, “I didn’t have any relationships with teachers. I never, outside of elementary school, I didn’t develop and or really care” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016).

Berto was the only participant who expressed an outright dislike of his teachers. Berto was constantly getting suspended, and he had one expulsion from school. Berto said teachers would call him names, and he was surprised that professionals behaved in such a manner. He shared, “There were times they would go out of their way to be disrespectful, and even as a grown man, I’m almost 50 years old, and I still think that way, you know, I still resent their behaviors” (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017). While there were some White teachers who disrespected Berto, most of the disrespect came from teachers of color:

They would just, like I said, they would just do nasty things like you know talk to me bad or you know just disrespect me in front of the class. More often, it

wasn't the White teachers. That's one thing that I was tripped out on, it was like, is why was it these Mexican and Black teachers [are disrespectful], and the White teachers were more respectful? (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017).

Suspensions

Data indicates that the four males in the study (Alejandro, Lionel, Marcel, and Berto) were suspended from school at least once, if not more. However, the two females in the study, Natasha and LaTonya, reported that there were never suspended or expelled from school. Although LaTonya said she almost was suspended from school one time, it was a minimal infraction, and no suspension was documented. Alejandro indicated that he was suspended a few times, mostly for cutting school or fights. Lionel shared that he does not recall how many times he was suspended from school, but he believes it might have been seven or eight times. Lionel said, "I had a few fights, not a whole lot, and high school was a little different. It was definitely like, me not going to school, but it was also my gang activity" (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). Marcel said he only had one suspension from school, but it was not related to any fighting or violence. He shared, "I only had one suspension, it was for stealing some candy, like a school candy drive, that's it. No violence or nothing like that" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016).

In the study, Berto was the only participant who was both suspended and expelled from school. Berto reported that he was suspended so much that it became a nearly daily occurrence, and the school would just send him home without even completing the necessary steps to formally suspend him. He remembered, "They would say, 'Berto go home,' it got to the point where they didn't go through the procedures" (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017). As many times as Berto was suspended, however, nothing was ever done by adults at school to support his behavioral needs. According to Berto, the only thing they did was say come back the next day. "They said come back tomorrow" (Berto,

interview, February 11, 2017). Berto also shared that his expulsion from high school was a one-time offense for smoking marijuana on campus.

K-12 Peer Relationships

Two of the six participants, Natasha and Lionel, were identified as being well-accepted by from their peers. The other four participants--Alejandro, Marcel, LaTonya, and Berto--had more complex views of their peer groups. Some believed that their peer groups influenced them to make poor decisions, others withdrew socially, and others were bullied. I discuss these ideas in the paragraphs that follow.

Peer Acceptance and Influence

Although at times Natasha felt unsafe going to school with the fear of being jumped, given the challenges of her neighborhood environment, she typically had good relationships with her peers. For example, Natasha and Lionel both described examples of peer acceptance. Natasha said, “I get along with everybody—I still do” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). Natasha prided herself on valuing acceptance for all racial and ethnic groups. This may have been because she herself is tri-cultural, and she embraces her Black, Japanese, and Native American heritage. Speaking to her attitude toward relationships with peers, Natasha stated, “I was friends with athletes, cheerleaders, cuz I was a cheerleader, umm, nerds, everybody” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016).

Lionel shared the same sentiments as Natasha. Conflict was not a part of Lionel’s daily life at school with his peers. Lionel was social with everyone and embraced relationships with all groups. Reflecting on his peer relationships in school, Lionel noted, “Yeah, I always had friends” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). However, Lionel

was the only participant who specifically discussed positive peer influences on him when he was growing up. Lionel said, “A combination, I had all, gang, ahh, people who actually went to school, people with both parents in the house, umm, I definitely got, got along well with people, umm, in the school” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). In general, Lionel felt he had good relationships in his K-12 experiences, and he strove for peace in his relationships. Lionel said, “I haven’t had any problems for the most part, [I] got along well with students” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016).

Other participants described that the peer relationships they had were not so positive in terms of the choices they were making in their middle and high school years. For example, Alejandro shared the peers he spent time with in high school tended to be the smokers, drinkers and partiers. However, he shared that he desired to hang out with the White students as well. Being a Latino and second language learner, Alejandro displayed an interest in the American culture and attempted to improve his English language skills. He described, “They were plenty of Latinos [at school] too, the races were mixed, but umm, mostly I hung out with the White people. I wanted to learn more about them” (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016).

Natasha indicated that she had bad peer influences all around her, which she felt contributed to the poor choices she made during her teen years. In particular, the need to be accepted and fit in with her peers preoccupied her mind. She shared, “I had a lot of pressure on me. Pressure with sex, pressure from boys, pressure to be accepted, pressure to fit in, pressure, and then I went to jail” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016).

Marcel indicated that the negative peer influences he faced primarily involved gang activity. As noted previously, Marcel grew up in Compton, California, and in high school was exposed to gang culture. Marcel noted, “That’s when I started going to school with a lot of the gang members” (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). Marcel further shared there was always a lot of fighting and tension at his school. Given the confines of

his environment, Marcel felt there were no other options other than to participate in the gang culture. After his father moved to Alabama, Marcel was already being inducted into the gang lifestyle as early as fourth grade and became heavily involved by high school. Marcel affiliated himself with the Pyru Bloods. Describing how the gang members became his primary peer group, Marcel explained, “I [did not] hang around nobody that wasn’t affiliated with me, I didn’t want nobody that wasn’t part of my gang” (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016).

LaTonya, who had withdrawn socially, due to the trauma she experienced as a child and young adult, had few relationships from her school experiences. In fact, she shared that she had two friends from childhood that she has continued to remain in contact with to this day. Describing these long-time friends, she remarked, “Yeah, we grew up like sisters” (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). The isolation grew even more severe when LaTonya changed schools as a teen, and she did not make any friends at her new high school. LaTonya shared that she felt like she lived in an egg shell—implying that she was in an extremely fragile state--and was tuned out from her environment. The combination of the grief over her parent’s divorce and changes in her high school environment had taken a toll on LaTonya, and she felt that she could not make connections with anyone. Discussing her emotional numbness, she expressed, “it was like I wasn’t even in contact with emotions anymore” (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017).

Peer Rejection

Data suggests that two of the six participants, Alejandro and Berto, experienced some rejection in the form of bullying from their peers. As previously noted, Alejandro discussed that he was often called racially-charged names in school by his peers. In particular, a group of students in his middle school developed a cruel nickname that

targeted his Mexican heritage. Alejandro shared, “Umm, well there was a few people that umm at my school, my middle school, that knew my name, but they always called me ‘Pancho’ and that was considered, you know, ‘Pancho Villa’ and all that stuff, so” (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016). Alejandro expressed that he was hurt by the comments and felt a sense of exclusion from his peers.

Berto also shared that he also experienced a lot of bullying in school, which he felt was because he did not fit in well with his peers. Other kids thought he was odd, and he was often picked on by the others. He described, “The other kids always thought that I was weird. I got harassed and picked on a lot, and I don’t know why I didn’t get along with them” (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017). Later, as the bullying continued into middle and high school, Berto said eventually, he became aggressive and started fighting back. Berto indicated the bullying became so severe that eventually he began to respond with aggression. This behavior further isolated Berto from his peers, and thus it was always difficult for him to make friends.

When we came back from Nebraska, it was like it was, I was thinking about it, I said man we got bullied, you know what I mean, like man and so finally, it got to the point where I would do things like just walk up and just hit people. (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017).

Coping Strategies

Given all of the challenges the participants faced from their untreated trauma, undiagnosed disabilities, a general lack of safety, and other difficulties in their home and school environments, the participants coped in a variety of ways through their teen years. From internalizing behaviors such as withdrawal and depression to externalized

behaviors manifesting into anxious behaviors, including but not limited to calming themselves with drugs and/or involving themselves in gang and criminal activity, the participants coped within the limitations of the resources they had available to them with their environments.

Within their low socio-economic neighborhoods, common activities included the use of drugs. Some participants indicated their drug usage was to escape and forget about the pain of their daily lives, especially Berto, who experienced a lot of pain from the constant bullying and little to no support for his emotional needs. Drinking became a coping strategy for Berto. Data indicates that four of the six participants drank alcohol (Alejandro, Lionel, LaTonya, and Berto). Furthermore, four of the six participants smoked marijuana (Alejandro, Lionel, Marcel, and Berto). Only two of the six participants indicated that they used harder drugs including speed and coke (Alejandro), and methamphetamines and Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), also known as acid (Berto). As mentioned prior, some of the drug usage was used for coping, other usage was recreational, due to the availability in their environments.

Gang involvement was also common activity associated with the participants' neighborhoods. Although many participants indicated that they did not intentionally set out to become involved in criminal activity and the circumstances that surrounded them, their peer associates and a general need for safety influenced them to join. Three of the six participants were involved in gangs (Alejandro, Lionel, and Marcel). Alejandro was in a Hispanic gang called the Norteños located in Northern California, while Lionel and Marcel were Pryu Bloods located in the Los Angeles area, Southern California.

Alejandro shared that he joined the gang when he was around 16 years old. He still is a Norteño today, but is not active. Alejandro described himself as the person who made all the decisions for the gang members below his ranking. Alejandro was also 'yard rep' or a person who speaks for the gang. In prison, there is a hierarchy in the gang, and

the members below the shot-caller (yard rep) must follow orders. Alejandro said, “I had a clan of at least 200, when I was in the correctional facility” (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016). Alejandro further said, “I was pretty much called a ‘shot caller’ (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016).

Lionel indicated that the beginnings of his gang activity started in the 7th grade. Initially, it started out as what he described as the ‘Crew,’ a group of neighborhood young males who were involved in questionable activities. The Crew, while not technically a gang in the traditional sense, was the precursor to joining a gang. However, it wasn’t until high school that Lionel became affiliated with the Bloods. He noted,

It wasn’t the Bloods and Crips, a crew is like a like a could be like 12 people or less umm people who associate with each other and did things together which involved activities, but it wasn’t to the level of gang violence. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2017)

Marcel was affiliated with the Pyru Bloods in Compton, California (Los Angeles County). Marcel indicated that after his father left to live in Alabama, he gravitated towards the gang lifestyle at the age of nine. He said, “It was like I grew up too fast, I never enjoyed the childhood that I was exposed to when I was younger, it was like something changed, when he left, the gang stuff came in, I changed” (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). Marcel further indicated that, once he had joined the gang, he started getting into trouble and getting arrested. In high school, there was constant fighting and conflict. Describing the violence, he observed and experienced physically, Marcel said,

[There were] physical fights stabbings. I got stabbed on my back. They [shot] me right here. I was in their car, the Spanish [gang], they wasn’t shooting at me, they

was shooting across school trying to get these guys over here. I got hit right up to here, I didn't even know I was hit. (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Criminal Activities

From a combination of home trauma and environmental factors, along with limited or lacking supports and services at school, all six of the participants engaged in different types of criminal activities, which led to their incarceration(s). Described below are each of the participants' criminal histories they shared in their interviews.

As noted in the previous section, Alejandro was first arrested as a juvenile. An altercation occurred between him and the police when he attempted to intervene on behalf of other Hispanic people who were being harassed. Alejandro's criminal history included arrests between 10 and 12 times. Some of his crimes involved reckless driving, assault on officers, burglary, and drive-by shootings. He described,

The longest time in jail was the last incident for the guns I had and the street gang stuff was five years. Well, they wanted to give me 15, but ... my attorney pleaded for five years. I did three years straight, I did one year in San Quentin, one year in High Desert, and another year in Susanville. (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016)

Natasha was involved in a robbery that resulted in a homicide, after which she and her boyfriend were charged with first-degree murder. Natasha, her boyfriend, and a third person decided to rob her house to get back at Natasha's father because her boyfriend was angry with him. Natasha, who had years of anger stored up toward with her abusive stepmother, agreed to serve as his accomplice. Natasha and her crime-partners did not intend for anyone to actually be hurt—they thought that her father and stepmother were insured and would get everything they stole back, since it was a 14-room house worth

half a million dollars. When they entered the house, they tied up her stepmother, who died of suffocation from the apparatus used to bind her. The trio was caught and arrested. Natasha was 17 years old at the time. She was tried as an adult and served a prison sentence of 18 years and one day.

Lionel was incarcerated for homicide, which was at least partially related to his Blood gang activity. Lionel did not reveal much regarding the specific details of his crime, but he did indicate that the homicide that occurred was unplanned and unexpected. Lionel was 15 years old at the time of his crime, and he took a plea bargain for 15 years to life. He explained,

It was a tricky situation, but put it this way--we didn't wake up that day knowing that we were going to hurt somebody or planned it. Things just transpired, it threw us all off, we were prepared for, but I'll just leave it at that because I don't want to go into the questioning. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Marcel revealed that prior to his last crime, for which he was sentenced to 32 years in prison, he had been arrested three times--once for auto theft, another time for stealing a bicycle, and third for strong-arm robbery. Marcel noted that, although he did not commit the third crime, he was charged for it regardless. Then, at 17 years old, Marcel committed his fourth crime, which was a murder, and was related to his Blood gang activity. He described the incident in this way: "It was over a car. The car got stolen and a gang member, they wanted their car back, and I didn't want to give it back. Then a lot of killings started happening over this car" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016).

