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# Gangs and College Knowledge: An Examination of Latino Male Students Attending an Alternative School

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

Adrian Hernandez Huerta

2016

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Gangs and College Knowledge: An Examination of Latino Male Students Attending an Alternative School

by

Adrian Hernandez Huerta

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Patricia M. McDonough, Chair

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand how 13 Latino male students acquire and make sense of gang and college knowledge in one alternative/continuation schools in Rock County School District. Less than 45 percent of Latino males graduate from public schools in that state of the study (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). Bourdieu's (1980, 1990) cultural capital and habitus and Coleman's (1988, 1990) social capital theories serve as a combined lens to consider how Latino males are taught to perform in an appropriate or expected fashion in their communities, accrue benefits in their various social networks, understand how these individuals' social histories and experiences influences aspirations and expectations for their future, and how schools constrain or enable their aspirations. Findings suggest that 10 of the 13 students are more aware of gang membership requirements than college admission criteria. Ten of the 13 students want to attend a technical or vocational college as well as four-year universities. Most students believe their only college financing options are working full-time and/or student loans. Only two students mentioned a teacher, counselor, or school administrator trying to actively help them prepare for, or share information about, college. The results of the study can help high school college counselors, college

outreach professionals, and social service practitioners to develop better prevention strategies to alter or create earlier interventions that promote college-going and college cultures.

The dissertation of Adrian Hernandez Huerta is approved.

Walter R. Allen

Tyrone C. Howard

Carola E. Suarez-Orozco

James Diego Vigil

Patricia M. McDonough, Chair

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2016

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| | |
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Huerta, A. H., & Fishman, S. M. (2014). Marginality and mattering: Urban Latino male undergraduates in higher education. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 26(1), 85-100.

Huerta, A. H. (2015). "I didn't want my life to be like that": Gangs, college, or the military for Latino male high school students. *Journal of Latino/Latin American Studies*, 7(2), 156-167.

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# CHAPTER 1

## *Introduction*

The purpose of this qualitative dissertation is to examine Latino male students' gang and college knowledge. From a social and cultural capital perspective, intersections between gang knowledge and college knowledge are plentiful. Each type of knowledge requires an abundance of social and cultural capital, habitus, including how to navigate and be successful in specific spaces. This study is a means to understand how and why this student population may have a better understanding of one culture over another and how cultural norms are communicated, or not. The 13 Latino male students who participated in this study attended Anderson Behavioral School in Rock County School District, both pseudonyms, in the Western region of the United States. Anderson Behavioral School is alternative school that serves anywhere between 70 to more than 300 at-risk students with past academic, disciplinary, and attendance issues. Rock County School District (RCSD) is located in an urban community. At the time of this study, RCSD was ranked in the top five nationally for the total number of students enrolled, number of students identified as English language learners, and the number of students living in poverty and who qualify for free and/or reduced lunch (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014). Typically, students with disciplinary problems and gang embeddedness experience various social and academic struggles within traditional school settings, which often results in premature school departure and inability to adequately prepare for postsecondary education, or transfer to alternative schools (Carter, 2005; Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Curry & Spergel, 1992; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Kelly, 1993; Khalifa, 2010; Morris & Perry, 2016; Pyrooz, 2014; Rios, 2010; Rumberger, 1987; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith & Tobin, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999; Vigil, 1988, 1999). In this chapter, Imake

the case for the purpose and significance of this study. I describe the study population, give an overview of the theoretical framework, and the research design.

The focus on Latino males in Rock County School District is influenced by the harsh reality that less than one in two students from this subpopulation graduate from public high schools in this state (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). Furthermore, the attention on Rock County School District is significant because the state ranks in the bottom quartile for education spending and high school graduation rates but has the highest rates of Latino children living in poverty. Over 60 percent of all students in RCSD live in poverty (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014). The strong relationship between families' high poverty rates and low high school completion cannot be understated (Kozol, 2006; MacLeod, 2009; Rumberger, 1987, 2011). For example, low income Latino students are not immune to the stresses for school departure and failure (Carter, 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Telles & Ortiz, 2008).

The exact number of Latino male students impacted by poverty and early high school departure rates cannot be easily calculated in Rock County School District. The state department of education was admonished by the United States Department of Education for their creative and deceptive and inaccurate calculations of high school completion rates for low-income students of color and their encouraging of students to transfer to adult education programs (Milliard, 2014). An unfortunate reality is other states may be engaging in similar deceptive acts to conceal the real student departure rates and high school completion rates for underserved populations. While the factual evidence of high school completion and separation rates are difficult to determine, more information is needed to understand why close to 600,000 Latino males dropped out of high school in 2012 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2014). Returning to the state where Rock County School District is located, there was an unprecedented population growth over the last decade of Latinos under the age of 18, where more than one in three students are Latinos (U.S.