The day of the homicide, Marcel spoke to his father and once again pleaded with him to let him come out to Alabama. His father refused. Later that day, he and a rival gang member got into a fight over the car, and Marcel shot him. "I was able to back up away from him, and I could have walked away, but it was like I had all these emotions

of my father that morning, and he didn't want me to come out [to Alabama]--and I had this guy standing right here, [and] I have this gun" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). Marcel further said, "all he had to do was give me the keys to the car, and I could have left" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). However, as Marcel described it, the rival gang member had a smirk on his face, as if he believed that Marcel was not serious about taking the car from him. After having seen this smirk, and still hurt over his father's rejection from their morning conversation, Marcel said he felt enraged, full of emotions, and he exploded. He reflected,

It was like a bucket like a bucket with warm water it was all kind of stuff that stings like rage, it was humiliation, it was crime not going well, it was all boiling, and it exploded in me shooting him twice, and I didn't mean for him to die, but he did. (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Marcel was sentenced to 32 years in prison for killing the rival gang member.

LaTonya was also charged for homicide, and because she was 19 years old at the time, was tried as an adult. Six months before the homicide took place, LaTonya had a conflict with a woman who had shot at her while LaTonya was in a car with her children. During the crime, LaTonya was driving, and a passenger in her car shot the woman who had attacked LaTonya several months before. She reflected, "My crime partner never even gave the girl a chance that night, she just started shooting at her, and she shot her twice" (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017).

Although LaTonya did not shoot the woman herself, the fact that she did not stop to get help for the victim or report the crime to police made her guilty of murder. LaTonya described her cultural and community norms as the reason she did not take action when the victim was shot. She said, "I'm not calling no police, you know, because it's because, like I said, I was born and raised in Del Paso Heights, and we don't call the

police” (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). Consequently, LaTonya served 23-and-a-half years for homicide.

Berto indicated that he was mainly arrested for property crimes, such as auto theft, grand theft auto, robbery, and burglary. In total, Berto served four prison terms between the ages of 18 and 42. Berto further shared that his crimes were connected to his drinking: “I’ve never been to prison when I was like, straight. Every single time I went to jail, I was drunk” (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017). Describing his cycles of criminal activity and incarcerations, Berto described his life as a revolving door of incarcerations—overall, he had spent approximately 25 years of his adult life in and out of prison. He said,

I’d go, I get arrested, I’d stay out, like, maybe 30 days, 60 days, and I’d wind up in prison for a bunch of more years, and I’d get out and I’d stay out a few months maybe, and I’d go back again, and so that’s the way it was. (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017)

It was not until his last prison sentence that Berto received substance abuse treatment for his drinking problem.

Survey Questionnaire Results

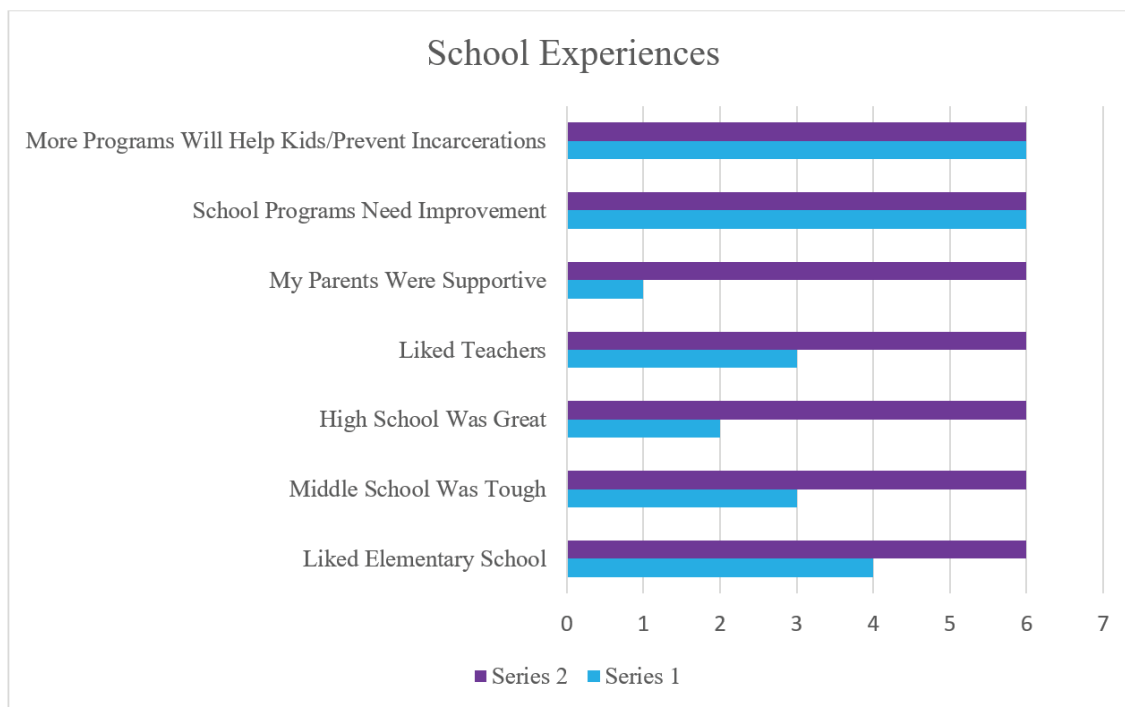


Chart 1: School Experiences

Outlined above are the school experiences results from the survey questionnaire. Data indicates that the most participants started elementary school with positive experiences, but they declined over the middle school and high school years. Half of the participants indicated they liked teachers. Only one participant indicated a parent was supportive. When comparing interview data with survey data, results are consistent when participants indicated they had needs that went unaddressed and undiagnosed. All participants agreed that schools need improvements and more programs to help students, which can prevent incarcerations. Additionally, home trauma reported within the interview data was further confirmed in the survey data, with only one parent being acknowledged as supportive.

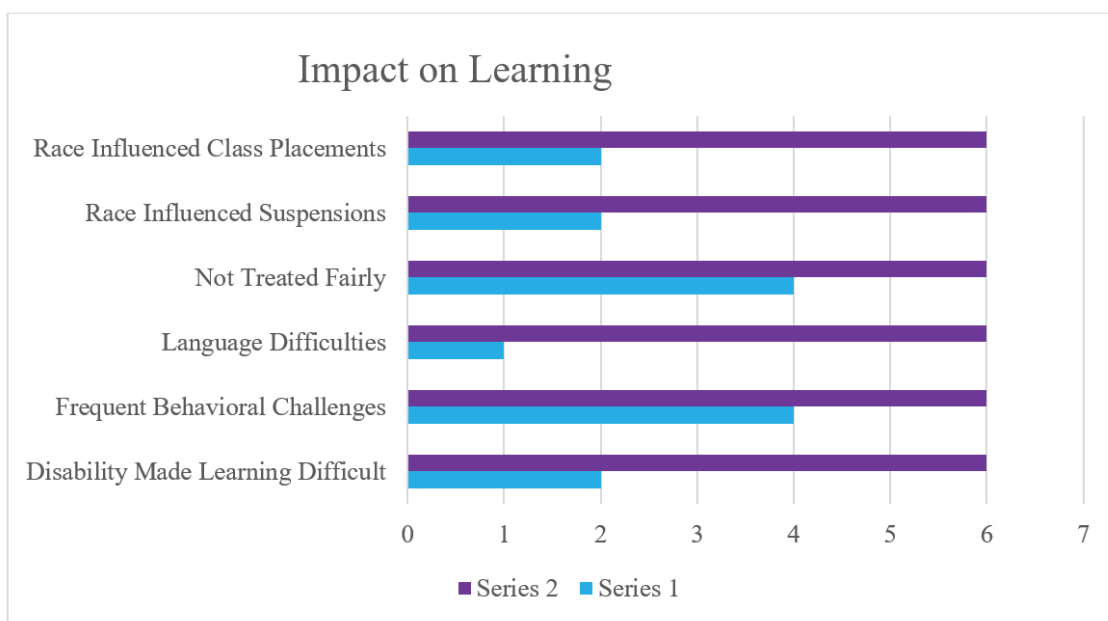


Chart 2: Impact on Learning

Data indicates that the participants did not generally view their disabilities and/or challenges with language as impacting their learning. Participants also indicated that race did not impact their class placements and/or suspensions. However, four of the six participants did indicate that they had frequent behavioral challenges in school. Alejandro, Natasha, Lionel, and Marcel further believed that they were not treated fairly in school. When comparing interview data with survey data, results are consistent with peer challenges and feelings of discrimination. All of the males experienced school suspensions, with three of the males heavily involved in the gang lifestyle, and all six participants had criminal records, which adversely impacted their learning.

CHAPTER 6

PRISON AND SOCIETAL RE-ENTRY

Chapter six discusses participant experiences during their time in prison and as they transitioned back into society, and culminates with a description of historical trauma as it relates to ongoing trauma for African American and Latinos today. Main sections of the chapter include challenges experienced by participants when they were incarcerated, discrimination in prisons, participant views on prison rehabilitation, the aftermath of participants' time behind bars, and the reflections of participants regarding the difficulties and triumphs of re-entering society. The chapter concludes by reviewing survey questionnaire data and triangulating it with interview data for comparison of similarities and/or differences.

Inmate Challenges

Participants in the study discussed a range of challenges they experienced during their time in prison. These challenges included securing their own personal safety, navigating prison politics, getting access to educational resources, and receiving emotional support. According to Alejandro and Marcel, the gangs run the prisons, and for their own safety, some participants felt pressured to affiliate themselves with particular gangs. Lionel, acknowledging that there was no sense of real safety in prison, commented, “[there is] no sense of safety. I think things happen so much there that no

one can really protect you” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). Described below are some of the accounts the participants shared regarding their personal challenges in prison.

According to Alejandro, one of his primary challenges as an inmate was navigating the gang lifestyle. Initially, Alejandro tried not want to become involved with the gangs, but he was pressured by other gang members in San Quentin prison. After being physically subjected to violence, he continued his affiliation with the Norteños. He noted, “after I got jumped and beat up ... I wind up sticking with the Norteños because I was in a Norteño prison. I was from North Bay so the name follows you” (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016). Thus, it was for his safety that Alejandro affiliated with the Norteños. Alejandro also discussed prison politics, which, as Lionel mentioned previously, were such a part of the culture that even the security guards were unable to protect the inmates. Alejandro described,

There’s people that know people in there that shoot kites and to each other and they tell you who you are, and where you’re from, and all that, and then the main person sends the soldiers you know towards you, and they ask you ‘What, do you bang? ‘Who you are? ‘What are you doing?’ That type of thing. (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016)

Marcel also agreed that there was a lot of pressure from other inmates to join particular gangs. This was, as he put it, “going by the rules,” because the gangs actually ran the prisons. Thus, according to Marcel, being in a gang in prison was actually safer than not being in a gang. He described, “Prison is all ran by gangs, there’s no people that are not, not in a gang. They [those not in a gang] don’t mean nothing, those are the ones that get really punked, pressured and a lot of bad stuff happen to them, you know, but the gangs really run the prisons, you know it’s all bad. (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016)

For Natasha, trying to get access to education and pursuing vocational opportunities were her ongoing prison challenges. Natasha said the prison was selective in who they allowed to participate in education, and inmates also had to pay for it. However, if an inmate still owed restitution, money was taken by the prison. Natasha shared, “When I was inside, 55% of your money would be taken if you still owed victims restitution or victims services” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). Money Natasha received in prison was from family members, who put it on her account. Typically, her mother and stepfather gave her money, during the holiday season. Other ways Natasha was able to earn basic food items and money were through drawing cards for other inmates and/or designing logos/characters on their clothes. In exchange for these items, other inmates would have their family members put money on Natasha’s account. Both Natasha would Lionel acknowledged the high cost of commodities in prison. Anything considered “extra,” such as education and personal phone calls, came with lofty price tags. Prison was very expensive.

And the phone calls at the time was so ridiculous, it was so expensive. It was like, they had the prepaid cards ... for \$100 for ten calls, 15 minute calls, [and] if you had to hang up ...they charged for everything. So, everything about it, everything costs. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Natasha further shared that security officers often served as barriers to maintaining a successful educational program. When prison searches were conducted, security could take and destroy inmates’ homework or other educational materials. Natasha said, “The cops can destroy your homework, they can destroy the school books, and it’s not like you have money to go blow to go buy some more” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). Natasha further shared that her mother paid for the courses she took at Ashworth University. Natasha also received a scholarship from Coastline Community College,

which also helped finance her education. However, even after Natasha spent a large amount of time investing in her education, it was discovered that some of the colleges she attended were no longer accredited. In turn, all of the school work she had completed did not count towards earning a degree. This was the most disheartening for Natasha, who reflected,

We don't know if we have to start all over from scratch, and so a lot of us use this opportunity to advance our educational levels, but not having reliable accredited programs for us to go through was very frustrating, and then it doesn't mean squat once you get out here. (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016)

The difficulty of securing and maintaining emotional support while incarcerated was noted by three of the six participants--Lionel, Marcel and LaTonya. For Lionel, he shared that being away from family at Christmas time was really difficult for him. LaTonya further indicated that separation from loved ones is very hard for inmates, and especially at Thanksgiving and Christmas time. These were LaTonya's toughest months in prison: "October, November, and December was the worse months for me in prison, and it was like, sadness, because I couldn't be with my loved ones, and that's a big thing for us to be together for Thanksgiving and Christmas, and so I was so saddened for all those years" (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017).

Even now, though out on parole, LaTonya said she is still sad when the holiday months come. Now, however, she is sad for all of the people she met in prison who she notes were good people and should be out of prison with their families. She said, "I feel sad for them" (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017).

Marcel also acknowledged that one of his biggest challenges in prison was not having family support nearby. As Lionel and LaTonya echoed previously, having family support is a very important thing in prison to the inmates. According to Marcel, just

knowing that someone was thinking about him and supported him did a lot for his mental health, providing encouragement that helped him persevere through his prison time.

Because when you go to prison if you don't have anybody writing you a letter or come to visit you it's like nobody really cares about you and you start feeling like... you're alone ...like your life is meaningless, and [it is helpful] when you have people writing you letters encouraging you to do things, like I always had my sister and my mom writing me. (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Marcel said the encouragement he received from his mother and sister helped him successfully complete prison programs, college and vocational school. Not only was the coursework difficult, but doing it alone, in prison, was even tougher. It was only with the letters of support from his family that Marcel was able to successfully finish and get his Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree, even though at times he thought of quitting. He shared, "I almost quit twice, and if it had not been for my sister telling me, 'You know you can do this, you can do this,' I would have gave up" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016).

LaTonya further shared she experienced challenges within prison just before she was getting released. While in prison, LaTonya achieved a successful program and was considered suitable for parole. Her behavior with others was good, she completed education classes, and participated in various counseling groups. However, she shared that other inmates sometimes attempt to sabotage the good standing of an inmate, such as LaTonya, by telling authorities that she was a "confidential enemy." Doing so could delay the "good standing" inmate's release on parole. Upon LaTonya's release, two inmates said LaTonya was a confidential enemy to them, but LaTonya denied that was true. Although the challenge she experienced was a part of prison politics and served as a side-distraction, it did not prevent LaTonya from paroling.

Discrimination

Several participants described forms of discrimination they observed perpetuated by the justice system. For example, Alejandro acknowledged a socio-economic disparity exists between Latinos, Blacks and White people, which he felt to provide unfair advantages to White people who are arrested. Specifically, he described that Caucasian families have more financial means to help family members in prison get released, due to wealth disparities and differences in resources (like access to quality lawyers) between racial/ethnic groups. He explained,

I think the Latinos and the Blacks have more problem getting out [of prison] than the White people...They're more...involved in the culture where, their families help them, and the Latino and the Black people are more of lower class, lower level people where they don't get the [financial] help. (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016)

Natasha also shared this same belief with Alejandro. That Caucasian families had more financial means to support their family members in times of trouble was an obvious difference to her. Natasha said, "the people that were getting out were Caucasian because they had the money to pay for the attorney" (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016).

Although Alejandro and Natasha had observed disparities in financial resources that gave Caucasians an advantage over people of color, Berto shared a different view. From Berto's experience, he viewed all inmates as the same, regardless of their race/ethnicity or culture. He noted, "All those inmates in there ...they're all the same" (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017). In Berto's mind, all inmates are people with problems, and no one race is inclined to do better than any other. He said, "No, no, in there it doesn't matter if you're White or Black or Mexican. Those people in there by in large, people

in there, they're all f'-ed up people in there...what I mean by that is... Whites aren't inclined to do any better in prison than Mexicans or Blacks" (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017).

The African American participants in the study, Natasha, Marcel, and LaTonya, all shared examples of discrimination that occurred to them in prison as well. For example, Natasha described an overt instance of discrimination she experienced, based upon her skin color, while in prison. Natasha had a White friend who partnered with her to do presentations for a chapter of a community based organization that does violence prevention in San Francisco. She and her friend facilitated several self-help groups for youth offenders who were 17 years or younger at the time of their arrests. Support groups included a range of topics, such as anger management self-esteem building, check-ins, and a book club, etc. When going to the different buildings to present, Natasha found that when she stood in front of the door, no one would notice her or open the door to let her in, and sometimes it took as long as 45 minutes before someone would even notice she was there. However, when her White friend stood in front of the door, she was let in the building immediately. Natasha summed up her experiences in this way: "It's just we're treated differently than any other culture and lowest on the totem pole, and we're sentenced just as harshly if not worse than anybody else" (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016).

Furthermore, there were clear disparities among the races in prison, according to Natasha. She observed that "Latinos or Latinas ...and African Americans ...were somewhat pitted against each other" (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). Jobs were also apportioned according to racial preference. Natasha described, "The jobs that you can actually make enough money to be able to survive in there, they would give to the White people first, and then they would give [the other jobs] to the Latinos, and then they give [the leftover jobs] to African Americans" (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016).

Marcel and LaTonya further shared their views of structural racism in America related to the justice system. Marcel described his perception of the preferential treatment offered to White people who commit crimes and also believed that Whites received lighter consequences compared to people of color:

Whites, [if] they get arrested, they go to a different place, they don't go to prisons, unless they're really poor and really did something bad. The majority of them, umm, they don't get treated [as badly], they don't get the same [prison] time, they don't go to the same places as people of color. (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Even after being released from prison, Marcel also continued to experience discrimination, which affected his ability to obtain housing and government assistance. He experienced such difficulty that he even was forced to conceal his criminal background to secure an apartment. Disclosing that he was a felon would have prevented him from being eligible for housing.

So, a lot of things, prisoners we don't get, you know, like for me I had [to], I lied on my, a lot of my stuff, my apartment that I have now, if I would have told them I was arrested with a conviction or whatever, had I said I was a youth felon or something, I would have got discriminated again ... [for what happened] 40 years ago. (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016)

LaTonya also described stereotyping practices where marginalized people were considered as one homogenous group, rather than having different characteristics. Often, for example, African Americans and Latinos were judged as a group, rather than as individuals in prison. LaTonya stated, "With the African American and the Latinos, I

think, umm, they don't get treated the best, you know and umm, if one of us mess up, it's like we all mess up" (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017).

Prison Rehabilitation

Several of the participants criticized the prison system's ability to "rehabilitate" inmates. Specifically, Natasha, Lionel, Marcel and Berto were all in agreement that the prison system does little to nothing to support inmates to develop educational, vocational, adaptive functioning, and life skills. All four of these participants indicated that prison is destructive, punitive, and dehumanizing. Natasha expressed, "I am so against the prison industrial complex. There's nothing that's great about it. It's there to destroy, and its designed to exactly as its meant to be. It's there to dehumanize destroy and split up families, and it works exactly as its designed to" (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016).

Natasha further stated there are many obstacles to being "rehabilitated" in prison, and the security staff is one of them. In Natasha's opinion, after spending time in prison, many inmates actually leave "worse off than when they went in." She believes that if rehabilitation does occur, it is because of the inmate's own initiative that growth and change happens—and it is in spite of the prison system, rather than because of it. Natasha's account below describes prison security views and the treatment of inmates,

We are job security. That's what they care about. If you're going to school, and if you about going to school, they don't care about getting to class to drop off your school work. [Guards] don't care about you getting to your mid-terms or finals or graduation or anything else for that matter. And so no, I don't think the prison system helps people and make them better, if they don't have the opportunity to

rehabilitate themselves they come out worse off than they were when they went in because they haven't had the opportunity to address the issues that they need to address. (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016)

Lionel further shared that he believes that the system is designed for incarcerating people of color, not rehabilitation. He described the complexity of the challenges people of color face as a combination of multiple factors, which Lionel referred to as pipelines. For example, the school to prison pipeline, which involves suspensions and expulsions, is just one of the pipelines that lead toward prison for people of color. According to Lionel, "Even history plays a role, and so ...when I think about when we talk about the school to prison pipeline, the systems are designed ... to me the system is perfectly, it's working perfectly. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Like Natasha mentioned previously, Marcel shared that he, too, believes the prison system is designed to punish to inmates without a rehabilitative focus. Instead of helping inmates realize alternatives, the institution is set up to reinforce failure. The negative mission and vision of the prison system is evident from the employees it hires. The overt verbalization from security staff of an agreed upon culture and climate to punish and not educate is no secret to the inmates, but rather a prison norm within the institution. "No, the prison system is designed to punish, they're not in the business for rehabilitation, it says rehabilitation, but the guards will tell you their self, we're not here to educate you and try to help, we're here to punish, and that's what they do punish" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016).

Berto further shared the same sentiment as the others regarding the lack of rehabilitative services for people in prison. According to Berto, "You know they're just places to warehouse people ...there's no ... real program there... they're disrespectful, you know what I mean, they don't, they don't want people to do well, they want them

to come back” (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017). However, Berto did take the initiative to take advantage of the few programs and resources that were offered in prison. For example, in the last years of his sentence, the prison system started a community college program, Berto said, “you know that’s when they started the community college program, but up until that point there had been no real ... rehabilitation program structure or anything like that” (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017). According to Berto, there was only one other program in prison, the Substance Abuse Program (SAP), that he believes helped him with his substance abuse problem. He described, “Last time I was incarcerated, I went through ... a two year ... drug and alcohol treatment program, they had one on the yard... it was called SAP Substance Abuse Program, and that’s what I went through for like two years. It was run by Phoenix House” (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017).

Aftermath

In the aftermath of prison, all participants embarked on a healing process from the trauma of their childhoods and successive incarceration experiences, as well as learned how to re-enter society and become successful. All participants went through a healing process where they had to self-reflect on their own history, develop boundaries for self-protection, and also develop new skills of self-reliance to cope in a healthy way and move forward. Many participants found a motivation to change, such as their own children and providing a better example for them, or developing a connection to a higher power to help support their growth both emotionally and spiritually.

Self-Reflection

Alejandro shared that while in prison he engaged in a lot of self-reflection about his mistakes. It was his family, especially his children, that helped him change his lifestyle. Alejandro said, “I myself, ‘cause I had ... my son and my daughter out here waiting for me, made me change my perspective in life and perspective in ways of seeing things” (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016). Alejandro further shared that he feels that he really did not have a lot options as young person growing up. With his father and other family members, including brothers and uncles, having been in prison, Alejandro acknowledged, as an adult, the poor role models he had while growing up, which he wants to avoid for his own children: “I followed the wrong steps and ... if I had better guidance, you know, when I was younger, then I probably wouldn’t be--well I’m in a better place now and better environment now, but back in the day ... I didn’t really have much of a choice. (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016)

While in prison, Lionel said he spent time in various programs that helped him get to know himself better and be able to identify his “triggers,” situations that cause him to become upset. Common triggers for Lionel included feeling stressed, self-inadequacy, and/or challenged. Additionally, when someone abused their power, this would bother Lionel, as well. Looking back reflectively on his past, Lionel said he was able to identify the unhealthy choices he made which contributed to him coming to prison. Lionel asked himself, “you know, why, how, did I get to this point in my life?” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). It was this self-reflection and self-awareness that helped Lionel learn to heal and make better choices for himself moving forward: “[I have done] deep emotional work and I identify triggers, I got to know myself more than I ever did in my life” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). Mentors were also a part of Lionel’s growth process and still continue to be in his adult life today to secure and maintain his

successful functioning. He noted, “with parole and a mentor, so I don’t know how to explain it, so I had so much growth while I’ve been in San Quentin” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016).

Similar to Alejandro, Marcel acknowledged that it was his family, and in particular, his daughter served as a catalyst for helping him change his lifestyle in prison. Marcel noted one visit when his daughter came to visit him in prison with her mother that really stood out to him as a turning point. During the visit, his daughter began crying because she could not touch him through the glass window. It was this incident that made Marcel feel he was doing to his daughter what his father did to him—he had essentially abandoned her while he was in prison. Marcel acknowledged, “That’s what started me changing, my daughter.” He added, “I started feeling like I was doing to her the same my dad was doing to me you know what, from this day on, I will never do anything to never make her cry again, but I had to go back and change a lot of things I was doing” (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016).