Census Bureau, n.d.). Lastly, the state population has one of the lowest rates of postsecondary education completion and credential attainment in the United States of America (Lumina Foundation for Education, 2014).

The focus on gangs and gang knowledge in this study is guided by Latinos representing slightly over 20 percent of the over 1 million adolescent gang members in the United States (Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015). Gang affiliated youth are 30 percent less likely to graduate from high school and almost 60 percent less likely to earn a four-year degree compared to their non-gang counterparts (Pyrooz, 2014). Gang members are often shifted into alternative or continuation schools. It's important to note that this shift into different school setting can happen before or after gang affiliation occurs. The school site for this study is an alternative school because these students often represent the most marginalized and neglected students in the educational pipeline (Kelly, 1993; Brown, 2007) and nearly six percent of all Latino males in K-12 education are enrolled in some form of alternative school (NCES, 2012a). Moreover, Latino male students disproportionately represented 91,757 or 35 percent of the 264,600 males enrolled in alternative schools during the 2010-2011 academic year (NCES, 2012a). Why is enrollment in alternative schools a concern? Students enrolled in alternative schools are more likely to dropout compared to their peers in traditional comprehensive schools (Brown, 2007; Kelly, 1993; Kim, 2011), and these alternative schools' curriculum, facilities, and organizational habitus reinforce minimal social and academic expectations for their students (Kelly, 1993; Kim, 2011; Muñoz, 2005).

## Theoretical Focus

The use of social and cultural capital, as well as habitus allows an understanding how of Latino males are taught how to perform in an appropriate or expected fashion in their communities, grow or experience stunted social networks, and how these individual's social history and experiences influences their actions, perceptions, and expectations of performance in their schools

and communities (Bourdieu, 1980, 1990; Coleman, 1988, 1990, Carter, 2003, 2005). It is important to stress that only a small percentage of low-income urban Latino male youth are gang members, but many Latino students also navigate the presence and culture of gangs in their schools and low-income communities and hace to actively avoid physical and emotional dangers of their gang involved peers (Carter, 2005; Conchas & Vigil, 2010, 2012; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Flores-Gonzales, 2005; Huerta, 2015; Rios, 2011; Vigil, 1988, 1999, 2002). To uncover the cultural nuances, expected behaviors, aspirations, and expectations for Latino males attending Anderson Behavioral School, I use Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1990) cultural capital and habitus, and Coleman's (1988, 1990) social capital to investigate this phenomenon because these theories provide the tools to explore the various individual and school relationships.

A central focus of this dissertation is identifying and decoding students' gang and college knowledge, which encompasses their dominant and non-dominant social and cultural capital as well as habitus. When cultural capital and habitus are used in combination, it is possible to understand how these elements shape students' aspirations, expectations, and perceptions for their future postsecondary educational opportunities. I define gang knowledge as one's understanding of gang culture, graffiti, the differences between gangs and graffiti crew eligibility, and how to obtain and sell drugs or weapons (Moule, Decker, & Pyrooz, 2013; Thornberry, et al., 2003). I define college knowledge as an individual's understanding of how to prepare for and apply to college (entrance exams, high school coursework), the institutional differences (two-year versus four-year institutions), how to secure financial aid, and awareness of various college costs (Conley, 2005; McDonough, 1997). Both gang and college knowledge require a student to possess the ability to navigate, convert, and manipulate their social and cultural capital to achieve their street and/or educational credentials to reach their desired goals and status.

## Research Questions:

1. What are the college-choices processes for Latino male students who attend an alternative school in Rock County School District?
2. How do Latino males in an alternative school use their social and cultural capital related to gang and college knowledge to make postsecondary plans?
3. What is the perceived role of school counselors in supporting and sharing information about postsecondary education from the perspective of Latino males' in this alternative school?

To answer these questions, I employ a case study approach which includes student interviews, participant observation, and letters from students on the educational advice they would give their male relative. I analyze the data through the lenses of social and cultural capital.

## Contribution and Significance of this Work

Researchers, policymakers, and philanthropists steadily work toward uncovering the nuanced factors that impede educational success for Latino males in high school completion, college enrollment, and postsecondary degree attainment in the K-20 educational pipeline (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Huerta, 2015; Huerta & Fishman, 2014; NCES, 2012, Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005).