After the incident with his daughter, Marcel said he started observing other inmates who were being successful in prison and using them as models to figure out what he should be doing to turn his life around. They were dedicating their time to religious worship and attending rehabilitation, mentoring, or educational programs. He said, “I started looking what are the other guys doing that I’m not doing, they was going to church, he was in the scared straight program and mentor program, he was going to school getting a trade” (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016).

Furthermore, Marcel shared that he healed the relationship with his father. There was a time in prison when Marcel wrote his father and cursed him for all things he went through while growing up without a father. Although they had experienced a lot of emotional turbulence through the years, they were able to heal the relationship and move forward. This was accomplished primarily through an awakening of his religious beliefs.

For example, upon finding out that his father almost died from a domestic violence incident, Marcel turned to his religion for support and guidance, and took comfort in a “higher power.”

I got on my knees and I prayed for him, I didn't believe in God, even though I didn't like what he did to me ... how things worked out the way they did, I mean God, he didn't die, he came through for some reason, it was a miracle, and then came to visit me. (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Self-Protection

Blurred boundaries were challenges for Alejandro and Natasha while growing up with their family members. From sharing crimes one did not commit to inappropriate bodily contact between family members, both Alejandro and Natasha had to learn to self-protect after being released from prison and firmly set boundaries with family members in order to prevent further harm to themselves. For example, Alejandro recalled being arrested for a crime he did not commit. While on probation, the police did a probation search in Alejandro's home. His roommate was possibly going to prison for a life sentence, so that person put some weapons in Alejandro's room. Although, they were not his, Alejandro told the police they were his weapons, so to prevent the other person from going to prison for life.

In the lifestyle of the crime syndicate you cannot snitch cuz if you do then umm it's all bad, it's gets really bad and just worse, so I wind up saying that those were mine umm that started the whole incident where the police were watching me and the police were following me and one thing led to another and I wound up getting canned. (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016)

To prevent situations, as described in the above example, after prison Alejandro moved away from certain family members and relocated to a new city. The physical distance from individuals, who were bad influences upon Alejandro, helped him successfully maintain appropriate boundaries and stay away from trouble.

Natasha shared similar sentiments to Alejandro in recognizing the importance of self-protection and setting boundaries with family members to prevent from being enmeshed into someone else's problems. For example, Natasha learned to set boundaries with her mother. Natasha's mother would often say hurtful things to Natasha. For example, "some of the stuff she says she still says some way out shit to me like you're the child I didn't want" (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). Consequently, Natasha learned to set firm boundaries with her mother, not only for herself, but for her daughter, as well. "I'm very self-aware and I'm not allowing her to say things that scar me anymore. It's more now that I use discernment and I know that this does not work for me, and so I will limit my conversations with you, not to punish you, but to save myself" (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016).

Self-Reliance and Responsibility

All of the participants came to the realization that they had to take responsibility for their lives. Each of them accomplished this task in their own way. For instance, Alejandro shared that he has learned that he has choices he can make in life, and his focus is now on making the 'right' choices. With options, he now believes that he can do anything he wants in life. Alejandro has been successfully employed since leaving prison and working on new goals, like purchasing a home. He describes,

It's always an option, never one life shouldn't be just one door, you know, and you have to deal with that, you can ... be able to do anything you want in life, and

that's where I'm at. My next goal is to get a house and hopefully, move to Napa, but if not, at least get my new home. (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016)

Lionel expressed that people have to want the change for themselves, rather than to change for someone else or other external goal. He also acknowledged that obtaining access to education and resources are crucial to one's success. However, he believed that the responsibility falls upon the individual to initiate the change and pursue it wholeheartedly. He shared, "For me... I decided that it already in my it was in my heart... I was sitting in a block for a long time ... and it was just something that I wanted for myself... not because anybody told me, or the guard or ... administration" (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016).

Of the six participants, Marcel demonstrated a creative and innovate approach to becoming self-reliant. This may be, in part, due to him having served 32 years in prison. In comparison to the other participants, Marcel served the longest prison term. However, not only did he find himself, but he also obtained the money required to get an education while in prison, He noted, "My college education, I paid my own way, the prison didn't pay me none of that stuff. I had to pay like anywhere from \$100.00 to \$150.00 per book" (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). The most impressive aspect about Marcel's transformation was that when the prison system cut back on programs, he took it upon himself to create and facilitate self-help programs for himself and other inmates. He described, "They was doing away with a lot of vocational trades and programs, so I started creating programs for us, you know, mentoring. Like I had one group called ... 'Life for Life,' which was life-ers, life-term inmates, 15 years, 15 to life. (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016). His programs were all led by himself and other inmates. Some of the programs he started included cultural organizations that put on events four times a year, including Juneteenth, Black History Month, and Cinco De Mayo.

According to Marcel, the inmates loved the events. Education was a focal point of the programs and guest speakers were brought in to the prison to participate. Other prisons and organizations, including Pelican Bay and Barrios Unidos, participated. The events grew to be so big that activists and celebrities, including Harry Belafonte and Danny Glover attended, as well. Describing a typical event, Marcel shared,

I'll take the guests, we take them to the kitchen, isolated, maybe 10 inmates at the most inside a secured area, [and] we would serve them a prison spread, which is like Top Ramen soups, sea food crabs, stuff mixed up mayonnaise, you ever had that? ... We give them a certificate of appreciation, and I'm good with wood, a lot of picture frames, Chess board, anything with wood, I'm good with. So, I would give them a gift, a certificate of appreciation on a piece of wood and umm, we take pictures. (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Given all of the innovation and effort put forth by Marcel, upon one of his visits, Danny Glover asked Marcel how much money it took to put on an event. When Marcel said that it cost about \$20.00, Danny Glover then offered to give Marcel \$1,000.00 and inquired what he could do with that amount of money. Marcel recalled, "We'll take half of it and we'll invest, we'll cater food, we can have soul food, Mexican food, and I'll take the other half, [and] invest it in more arts and crafts, so we can make more gifts and invite more people. [Danny Glover] adopted us for about 20 years. (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016)

With Marcel's initiative, the events drew other visitors, who were guestspeakers in his prison cultural programs. One such visitor was an historian named Dr. Vincent Hardy. Upon visiting Marcel's program, he, too, was impressed with Marcel's innovations. It was this visitor that provided a way for Marcel to get paroled. Marcel recalled,

‘Marcel, I’m impressed by all of this,’ he said, ‘You guys need to be out into the community doing the work.’ He said Michelle Alexander was coming to his organization to do a fund raiser. I didn’t even know who she was. He said ‘She can possibly help you go home. Do you have a bio I can give her anything, you know, can [she] know about your case?’ (Marcel, interview, December 28, 2016)

It was this contact with Michelle Alexander, the former Director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and renowned Civil Rights scholar, who helped Marcel get paroled from prison. By taking the initiative to create prison programs and eagerly network with community members, when they attended his prison events, Marcel positively changed his life circumstances.

LaTonya shared the same sentiments as the other participants in regards to positive change being the responsibility of the individual. However, LaTonya’s focal point to self-reliance emphasized a positive mindset. The self-reliant aspect that stood out for LaTonya was her acknowledgement of having a positive self-talk. She shared, “My first month or two in there I use to walk around the yard and I use to just observe everything I would look around and I told myself I’m not dying here I’m not going to spend the rest of my life here” (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). With a strong, positive self-talk, this inner dialogue drove and guided all of her behaviors. Moving forward, LaTonya said she participated in every program the prison system offered. Rather than being a spectator, she was an active participant. With her participation in multiple prison programs, she was able to show evidence of a chronology of all her efforts while in prison. Due to her hard work, she was suitable for parole several times. Like Marcel, as LaTonya continued to participate in the various prison programs, she eventually became a facilitator of the groups. With a positive mindset in prison and

inmates who apply themselves, LaTonya believes that inmates can actually come out of prison being skilled people.

Last, Berto further echoed the same sentiments the other participants acknowledged previously, sharing that he believed an individual's self-reliance can help make positive changes. Berto said that he, himself, had to decide to take a different path in prison. He said, "I did it on my own" (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017).

Societal Re-Entry

Programs and Support Systems

Many of the challenges that were noted for inmates in prison continued during their re-entry to society. As mentioned in the previous section on prison inmate challenges, upon exiting prison, Natasha, Lionel, Marcel, and LaTonya expressed again that the support of family and other people really helped them re-enter successfully back into society. Support systems were crucial for their success. Family, Church, and support networks after parole provided a foundation for the participants to move forward with a new start. For example, LaTonya shared that referral by word of mouth was a common network experience she had while on parole. She would attend events and meet others. If there was a need she had, she inquired, and others would give her a name and phone number to contact someone who provided that service. The referral was support by name dropping. By identifying who sent you for the service, more support was provided to ensure success. This community of support made a difference for LaTonya, as other participants. Lionel further described,

I mean, the biggest thing is, is support. What I mean by support, I'm not saying not always material things, just people, you know, you can laugh with and go out

and have fun with and will invite me over for dinner and stuff like that, I feel like I'm a part of their life, that's the biggest thing. ...to me that made my transition better, it made me happy. When I'm happy, I make better decisions. And so ... that's really the biggest thing. (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016)

Marcel further acknowledged that, while family was instrumental in his successfully achieving parole, the fellowship he received at Church also played a significant role. Both of these networks provided encouragement and resources. LaTonya, too, said she received a lot of support from people she met in different organizations, who often would point her in the direction of additional resources that she needed, creating what she called a “domino effect” of support.

If I went to one place and they helped me with something, and then if I needed help with something else, then they'll give me the sources of—‘Okay, go to this place, and tell so and so that I sent you, and they'll help you pay for your college books,’ and, you know, so it was like a domino effect for me. (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017)

Just as each participant needed to take the initiative in prison, they demonstrated the same level of participation in the community on parole, which equally contributed to the maintenance of their success. For example, although LaTonya did not have a substance problem, she volunteered to participate in the Victim Offender Treatment Program during her first 90 days on parole. This provided a support system for her as she transitioned back into the community, as she met people who were going through similar circumstances and navigating some of the same challenges, and she was able to locate further resources and supports to help her as she re-entered society. Additionally, when she was on parole, LaTonya entered the San Francisco Mayor Housing Unit lottery, a chance for low-income individuals to obtain below-market rate housing. She won one of

the designated slots, allowing her to secure an affordable apartment. Clearly, the success of all of the participants interviewed hinged on finding out about and engaging in relevant programs, building support networks, and personally doing whatever it took to maintain their freedom and pursue new lives in their community.

Changing Environments

Alejandro, Marcel, and LaTonya all acknowledged that changing their environment upon release from prison was key to their success on parole. The prison system also intervened to ensure newly released inmates were not placed into areas that could potentially expose them to circumstances in which they were more likely to violate their parole. Alejandro and Marcel both understood that a fresh start in their environment was important to avoid former associates and other potentially negative influences. Alejandro, for example, knew he had to stay away from bad influences, and so he moved to a new location upon his release. He noted, “Staying away from the bad influences, staying away from the bad people I use to deal with ... moving from the location I was living from, that was a big, big part of the part of the life change that I had [after prison]” (Alejandro, interview, November 18, 2016). Likewise, Marcel, rather than returning to Compton in Los Angeles County, decided to parole in Northern California. Although Marcel did not know anyone in the area, the move allowed him to be near his daughter, who resided in Oakland. Thus, Marcel made a new start in Berkeley.

LaTonya also moved to a new location, but she did not do so because of her own desire. Instead, she was not able to parole back to her home city because the woman who committed the crime alongside her had already been released to Sacramento County. LaTonya’s parole agent was not willing to release her to the same county as her crime-partner. As a result, initially, LaTonya was paroled to Los Angeles county. Eventually, she

was able to transfer back to Northern California to be near her family, but was placed in San Francisco County.

Barriers to Successful Societal Re-Entry

Once they were paroled from prison, the participants faced several barriers and challenges, primarily employment and housing. For Natasha, balancing school and work were her most challenging tasks. She described the treatment program in which she was required to engage while she was on parole as being very restrictive, and required that individuals had complete a portion of the program to have the “privileges” of going to school, getting a job, or even spending time with your family.

Trying to balance work, going to their groups, and/or life in general was very frustrating and difficult. I did it [the program] and I was mandated there for 15 months and ...[for] the basic things, like spending time with family, you had to fill out a piece of paper and help somebody with and sign it to be able to go with your family. (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016)

Natasha further shared that getting access to transportation, housing, and jobs were barriers she had to overcome, concerns that were echoed by Lionel, LaTonya, and Marcel. Obtaining jobs that were sufficient to meet their basic needs and housing without appropriate credit and references proved extremely difficult, as Lionel expressed in his account below.

So, re-entry was a huge obstacle. Housing is another obstacle finding some place to live, we have minimal jobs with no credit history, no, we've been off the map for so long to have to explain that not everybody has the skill set to articulate where they've been and what happened. (Lionel, interview December 28, 2016)

For Lionel, he entered transitional housing, which was not ideal, but he said it met his basic needs and it provided him some stability for him as he moved forward. “I was in transitional housing for a year. And, so, I had a room, I had a bed, do I like it, do think it’s convenient, not necessarily, but I did have a place to go a place to sleep and always had food” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016). Emotionally this was tough for Lionel, but he had a support system to keep him motivated, and also to provide him with a safety net, should anything go wrong. He noted, “By me knowing my basic needs were met ... and I also have other supporters that if anything goes bad, I’m going to be okay to help my mental state out for where I can, like, move on” (Lionel, interview, December 28, 2016).

Like the other participants, once out on parole, LaTonya encountered housing as a barrier. Upon her initial release, LaTonya stayed in what is called a Single Room Occupant (SRO), which are old motels that have been converted into hostel-like accommodations where individuals live with others, share a bathroom, and use a central kitchen. Typically, the time limit for staying in an SRO is 90 days, but since LaTonya had a job and was trying to save money to move into her own apartment, they extended her stay and allowed her to live there for nine months until she was able to afford her own housing.

Similarly, to Natasha, some of Marcel’s barriers included having to work and go to school simultaneously. When Marcel first was paroled, he found that there were a lot of minimum wage jobs that would hire him, but not many that would pay him a livable salary. As a result, Marcel decided to further his education so that he would be able to access a larger range of positions. For some time, Marcel worked two minimum wage jobs while he attended school. However, this took a toll on Marcel. He said, “so I got two minimum wage jobs, like \$10 and \$10 is 20, so I was making \$20 an hour, but I was tired, working too many hours, then trying to go to school at the same time” (Marcel,

interview, December 28, 2016). Eventually, Marcel was able to get a college scholarship, and he found a better paying job, which alleviated a lot of his stress.

Survey Questionnaire Results

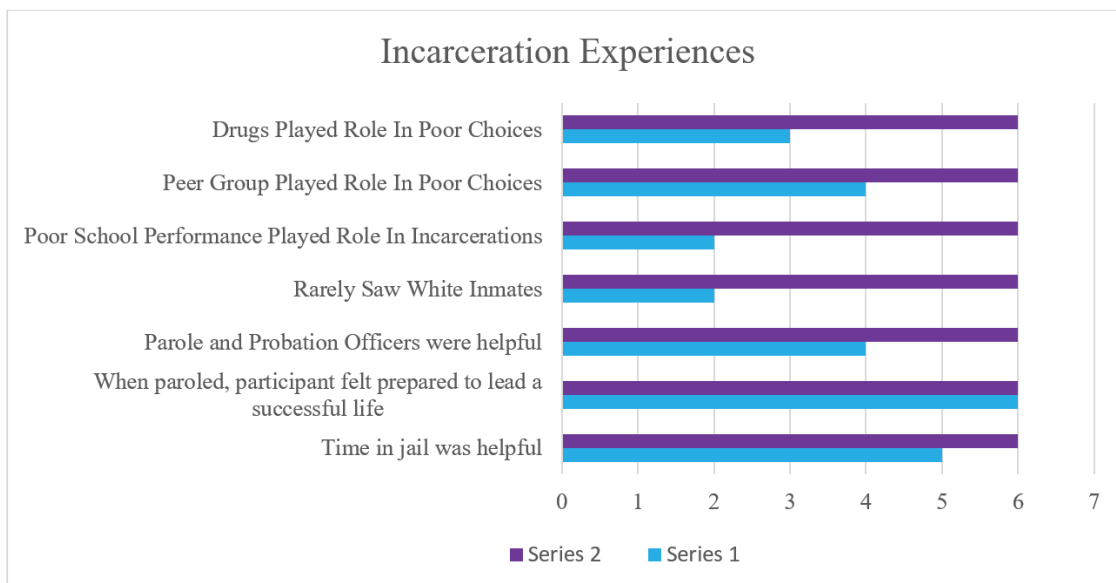


Chart 3: Incarceration Experiences

Data indicates that the participants perceived poor school performance as having less adverse of an impact on their lives, as compared to drugs and negative peer influences. Half of the participants indicated drugs played a role in their activities leading up to incarceration. Likewise, four of the six participants indicated their peers played a role in these activities. Regarding disproportionality in prison, while incarcerated, two participants indicated they rarely saw White inmates. When comparing interview data with survey data, results are consistent in regards to negative peer influences, but inconsistent in relation to challenges and barriers both within and outside prison. Interview data confirms the aforementioned challenges, but survey data negates this

notion, as participants indicated they felt prepared to lead successful lives after prison and viewed parole/probation officers as being helpful. For example, interview data indicated the incarceration experience was not rehabilitative, and there were continued barriers after prison with housing, employment, and education issues.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I describe the overall unfolding of the participants' life circumstances ultimately culminating in prison incarceration. The questions that guided this study were: 1) What are the early home life and K-12 educational experiences of formerly incarcerated people of color with special needs? 2) What K-12 factors may have contributed to creating and/or mediating the disproportionality of formerly incarcerated people of color with special needs? My analysis revealed further insights into disproportionality for African Americans and Latinos, that include both outside of school and in school factors. Specifically, the study's findings indicate that what may have affected participants the most was that all of them experienced significant early home life trauma. This trauma stemmed from a combination of their families' historical oppression, fractured family units, lack of support systems, exposure to violence and substance abuse, and high-poverty living environments. When coupled with limited and insufficient resources in the K-12 educational system, this trauma propelled the participants to look elsewhere to meet their social-emotional needs.

As a result, participants were exposed to environmental influences of negative peer role models and engaged in various coping strategies, including, but not limited to, internalized behaviors, such as withdrawal and depression, and/or externalized behaviors, such as drug usage, gang affiliation, and criminal behaviors. Thus, participants' early home traumas and poor K-12 educational experiences reinforced circumstances contributing to participants' prison incarcerations. Participants were positioned

inequitably from the very beginning of their lives, and social, cultural, educational, and environmental factors further influenced their trajectories toward prison.

In the discussion that follows, I provide insights into disproportionality for people of color with special needs, centering on how cycles of oppression were perpetuated for the participants in this study. I first discuss my findings in light of the theoretical frameworks that underpin this study, which provide lenses to explain the disparities and adverse trajectory for this population. Providing insights to the limited economic and educational resources faced by all participants, Structural Inequity Theory provides a rationale for the inequitable distribution of resources and limited and/or foreclosed life chances at opportunities. Cultural/Social Reproduction and Critical Race Theory (CRT) additionally acknowledge the dominant and subordinate dynamics in reproducing cycles and maintenance of oppression for marginalized groups. In addition, I discuss key K-12 educational aspects from this study in light of cultural deficit thinking, teacher perceptual bias/cultural mismatch, discipline practices (suspensions), and special education psycho-educational assessment practices. All of these, I argue, contributed to perpetuating the cycle of oppression for the participants in my study. Finally, I close the chapter with recommendations for school and prison reforms.

Cycles of Oppression

Theoretical Perspectives on Oppression

Structural Inequity Theory. United States institutions are built upon a legacy of structural inequities. From slavery to the Jim Crow era, to modern day mass incarcerations of people of color, inequities are still present within our institutions, but just have been manifested into new forms. Structural Inequity Theory acknowledges

the stratification patterns of the differential distribution of resources and ultimately life chances for opportunities (Sullivan and Artiles, 2011). In particular, education is a core resource that impacts life chances. The access to quality education an individual has can either open or foreclose her/his opportunities for advancement into adulthood. Structural Inequity Theory, which pinpoints the disparities among the races from an historical perspective, argues that low socio-economic populations, and especially people of color living in poverty, are vulnerable to unequal distribution of educational resources. Institutional racism and micro-level aggressions set up an inequitable structure positioning the dominant group to an advantage, while keeping the subordinate group disempowered and oppressed. For example, “An institutional infrastructure built upon structural inequities sets in motion a trajectory that socially reproduces the interests of the dominant group and disadvantages for subordinate groups” (Sullivan and Artiles, 2011). In addition to structural inequities, individuals contribute as well—for example, it is often the judgment of professionals in schools that set trajectories for students of color.

From an impoverished environment with limited resources to poor K-12 regular educational practices, the combination of the social-cultural environmental stressors positioned the participants to exist in a constant state of fear and panic, without appropriate support systems, and relying upon negative peer influences, which ultimately influenced them to make poor choices and go to prison. Surviving their immediate environments was a focal point for the participants, rather than engaging in the K-12 educational process. When absenteeism and suspensions pushed them out of school, falling victim to the streets was a natural progression. Compounded with these institutional dynamics were also teacher cultural deficit thinking and low student expectations, which will be further discussed below. From a lens of Structural Inequity Theory, these historical and social-cultural environmental factors worked together positioned the participants at an inequitable stance from birth and throughout their lives.

Cultural/Social Reproduction. The evaluative nature of teachers' position of power reinforces the inequities in the school process. The special education assessment process and teacher cultural deficit thinking are two examples of teachers' influences upon the educational pathways for students. This Cultural/Social Reproduction makes inequitable institutional decision-making socially acceptable. The idiosyncratic judgments at the micro-level perpetuates and reproduces the status quo of the dominant and subordinate cultures. For example, Marcel and Alejandro were both assessed for their special needs. However, their assessments were incomplete and did not attend to their emotional and cultural needs, respectively. Marcel had significant social-emotional needs due to domestic violence in his home, and Alejandro had significant language needs, as a second language learner. Thus, the failure of the system to detect their needs and provide appropriate supports further contributed to life circumstances for these participants that perpetuated patterns of mass incarceration of people of color.

In addition, teachers' low expectations and indifference to the needs of the study's participants further derailed them from an upward-bound trajectory. From the dissemination of work packets, rather than an engaging and rigorous curriculum, to the failure to follow up on students not attending class, as in LaTonya and Lionel's situations, respectively, these institutional micro-aggressions reinforced the status quo circumstances for these students. As a result, the teachers entirely missed the needs of the participants in the study. Without intervention and supports, the participants remained entrenched within their social and cultural environments. Historically, with limited resources from the start, thereby, setting up a positioning for early life home trauma and further combined with poor K-12 regular education resources, the cycle of oppression is able to thrive and perpetuate from generation to generation. The family and schools socially reproduce each new generation, as they take up social roles and occupations left by the previous generation (Demaine, 2003, p. 126). Consequently, the social structures

of home environment and K-12 education adversely impact job/career opportunities and reinforce the stratification of the classes, which create a hierarchical division of labor into adulthood.

Critical Race Theory. As discussed previously, historical legacies set the backdrop and positioning for present day circumstances for people of color. Critical Race Theory (CRT) acknowledges the link between fully understanding the historical vestiges of discrimination and the present-day racial manifestations of that discrimination (Howard, 2008). Assumptions are often made by teachers and educational staff whose backgrounds are different from students of color. Without fully understanding their historical and current home life circumstances, cultural miscommunications occur and assumptions are erroneously made. Students of color often get mislabeled as bad kids. However, in fact, they are simply just trying to survive their environments. For example, high levels of anxiety are evident from their daily life struggles and efforts to cope in an ever-changing environment, which is often not safe. With a limited support system and negative neighborhood influences, including gangs and drugs, the needs for safety and belonging are met within the limited means available. As acknowledged by the study's participants, examples of low teacher expectations, common acceptance of underachievement, indifference toward their best interests, differential forms of punishment, and teacher demeaning comments, this alternative story shares the participants' understanding from their perspectives (Howard, 2008).

Another important aspect of CRT is counter-storytelling. Delgado (1999) refers to counter-storytelling as a method of sharing stories of individuals whose experiences have not been told, and a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse. The participants' stories provided in this study present a counterstory, or an alternative to dominant discourses regarding the present-day circumstances for incarcerated persons of color. Their voices shed

light on the day-to-day realities in schools and challenge mainstream accounts of those experiences (Howard, 2008). For example, Berto, Lionel and LaTonya provided examples of arbitrary discipline, indifference toward school attendance, and subpar teaching practices by evidence of packet work, respectively. With cultural misunderstandings of socio-cultural environmental factors, teacher perceptual biases were evident through cultural deficit thinking. These dynamics hindered the development of trust, rapport, and respect with the participants and diminished their desire for further engagement within the K-12 educational process. By understanding the historical legacy and home traumas perpetuated from generation to generation within fractured family units, who have limited financial means, an empathy towards the needs of these students and action steps can be fostered to break the cycles of oppression. Critical Race Theory (CRT) acknowledges the importance of hearing the stories from the participants themselves as an empowering act to challenge the stories and assumptions of those in power, whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse (Howard, 2008).