The urgency to understand why only 48 to 65 percent of Latino males graduate from U.S. high schools will help educators pinpoint plausible institutional and systematic remedies for this student population. One major concern across the United States is the high rates of suspensions and expulsions for Latino boys and young men of color. For example, by ninth grade, one in five Latino males have been suspended from school for behavioral issues (NCES, 2012a). For all Latinos attending schools in Rock County School District, the expulsion rates ranged from over 1,083 of the 2,492 (43.5%) in 2012-2013 to 481 of the 1,384 (35%) in 2015-2016 during those academic years with the numbers gradually decreasing because of the implementation of restorative justice efforts

(Morton, 2016). The suspension and expulsion concerns are not isolated to Rock County School District, but mirror the recent reports by the NCES, which found 40 percent of Latino parents are contacted by their son's school for reports of behavioral problems including insubordination, threats of violence against peers or educators, and drug use or possession (2012a). The overuse of school suspensions and expulsions has attracted national attention because of the long-term negative impact on students. Shollenberger (2015) reports students with more than one outof-school suspension will have less than a five percent chance of earning a Bachelor's degree in their lifetime.

The focus on disciplinary policies use by school leaders is a salient concern for Anderson Behavioral School. Most of the students at this campus have multiple suspensions and expulsions, which contribute to the interrelated actions and experiences that systematically thwart college knowledge growth and options for this student population. The lasting impact of having a disciplinary record will stunt opportunities for students to build a positive and trusting relationship with counselors (Huerta, McDonough, & Allen, 2016). Again, not all of the students at Anderson Behavioral School are gang members, but all of the study participants have been labeled as "bad," "troubled," or "unreachable" by the school personnel.

When a young Latino male exhibits his gang involvement or shows some form of affiliation with gangs or graffiti crews through dress, tagging on folders, and other perceived indicators, educators may encourage his removal from school through transfer to an alternative school or suspension (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Kelly, 1993; Kim, 2011; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; Muñoz, 2005; Powell, 2003; Rios, 2011; Tellez & Estep, 1997; Vigil, 1999). Teachers and principals routinely work together to transfer students who are labeled "bad" or "ill-prepared" to alternative or continuation schools instead of working to mediate students' psychosocial needs or minimize the disruptions in the student's learning (Brown, 2007; Kelly, 1993; Kennedy-Lewis &

Murphy, 2016; Muñoz, 2005; Powell, 2003; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2010; Rumberger, 2011; Tellez & Estep, 1997; Vigil, 1999).

Lastly, the aims of this dissertation are to highlight the intersection between criminology, education, and public health and policy. Youth who are gang embedded are more likely to dropout of high school, require social services, and have involvement in the criminal justice system (Rumberger, 1987, 2011; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Other researchers have well-documented that the social and economic impact of high school dropouts affects not only the individual, but society through decreased tax contributions and increased cost of social services (Rumberger, 1987, 2011; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). This dissertation is not simply another higher education college access project, but an attempt to tease out the links between gangs, college access, school discipline, and alternative schools for Latino boys and young men. The rest of the dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter Two provides a discussion of the current literature related to Latinos and education, gangs, and school experiences broadly, Chapter Three covers the theory of social and cultural capital, as well as habitus, Chapter Four presents the methodology used to investigate students knowledge and experiences, Chapter Five is the data presentation and analysis, and Chapter Six is the discussion, implications, and conclusions.

# CHAPTER 2: Review of the Literature

## *Introduction*

The study of Latinos in education requires extra diligence given the complexity of internal and external challenges related to language abilities, citizenship status, differences in nationalities, behavioral issues, and low academic achievement that impact high school completion and subsequent college-going rates (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Research on Latino males tends to be focused on student and educator interactions or the ecological and socialization factors that influence the students' commitment to excel or fail in education (Conchas & Vigil, 2010; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Huerta, 2015; Huerta & Fishman, 2014). Previous research tends to combine the educational experiences of Latina and Latino students with these students' challenges with school systems, which creates difficulty in understanding how race and gender influence the neglect and mistreatment of Latino male students by their teachers and counselors (Conchas, 2001; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005).

Much of the literature on Latino males in the U.S. educational system paints a dysfunctional picture. From early on, Latino boys are behind in preschool enrollment and school socialization, and struggle with negotiating racialized stigmas of masculinity (Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2011; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). Educators perceive Latino boys and men as an unsolved and demanding problem and seem reluctant to develop appropriate methods and strategies to support Latino males' presence and persistence to be successful throughout the educational system (Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2011). Four major concerns are addressed in the literature:

- Latino male youth involvement in gangs (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Huerta, 2015, Lopez-Aguado, 2016; Rios, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Tellez & Estep, 1997; Thornberry, et al., 2003; Vigil, 1988, 2009);
- Low-levels of college readiness of Latino youth (Carter, 2005; DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Huerta & Fishman, 2014; Huerta, et al., 2016; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Tierney, 2009; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005);
- Teacher and counselor perceptions of students' disengagement, assumed lack of commitment to putting forth the necessary efforts or behaviors to be strong students (Carter, 2005; Conchas, 2001; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2011; Rios, 2010; Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hillard, 2004);
- Adolescent males with behavioral problems and alternative schools (Behr, Marstoh, & Nelson, 2014; Brown, 2007; Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Kelly, 1993; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Stearns & Glennie, 2006).