With an acknowledgement of the historical vestiges and residual effects of people of color in present day society, institutional racism can be fully understood and action steps taken to correct the inequities. The study's participants are survivors of trauma and circumstances external to them within their historical and socio-cultural environments. Early home life trauma and ill-equipped K-12 educational systems adversely impact and reinforce the inequities setting a trajectory toward prison. Examples of the participants' historical trauma are discussed below.

Historical Trauma

Historical trauma includes effects of past generations upon the current generations and their situations. "Researchers and theorists suggest that the cultural traumas of past generations can affect the social and psychological lives of present-day individuals,

families, and communities” (Weichelt, et al, 2012, p. 320). With limited coping skills and available support systems, social-emotional functioning is likely compromised. For example, the theory suggests that historical trauma is associated with adverse emotional states, family disruption, and health-risk behaviors such as drug and alcohol misuse (Brave Heart, 2003; Wiechelt & Gryczynski, 2011). This accumulated historical trauma manifests in a host of physical, social, and psychological problems (Sotero, 2006; Walters et al., 2011). As identified from the study’s participants, a variety of manifestations can occur, including withdrawal, depression, anxiety, gang violence, and substance abuse, etc.

Alejandro, Natasha, Lionel, Marcel, LaTonya, and Berto’s stories provide poignant examples of how historical trauma influenced their life pathways toward prison. For instance, Alejandro’s historical trauma included overt discrimination in being called racial slurs at school and work, as well as, unjust brutality by the police. Natasha’s experience was somewhat similar to Alejandro’s in being the only person of color in her all Caucasian Catholic school, and wasn’t accepted into peer groups because of it. Alejandro, Lionel, Marcel, LaTonya, and Berto’s situations can be described as historical trauma, in the sense, that they all lived in poverty stricken-areas with either drugs and/or gang violence. The environments were so bad that some of their parents looked for other neighborhoods to move their child out of and attend school in a neighborhood with less drugs and violence. Both LaTonya and Berto also described their residential high schools as having high levels of violence.

The above-mentioned examples of historical trauma are known as phenomenon of social reproduction where generations of populations remain captive to their current environments unable to seek better opportunities to improve their lot in life. “Racism, social injustice, intergenerational racial trauma, issues of poverty and inequity of education opportunities have all been linked to stress, depression, psychological distress, and anxiety for African American youth” (Curry, 2010, p. 407). Other specific

psychological stressors unique to African American youth have been documented; for example, Bumham and Lomax (2007) found that African American students were more likely than their White counterparts to report a fear of death and danger—an indication that they worry for their safety. By being consumed with survival needs, people of color can get easily become derailed from the educational system and encounter situations that cause them to become a part of the justice system. “Social reproduction in the Marxist sense implied that every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction” (Krishnarah, 2012, p. 106). By understanding the origins of oppression and understanding how the accumulation of individual, family and community traumas occur over time, this insight can serve as a compass in preventing and perpetuating the same pitfalls in the present.

K-12 Educational Practices

Building on an understanding of historical trauma and early home life trauma, as described above, in the following sections I will discuss the school’s role in culturally and socially reproducing generational inequality. Examples of K-12 educational practices shared by the study’s participants include cultural deficit thinking, teacher perceptual bias/cultural mismatch, inequitable discipline, and inadequate special education psycho-educational assessment practices, as outlined below.

Cultural Deficit Thinking. To further compound the participants’ challenges, cultural deficit thinking by teachers and other school staff was clearly present in three of the six participants’ interviews. This cultural deficit thinking manifested itself mainly through low expectations, indifference, and failure to provide adequate instructional supports. For example, Alejandro was a second language learner working several years below his grade level, who struggled academically throughout elementary school with limited resources or support from teachers. It wasn’t until middle school that he actually

received language support for his second language acquisition needs. As a second example, Lionel's experience in school included a lot of absenteeism. Lionel literally just stopped going to school, and no one noticed or reached out to him to ensure he remained in school. Lionel was often roaming the school hallways and/or ended up at the local park during school hours. Given the chronic absences, Lionel received no support, and to further add to Lionel's school challenges, he indicated that he really did not have any relationships with teachers. It can be argued that the lack of relationships with teachers and low expectations of minimal concern for him may have contributed to Lionel falling further behind in school.

Additionally, LaTonya reported often being bored in school with teachers not providing actual instruction, and instead, providing packets of work to complete. LaTonya said she just wanted to graduate and be done with school. Although she had good grades, she did not want to be there. LaTonya further believes that if teachers would have been more motivating that would have made school more interesting for her. LaTonya stated, "If you just hand somebody a piece of paper and be like, do this and bring it back and get it graded, I mean it's really boring" (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). As noted by Ahram, Fergus and Noguera (2011), education for these students was not a priority for teachers. Low expectations and assumptions about cultural deficits were evident. Teachers did not provide engaging lessons, students were bored in class, attendance was not taken as a priority, assessment practices were inadequate, minimal effort to collaborate with the home, and false assumptions about students being troublemakers, as in Berto's situation were made. Berto shared he really had emotional needs he was struggling with, as reflected by all of his suspensions. However, school staff misinterpreted his acting out behaviors and assumed he was a bad kid. In fact, Berto was living with a grandparent with a mental illness herself, and his thinking was negatively

influence by her behaviors. Berto was a confused young man in need of a healthy role model, and he often felt misunderstood.

Howard (2008), Ladson-Billings (2004) argues that there are several areas of education that are amenable to a Critical Race Theory (CRT) analysis, namely curriculum, instruction, and assessment. She contends that a close examination of each of these areas suggests that students from racially diverse backgrounds experience significantly different accounts of what is taught, how it is taught, and the ways school evaluate what students know.

Teacher Perceptual Bias/Cultural Mismatch. Findings are inconclusive for teacher perceptual cultural mismatch. Four of the six participants indicated they had positive relationships with their teachers, and one participant indicated an aloofness to teachers without any relationship to determine its nature as either negative or positive. Survey results were similar to interview data with 50% of the participants indicating they had positive relationships with teachers. Although roughly half of the participants had positive relationships with their teachers reducing cultural misunderstandings and/or cultural clashes, the study does confirm, according to Ford (2012), there were differences in values, beliefs, attitudes, customs, and traditions between the White teachers and their racially, ethnically, and linguistically different (RELD) students. Low expectations and deficit thinking were evident, as described in the previous section.

Discipline. The body of research on this topic acknowledges that suspension rates are typically highest for schools in underfunded low socio-economic schools with minimal structure and supports with teachers who have poor classroom management skills and limited resources (Gregory, Cornell, and Fan, 2011). Studies have indicated that these schools had the largest racial discipline gaps. These stressors contribute to the micro-inequities students of color experience, resulting in disparities with more referrals for special education, suspensions, and expulsions. Krezmien, Leone, and Achilles

(2006), further confirms the disparity in suspensions is due to higher rates of suspensions in low-income schools and within predominately minority populations. Several school-related risk factors include high student-teacher ratios, insufficient curricular and course relevance, inconsistent adult leadership, students with emotional behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, ADHD, and students who were not living in two-parent families and who had experienced multiple school changes – factors typically associated with poor performing and impoverished schools. This study's findings aligned with this previous literature, indicating that the four males in the study (Alejandro, Lionel, Marcel, and Berto) were suspended from school at least once, if not more. However, the two females in the study, Natasha and LaTonya, reported that they were never suspended or expelled from school.

Alejandro and Lionel were two participants in the study that indicated they had more than one suspension throughout their K-12 educational experiences. Both participants indicated their suspensions were related to cutting school/lack of attendance and/or fighting, as well as some gang activity related offenses. This time spent away from school reinforced their relationships with negative peers and involvement in criminal activity on the streets. For example, three of the six participants were gang affiliated. Alejandro was a Norteño Hispanic gang member. Lionel and Marcel were Pyru Blood gang members. Both Alejandro and Lionel were 15 years old when they were arrested for the first time. Alejandro had ongoing experiences with law enforcement with subsequent arrests thereafter, but Lionel's first crime was more serious with a charge of homicide giving him a sentence of 15 years to life, which he was tried as an adult. Given these outcomes, it is imperative that K-12 educational systems work arduously to keep students engaged in school.

Additionally, Berto clearly fits the profile of a student, as described above in the two aforementioned studies. Berto lived on the East side of San Jose, California

in a poverty-stricken area infested with gangs and violence. He described ongoing challenges forming relationships with teachers of all ethnicities, including those who were Black and Hispanic, as well as, White. Berto's suspensions were so frequent that school administration often sent him home without even doing the procedural paperwork. Berto also had untreated Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) that went undiagnosed until his time in prison. As a result, Berto described his K-12 educational experience as difficult and dehumanizing--so much so that he admits to still harboring resentment towards his teachers some 35 years ago for the disrespect he endured in school. Berto further acknowledged that his negative experiences made him not want to participate in, or have anything to do with, school at all.

Alejandro, Lionel, Marcel, and Berto lived in low socio-economic environments with frequent gang activity and violence. The lack of positive father role models and/or the missing of a father figure, I argue contributed to their maladaptive behaviors. Alejandro's father was also a gang member and did time in prison. Furthermore, all of Alejandro's brothers and uncles were gang affiliated, as well. For Lionel, Marcel, and Berto their fathers were absent from their lives, either physically and/or emotionally. Only Marcel had contact with his father from time to time via telephone, since he lived in another state. However, this communication also was very limited in support. On the morning of Marcel's crime, he tried to gain his father's support by asking to move and live with him, but he was met with a polite rejection. The parental guidance was not there for Alejandro, Lionel, Marcel and Berto. Both Lionel and Berto had minimal contact with their fathers. All participants were young adolescents of color trying to navigate their environments to the best of their abilities. Unfortunately, these at-risk settings did not meet their developmental needs, and they made life altering decisions causing them to become incarcerated. Consequently, home, school, and community factors are critical

socio-cultural environmental aspects to understanding disproportionate suspensions for male students of color.

Special Education Psycho-Educational Assessments. Researchers have argued that the disproportionality of African Americans and Latinos in special education is a modern form of segregation, separating Black and Latino students from educational opportunities afforded to their White peers (Ahram, Fergus and Noguera, 2011). In this study, only two of the participants (Alejandro and Marcel) were considered for assessments, but these were poorly conducted and incomplete. Large gaps in assessment practices were missing from psycho-educational assessments, including a lack of primary language assessments in Spanish for Alejandro and a missing social-emotional functioning assessment for Marcel. These partial assessments missed very important data that could have been useful in diagnosing the needs of these participants more thoroughly and providing insight into their school challenges. Furthermore, the four remaining participants were not even considered for assessments, which left their needs unmet. Data indicates four of the six participants were not identified with their disabilities until adults in prison.

For example, the K-12 special education Child Find provision did not adequately find these students and address their needs. It is the responsibility of Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs) to find children who are suspected of having a disability. It is an ongoing effort to identify all individuals, birth through 21, with disabilities including children for whom English is not a primary language, students with low incidence disabilities, students attending private schools, highly mobile children, and children who are suspected of having a disability and in need of special education even though they are advancing from grade to grade (Special Education Local Plan Area, 2016-2017, p. 1). SELPAs work closely with public agencies such as Head Start, California Children's Services, Regional Center, County Mental Health Services, Juvenile Court Schools,

and others as appropriate in the identification of individuals with disabilities. Materials are distributed to pediatricians, health care professionals, and other agencies within the SELPA. The SELPA has established procedures for the identification, location and evaluation of students who may require special education services (Special Education Local Plan Area, 2016-2017, p. 1).

As a result, early home life experiences related to trauma, as well as, their cultural and academic needs, went undiagnosed and unaddressed. The two Latinos in the study, Alejandro and Berto, were diagnosed with attention disorders, ADD and ADHD, respectively. The three African American participants, Natasha, Marcel, and LaTonya were diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Lionel was not officially diagnosed with PTSD. However, he believes he suffers symptoms from it. Unfortunately, because these students were not identified during their K-12 experiences, the aforementioned disabilities did not become evident until the participants were adults in prison, except for Alejandro.

It is clear the SELPAs in the K-12 educational system did not perform their function adequately. All six participants had special needs that went unaddressed. Referrals for special education psycho-educational assessments were not done adequately, or not at all, and their disabilities were not identified early. Clearly, the Child Find provision of the Special Education regulations failed these students. Had they been identified and diagnosed, and received treatment for their trauma and other needs, the pipeline to prison may have been interrupted. In this study, findings regarding K-12 special education disproportionality were inconclusive. The lack of early identification created missed opportunities to appropriately address the participants' needs and provide support.

Conclusion

In sum, historical trauma and multiple school factors—including cultural deficit thinking, teacher perceptual bias/cultural mismatch, discipline, limited regular education services, incomplete or non-existent special education psycho-educational assessment practices, and failure of the Child Find provision to identify students with special needs resulted in untreated emotional and academic needs. The regular education program was ill-equipped to service the study's participants. Poor regular educational and assessment practices, along with teacher cultural deficit thinking and school suspensions put the participants at-risk and marginalized them from accessing their education. The limited support systems further provided inadequate role models and reinforced maladaptive behaviors, ultimately creating the development of a criminal lifestyle. Teachers missed the signs of struggling students, and students' needs went unaddressed.

As noted by Skiba and colleagues (2006), a number of clear themes emerged for the six participants in this study. Poverty and educational disadvantage, general education classroom management expectations, insufficient general education resources and lack of funding was evident in the schools the participants attended. Special education was considered for two of the participants, but they did not qualify. The psycho-educational assessments were incomplete and the regular education program remained the only resource, although inadequate. The study's six participants have historically been at a disadvantage. Their ancestors have been entrenched within this inequitable systemic infrastructure unable to escape, causing them to remain in a subordinate status. With institutional structural inequities, dominant classes maintain an advantage, and cycles of generations are reproduced, while subordinate groups continue to remain oppressed. From generational poverty, limited education, and resources, the participants' options for advancement have been few. Daily struggles preoccupied their attention to survival

needs, rather than entertaining the luxury of an education. Priorities were focused on personal safety and navigating the violence in their neighborhoods. Coping involved having to participate within the socio-cultural environment, which positioned them against the law and ultimately going to prison.

Mediating Prison Disproportionality

In review of the participants' early home life experiences, the study found home trauma and common social-cultural and environmental factors--including negative or strained relationship with a parent, single-parent home/divorce, parental substance abuse, domestic violence in the family, poverty, safety needs, transiency/residential moves, factors related to race/ethnicity/culture, discrimination, drugs, gang activity, and crime--contributed to future disproportionality in prison (that is, it increased their likelihood that they would engage in criminal activities and be sent to prison). In analyzing the cycles of oppression, historical trauma, early home trauma and poor K-12 schooling practices are three consistent variables evident in prior studies highlighting how oppression perpetuates. As cited by Skiba (2006, July) and noted in the National Research Council (2002) report, three possible sources of disproportionate representation include: 1) social and environmental factors that may disproportionately impact the school readiness of minority students; 2) contributions of general education; and 3) contributions of the special education referral process. Although these broad categories have been identified, the research to identify the factors associated with minority disproportionality has not necessarily yielded consistent findings. Inconsistencies appear to be partially attributable to differences in the level of data being examined (e.g., school, district, state), suggesting that the interactions that shape placement pattern variations at distinct levels have not yet

been clearly identified. It is through this study, that I have further identified specific home and institutional practices, which can support the mediation of disproportionality.

Furthermore, as noted previously by Krezmien, Leone, and Achilles (2006), several school-related risk factors include high student-teacher ratios, insufficient curricular and course relevance, inconsistent adult leadership, students with emotional behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, ADHD, and students who were not living in two-parent families and who had experienced multiple school changes – factors typically associated with poor performing and impoverished schools are factors critical to understanding disproportionality. Although the ongoing study of local school practices is needed in further research to pin point the specific institutional practices to mediate disproportionality, educators and school staff can learn the signs to offset the trajectory of a pathway to prison for people of color with special needs. As substantiated in the literature above, described below are some of the indicators reported from the participants in this study.

Domestic violence, substance abuse, financial stressors, and negative/poor peer relationships enable a gateway to compromised social-emotional functioning. Fractured family units and strained parent relationships position the participants toward seeking support from less equip peers. Data indicates five of the six participants had a strained relationship with at least one parent. Five of the six participants lived in single parent/blended families, with three coming from divorced families. Five of the six participants lived in homes with parental substance abuse and chronic domestic violence. All six participants indicated safety was a primary concern for them either at home and/or school. In addition to home trauma, the surrounding environment did nothing to alleviate the already existing home stressors. Instead, the socio-cultural environment further limited real viable options for breaking the cycle of oppression. Five of the six participants lived in impoverished neighborhoods, along with some transiency

and significant residential moves, which adversely impacted their social-emotional functioning. Some coping mechanisms included a propensity toward drugs. Four of the six participants indicated they drank alcohol and smoked marijuana. Two of the six participants indicated they had used harder drugs, including coke, speed, and LSD. Additionally, the unrest and need for safety contributed to three of the six participants becoming gang affiliated. Micro-aggressions of discrimination were also described in school, within the community, and in prison, by the participants. A culmination of home and environmental factors ultimately led to criminal histories of the participants. The two Latinos in the study were primarily arrested for property crimes including burglary, robbery, and grand theft auto. One of the Latinos also had arrests for reckless driving, assault on officers, and drive-by shootings. All four of the African Americans were arrested for homicide.

The findings in this study are consistent with the literature review except for special education referrals. Plausible theories to disproportionality in the literature (Arcia, 2007; Losen 2002; Ferri and Conner, 2005; Ford, 2012; and Ahram, Fergus and Noguera, 2011) indicate students of color are often times placed into restrictive settings (i.e. prison), have higher records of suspensions, which are predictive of future chances for incarceration, live within poverty-stricken areas, race factors into assumptions about ability, teacher perceptual bias/cultural mismatch create cultural clashes, and cultural deficit thinking allows for low student expectations. In this study, all participants, but one, did not report referrals for special education. The analysis of the aforementioned factors is important to being mindful on how to mitigate disproportionality.

Given an understanding of the some of the factors that contribute to disproportionality, as evidence in the literature review and confirmed in this study, there arose some mediating factors to disproportionality, such as the importance of involvement and engagement. A tri-faceted approach including home, school, and community

working collaboratively to support the needs of struggling students were suggestions by the participants and included the following: 1) Parental involvement and a Home/School Partnership is needed between parents and teachers to communicate regularly; 2) Notice the signs of a struggling students and take actions to correct them; 3) Engaging and culturally relevant curriculum; 4) School supervision/safety; 5) Equitable resources as in funding is needed; 6) Cultural relevance to the communities' needs; 7) Restorative Justice practices by law enforcement; 8) Education resources; 9) Employability Skills; 10) Career Readiness; 11) Counseling; and 12) Data on success stories of prior inmates to support lobbying for funding and new laws.

Data indicates the study's six participants advocated for school and prison reform in each of respective areas, as described above and affirmed by the following numbers: (5 of 6) Involved parents – home/school partnership; (4 of 6) – Pay attention to the signs of struggling students; (5 of 6) Counseling services; (5 of 6) – Engage students with culturally relevant curriculum and mentors; (4 of 6) Equitable resources; (3 of 6) Education, employability skills, and career readiness; (2 of 6) Restorative Justice practices; (2 of 6) Focus upon success rates of formerly incarcerated inmates; and (1 of 6) School security and a focus on addressing bullying. According to the study's participants, the above-listed mediating factors can offset pathways to prison. Strong and coordinated efforts among all stakeholders (i.e. home, school, and community) can positively influence students to remain engaged in school. It is from the voices of the study's six participants that recommendations for K-12 educational and prison system reform are further delineated below.

Recommendations

Based upon the study's data, in this section, I provide recommendations for school and prison reforms. I start by offering a combination of the participants' suggestions, along with my recommendations, as an educator, for action steps. Full Service Community Schools, Trauma Informed Care pedagogy, Restorative Justice practices, and K-12 institutional recommendations for assessment and teaching practices encompass the school reforms. Prison reforms also include participants' suggestions, along with my educator suggestions, from the perspective of a bilingual teacher, school psychologist, and administrator.

School Reform

School reforms include supplements to what the family is unable to provide. Not only resources for students can be made available, but resources to parents and families in the community need to be a high priority. It is the collaboration between home, school, and community, including law enforcement, that needs to occur. A united and coordinated effort can significantly impact the lives of students of color with limited resources and generational wealth. It is these extra resources, Full Service Community Schools, Trauma Informed Care Pedagogy, and Schoolwide Restorative Justice Initiatives, described below, that help offset pathways to prison.

Full Service Community Schools. As cited by Houser (2016), Community schools represent a school reform approach to address the multifaceted and intertwined challenges faced by poor urban communities and schools. The community school approach includes partnering with community organizations, making the school a community hub where services are provided during and outside of the school day, and targeting broad student, family, and community outcomes. Full Service Community

Schools need to be equip with resources to address the needs of low socio-economic environments. On site school counselors and school psychologists knowledgeable in cultural and linguistically appropriate interventions, psycho-educational assessments, and crisis intervention techniques need to be readily available to provide counseling supports for students. For example, Berto suggested, “there at the school like I said a vice principal or somebody who, who, like you know who monitors their behavior or like a school social worker or something, I’m sure they probably have those but...” (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017). If resources are not available at school, then accessibility of the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of other agencies in the community who may be of assistance can be provided to parents and students. Regular scheduled meetings of Back to School nights at various alternative times can be made available for working class parents to accommodate for their work schedules and ensure resources/information are disseminated.

Parental involvement was key for many of the study’s participants. Five of the six participants indicated having more parental involvement and a partnership with the school was needed for successful school performance. From parents simply just spending quality time with their children to taking more active roles, such as attending parent conferences and supporting the educational interests of their children including fieldtrips and other activities, many of the participants desired this from their parents. For example, LaTonya stated, “Being able to come like to parent conference, umm, when they have field trips, and they need chaperones to participate, you know, when you can get involved with your class, with your child’s class and the classmates” (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). A home/school partnership was recommended by the participants for their parents and teachers to work collaborative and regularly communicate often. Lastly, supporting students of color needs appropriately must be priority, as evidenced by Human Resources hiring practices for a diverse and inclusive staff who understand the needs of

these students. Furthermore, funding from Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) sources can be utilized to provide these resources.

Trauma Informed Care Pedagogy. Crosby (2015) notes the experiences of psychological trauma can impede cognitive, social, and emotional development in childhood, which can impair youth academic achievement, behavior, interpersonal skills, and general success in school. Trauma-informed educational practices in schools can provide much needed support to these students, improving their projected academic success and future life outcomes. Trauma Informed Care pedagogy for teachers and educational staff to learn, know, and act upon the signs of struggling students need to be on the agendas of all school districts and school administrators. Four of the six participants acknowledged the importance of teachers, and other educational staff, having Trauma Informed Care education. The ability to notice the signs of struggling students and follow through to take action on the issues was important among the participants. For example, Berto stated, “So much stuff going on nobody noticed, it’s just that you know when you got a kid that’s like you know acting out like that and just you know throwing tantrums, you know something is going on” (Berto, interview, February 11, 2017). The study’s participants agreed that there are often signs that students display when they are in distress, but they often go unnoticed, as in all of the participants’ experiences described in the study.

Furthermore, five of the six participants said more counseling services need to be available for students and families at school. LaTonya indicated the partnership between the home and school needs to be collaborative. For example, she stated, “You know, and if the parent is seeing this, and they bring it to the school, then that’s giving them permission to get my child into some counseling” (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). However, if the services are not feasible at school, then outreach contacts made in the community are needed to link families in trauma to services, as described above in the

Full-Service Community Schools section. Specific actions steps for the implementation of Trauma Informed Care pedagogy includes the following: 1) Inviting professional experts on Trauma Informed Care pedagogy to be a part of Professional Development activities for teachers and all other educational staff members must be a priority and regularly addressed throughout the school year making it become a routine aspect of school culture and climate; 2) Additionally, inviting professional experts to provide outreach services to students and support the learning of healthy ways to cope with stress by identifying and acknowledging feelings. These must be socially acceptable dialogues within the school environment for students to share with trusted adults, when they are experiencing challenges. In order to develop this trust and rapport with students, teachers much be aware and enact culturally relevant teaching practices, as well as, communicate high student expectations. These specific actions can engage students and sustain their attention within the educational process, while providing the supports they need.

Schoolwide Restorative Justice Initiatives. Restorative Justice models provide schools with the opportunity to improve school culture by addressing disciplinary standards and creating a forum for peaceful resolution of conflict and misbehavior. This approach seeks to balance the needs of the victim and the school community with consequences and accountability for the wrongdoer (Pavelka, 2013). Two of the six participants expressed that Restorative Justice practices support collaboration between law enforcement and school systems working together to keep at-risk students engaged in school and away from lifestyles of crime. Positive Youth Justice Initiatives including liaison supports for students recently released from juvenile hall can be available to parents and students to support their successful re-entry back into school after incarceration. Mentor programs such as Willie B. Atkins program and Latino Scholarship programs not only support students of color academically, but support age appropriate adolescent development and growth milestones. In addition to mentors,

Restorative Justice practices to keep families intact without removing children from the home were suggestions mentioned by the participants. For example, Natasha stated, “but having some sort of Restorative Justice and/or communication with the children and/or the family to see if there’s something that can be done without involving the police” (Natasha, interview, November 21, 2016). Having culturally competent law enforcement staff to restore communities, rather than dismantle or add further stressors to families, is a priority for communities of color.

Furthermore, keeping schools safe was another priority expressed by the participants. Securing a closed campus during lunch time was noted by LaTonya as a priority. She believes this simple policy change can reduce kids from becoming involved in trouble. For example, LaTonya stated, “Lunch time is lunch time, and you supposed to be going to eat and then coming back for your next class, not going to a friend’s house and smoking, smoking joints and then go back to school” (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). Ensuring students go to class and remain in class to reduce cutting is a priority. Additionally, bullying and providing more school campus security and supervision were specific agenda items for school reform addressed by the participants. LaTonya acknowledged, “Yeah, I think that like you know, there’s a lot of bullying going on in the schools right now, umm, umm peer pressure” (LaTonya, interview, January 2, 2017). Both school campus security and community law enforcement need to coordinate collaboratively to address bullying and act immediately to return students to school, when they are found off campus during school hours.

Prison Reform

All six of the participants unanimously agreed that prison does not rehabilitate individuals, in fact, it makes situations worse. Although interview data expressed this sentiment of prison, survey data expressed more positive support from probation

and parole officers after prison. Prison reform recommendations made by the participants included: 1) Educational Resources; 2) College and Vocational Training; 3) Employability Skills; 4) Career Readiness; 5) Counseling; 6) Restorative Justice Practices; and 7) Data on inmate successes.

Education/Employment. More education, employment and career development were specific suggestions by three of the six participants. Often these resources were lacking in prison, due to budget cut backs, and so participants either had to create these programs upon their own initiative and/or focus upon the limited programs the prison offered. Many of the participants felt that their education and employment skills were already behind, which made it even harder for them to re-enter in society with these limitations upon parole.

Counseling. Mental health was another top priority suggestion made by five of the six participants. Counseling for emotional issues to support their decision-making skills and overall quality of life was important for the participants, especially those with chronic depression and/or substance abuse issues. Chapel Services were also noted as being highly valuable to the social-emotional functioning of the participants both inside prison and out on parole.

Restorative Justice Practices. As mentioned, in the school reform section, two of the six participants also acknowledged the need for Restorative Justice practices for alternative ways to resolve conflict in the community, rather than the traditional punitive incarceration process. Lastly, focusing on the success stories, rather than negative outcomes can inspire more success and encouragement for inmates and parolees to turn their lives around. Marcel noted that there are many successful inmates doing positive things in society, but these successes rarely get mentioned. For example, Marcel suggested that having more data on the successes of prior inmates can be utilized to inform lawmakers and policymakers to change laws and support funding to reduce

recidivism. Having a proactive and constructive approach creates positive solutions for both society and prior inmates.

Overall school and prison reforms include more resources, such as education, employment, career readiness, mental health, and Restorative Justice practices, which can support a positive trajectory for success. Inequitable resources, across all of the participants' school districts, were evident. Disparities in funding for schools and prisons were noted by the participants as needing a remedy to ensure all people have an equal opportunity to an education, regardless of their socio-cultural backgrounds. Access to educational opportunities were high priority suggestions made by the participants.

It is important to acknowledge these institutional deficits and offer recommendations to equip schools and prison systems with resources to prevent future trauma and to mitigate the disproportionality of people of color in the prison system. To minimize the impacts of historical trauma and early home trauma, effective school and prison practices can interrupt the cycles of trauma, thereby providing opportunities for people of color to break educational and socio-emotional cycles. By thoroughly understanding the legacy of their ancestors in the United States, African American and Latinos can understand their current conditions in the present and make strategic decisions for not only their own lives, but for the lives of their offspring, as well. Few studies have analyzed the phenomenon of disproportionality for people of color. Although special education disproportionality was inconclusive in this study, prison disproportionality was confirmed.

Further Research

Generational oppression has been the norm for African Americans and Latinos, but with continued research and development in these areas, both, socio-emotional and

educational barriers can be broken. As demonstrated by the study's participants, four of the six have earned higher education degrees beyond high school diplomas. Natasha earned her Associate of Science (A.S.) degree in Business Management; Lionel earned his Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree; Marcel earned his Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree; and Berto earned his Master of Arts (M.A.) degree. Alejandro and LaTonya have high school diplomas and/or General Education Development (G.E.D.) certificates. Although some strides in breaking socio-emotional and educational barriers have been made by most of the participants in this study, further research on the successful re-entries of people of color into society after prison are needed for further insights into mitigating disproportionality in K-12 education and prison institutions.

Additionally, further research in the areas of Full Service Community Schools, Trauma Informed Care pedagogy, and Schoolwide Restorative Justice initiatives need further study. Research suggests that these wrap-around community approaches offer promising results to offset cycles of oppression and create more positive trajectories to evade incarceration experiences for people of color. Indicators of the cycles of oppression are evident in the literature, but further research and funding need to be allocated for more solution-focused approaches to determine their effectiveness. Focusing energy and resources on solutions, rather than the maintenance of problems, such as prison incarcerations, I suspect, will highly yield more promising outcomes for people of color with special needs.

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APPENDIX A

STUDY'S RECRUITMENT FLYER

Adult Volunteers Wanted For Research Study



Profile of volunteers needed:

If your ethnicity is either African American or Hispanic (Latino) and you have had the two following experiences in your life....

1. Have been a special education student at any point in your schooling (elementary, middle, and/or high school)
2. Have been incarcerated at least one time in your life, and/or more...

.... then you are a candidate for this study.

Please contact:

Shellie Higuera, M.A. and M.S.

Licensed Educational Psychologist, (LEP) No. 3520

Doctoral Candidate, 2017

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APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hello, my name is Shellie Higuera. I am a graduate student at California State University, East Bay (CSUEB) in the Educational Leadership, Social Justice Department. I am conducting research on African American and Latino adults who have been in jail and who have also been in the special education program during either their elementary, middle, and/or high school years. If you are an African American or Latino person who has been in jail and in special education, I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Participation in this study includes an intake interview, survey questionnaire, and semi-structured interview. Appointments with volunteer participants will be made convenient upon their schedule. The total time needed to participate in this study is approximately one hour. Possible benefits from participating in the study may include participants' responses adding to research on ways to help African American and Latino students do better in school and stay away from a life style of crime.

Self-Introduction. I would like to share a little bit about myself, and the reasons why I am doing this research on African Americans and Latinos. I am a bilingual in Spanish and a bicultural person. My mother is Caucasian and my father is Hispanic. I grew up in Salinas, California with a high Latino population. Growing up my parents, were factory workers and very hard working. My mother was a high school dropout and never finished high school. My father did finish high school with a high school diploma, but did not pursue more schooling. In the fifth grade, my parents became unemployed because the candy factory they worked at closed down. Both of my parents were out of

work with no education. My mom used to cry to me and tell me to get an education, be someone, and not to be like her.

I also have a brother who is three years older than myself. During his middle and high school years, my brother became involved in the neighborhood drug scene. Later in life, my brother revealed to my parents and I that our neighbor down the street (an adult) had him selling drugs at school for him. Throughout middle school, high school, and adulthood my brother had a drug problem. The people he associated with were not positive peer influences. My brother was very talented and had a lot going for him, but the environment and the people he associated with did nothing to advance him forward. My brother has been in jail three times that my parents and I know about; however, my parents think he has been in more than three times.

I am the first person to go to college in my family. I started at a community college and then transferred to a California State University. I received financial aid through college with Pell Grants from the government. I earned a Bachelor's degree in Liberal Studies, Bilingual Cross-Cultural Emphasis, and a minor in Spanish. Next, I earned a teaching credential in Bilingual Cross Cultural Language and Academic Development. I was a bilingual teacher in both public school and the Department of California Youth Authority for incarcerated juveniles. I continued on with my education and became a school psychologist. I earned two Masters Degrees, one in Behavioral Sciences, Bilingual Cross-Cultural Education and the other in Counseling, School Psychology. Today, I am a Licensed Educational Psychologist and finishing my Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership, Social Justice.

This research study is important to me because I see many African American and Latino students having poor experiences in school and becoming part of the justice system, my brother being one of them. Also, having been the first person to go to college in my family, I understand many of the challenges and barriers one must overcome in

order to make it through the system. My journey has not been easy. Through my research, I would like to understand your experiences and offer recommendations to schools in order to help better support African American and Latino students to be successful in school and stay away from a life style of crime. I need your honest thoughts, opinions and feelings. With your help, together, we can make a difference in society and hopefully prevent other young African American and Latino students from going to jail. If you would like to participate in this research study and/or have any further questions about the study, I can be reached at shellie.higuera@yahoo.com and/or 916-261-2743.

Thank you,

Shellie Higuera

APPENDIX C

INTAKE INTERVIEW

Interview Date:

1. What is your age?
2. What is your self-identified ethnicity?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your native language or language you feel most comfortable speaking?
5. During your childhood and teenage years, what was your parents' type of employment?
6. During your childhood and teenage years, what was your parents' highest educational levels completed?
7. During your childhood and teenage years, how many brother and sisters lived in your house?
8. What is your current family life (spouse and children) situation?
9. Are you employed? Please describe.
10. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

Health Concerns

1. As a child, do you recall or did your parents ever mention to you that you were ever delayed in your developmental growth, such as skills with walking and talking, etc.?
2. Do you have any family members who have disabilities?

3. In your life, have you ever had any major accidents or suffered from any injuries?
4. In your life, have you ever been hospitalized?
5. Do you have any history of substance abuse with either alcohol and/or illegal drugs?
6. Are you currently taking any prescribed medications?
7. How are your current sleeping and eating habits?

Highest Educational attainment

1. During your schooling experience, did you ever skip or repeat any grades?
2. Do you recall when you were first placed into the special education program?
3. How many years did you stay in the special education program?
4. Do you recall what your disability was in school?
5. Did your disability remain the same or was it changed over time?
6. Do you recall if you had a lot of suspensions in school?
7. Were you ever referred for an expulsion from school?
8. How were your relationships with your teachers?
9. How were your relationships with your parents?
10. How were your relationships with your peers?
11. What were your academic strengths in school?
12. What were your academic weaknesses in school?

APPENDIX D

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Having difficulties with language made school harder for me.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Does not apply	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. I feel my race influenced whether I was placed in higher or lower level classes.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Does not apply	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. I feel I was not treated fairly in school.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Does not apply	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. I feel I received more school suspensions because of my race.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Does not apply	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. I feel my poor performance in school played a role in me becoming incarcerated.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Does not apply	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. My elementary school years were good and I liked school.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Does not apply	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. I had a hard time in middle school with teachers.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Does not apply	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. My high school years were great.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Does not apply	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. My disability made school difficult for me.
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Does not apply | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
10. I had a lot of behavioral challenges in school.
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Does not apply | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
11. I liked my teachers in school.
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Does not apply | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
12. My parents were supportive of me all through my schooling years.
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Does not apply | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
13. I think school programs need to be improved.
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Does not apply | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
14. My experience(s) in jail helped me.
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Does not apply | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
15. When I was released from jail, I felt prepared to live my life successfully.
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Does not apply | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
16. Parole and/or Probation officers helped me.
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Does not apply | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
17. In jail, I rarely saw Caucasian (white) inmates.
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Does not apply | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
18. Drugs played a role in my poor choices.
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Does not apply | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

19. My peer group (friends) played a role in my poor choices.
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Does not apply | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
20. I think if there were more programs and role models to help young kids, they would do better in school and not get into trouble with the law.
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Does not apply | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

APPENDIX E

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

These questions are designed to specifically ask for the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. In the following questions, please share your experiences. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be truthful in your responses. Your answers will help research to better serve African American and Latino students.

K-12 Educational Experience

1. What do you remember most from elementary school and/or this period of time in your life?
2. What do you remember most from middle school and/or this period of time in your life?
3. What do you remember most from high school and/or this period of time in your life?
4. Please discuss what type of friends you had during your school years.
5. Did you do any drugs in school?
6. Is there anything in school that you feel you did not get, but you needed for success?

Special Education Experience

1. Please discuss your disability and your experiences in special education classes? Please describe.

2. Do you remember going to IEP meetings, and if so, what were they like for you?
3. Did you have any behavioral challenges in your special education classes? Please describe.

School Improvement

1. If you had the chance to do school all over again, what advice would you give teachers?
2. If you had the chance to do school all over again, what advice would you give your parents?
3. Looking back on your schooling experiences in elementary, middle school, and high school, what are ways schools can change for the better?

Adult Correctional System

1. What type of crime(s) did you do to get arrested?
2. How long were you incarcerated?
3. What are common challenges for people who are incarcerated?
4. Do you think the prison system helps people turn their lives around?
5. After getting out of jail, what are some things that have helped you re-enter society?
6. Do you think there any differences between the success rates among African American and Latinos compared to Caucasians?
7. Do you think there any differences between the failure rates among African American and Latinos compared to Caucasians?

If you think there is anything else important that you would want me to know, please share those thoughts now.