Overall, most of this scholarship mentions the debilitating influence of gangs on Latino boys and how gang involvement steers them away from constructive school involvement. Studentgang members experience internal conflicts related to their gang involvement because of the mixed messages received by their peers, families, and school educators about what should be valued (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Curry & Spergel, 1992; Rios, 2010, 2011; Thornberry, et al., 2003; Vigil, 1988, 1999). Other studies have shown that all Latino males' low academic achievement impacts their ability to adequately prepare for postsecondary education (Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Huerta & Fishman, 2014; Huerta, et al., 2016; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009).

## Latino Males and Gangs

Gangs are not a recent phenomenon in urban Latino communities. Gangs have historical footprints in Los Angeles, California as early as the 1930s (Vigil, 1988). In the past and present, gangs provide a space and opportunity to feel cared for, to earn respect, to obtain strategies for survival, and to be validated by peers (Calabrese & Barton, 1995; Calabrese & Noboa, 1995; Conchas & Vigil, 2010, 2012; Hatt, 2007; Lopez, Wishard, Gallimore, & Rivera, 2006; Miller, Barnes, Hartley, 2009; Moule, Decker, & Pyrooz, 2013; Tellez & Estep, 1997; Thornberry, et al., 2003; Vigil, 1988, 1999).

Recently, the conversations about gangs and boys have been moved forward by the work of Conchas and Vigil (2012), who discussed the identity development conflicts experienced by adolescent boys of color being defined as either *schoolsmart* or *streetsmart*. Their work provides an in-depth perspective of Latino male youth and other boys of color experiences with gangs, and other factors that contribute to delinquent behavior. Conchas and Vigil's work helps provide some of the needed understanding as to why Latino male gang involvement has ballooned, and insight into why Latinos represent between 20 to 45 percent of the estimated 1 million juvenile gang members in the United States (National Gang Center, 2011; Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015). Although the estimated gang membership number may be large, it is important to note most gang recruitment begins as early as middle school, if not sooner, in some urban and rural communities (Ayers, 2006; Curry & Spergel, 1992; Estrada, Gilreath, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2014; Pyrooz, 2013; Tellez & Estep, 1997; Thornberry, et al., 2003; Vigil, 1988, 1999).

Thornberry and colleagues (2003) present conflicting reasons why Latino youth join gangs based on a longitudinal mixed-methods study of over 800 Black, Latino, and White male and female youth from Rochester, New York, over a 13-year period. They share that Latinos primarily join gangs for "fun/action" or due to the influence of "family/friends." Although that study's sample of

Latinos is 140, the findings offer a small wrinkle in the argument as to why Latino and other youth join gangs. Furthermore, the nationalities of gang members studied by Thornberry and colleagues are primarily Puerto Ricans, which adds to the understanding of Latinos involvement in gangs, whereas Vigil's participants have been Mexican and Mexican-American. The combined studies enhance the social, political, and regional differences on why Latino youth join gangs throughout the United States. What remains are the most salient influences on why youth join gangs: (1) the individual's perception of marginalization, (2) continued structural forms of marginalization such as limited economic opportunities, (3) dissatisfaction or mistreatment in schools, (4) violence in the home or community, and (5) racism. Student experiences of racism and racial discrimination are primarily happening in schools, so I will further discuss racism in the school context section.

The presence of gangs in schools increases the pressure for membership by male students (Bjerregaard & Cochran, 2012). Boys of color may believe or feel pressure to join gangs and adhere to the "codes of the street" because it is a natural progression that results from the limited number of economic opportunities in urban communities (Bourgois, 2003; Carter, 2005). Gang recruitment and membership is not restricted to dark alleys or solely in poor communities, gang recruitment commonly occurs in schools because of the concentration of potential male recruits (Ayers, 2006; Calabrese & Noboa, 1995; Carter, 2005; Estrada, et al., 2014; Vigil, 1988, 1999). Gang members and gang affiliates often fall into the "at-risk" category in schools. At-risk students are defined by multiple characteristics or risk factors, including excessive tardiness or absences, evidence of emotional instability, low-income status, learning disabled, or a high propensity to not complete school (NCES, 2002). Students who are considered "at-risk" are shunned by educators and not provided equal educational opportunities in course offerings, extracurricular activities, or feeling connected to teachers or their schools in a meaningful way (Brown, 2007; Carter, 2005; Fergus, et

al., 2014; Flores-Gonzales, 2005; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Howard, 2014; Oakes, 2005; Vigil, 1988, 1999).

In many cases, teachers blame students and their families for school failure and dropout (Kim, 2011; Lopez-Aguado, 2016; Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2007). Often, alternative school educators are unable to support or validate the social and cultural capital of urban minority youth, which further increases the students' perception of marginalization in school settings (Brown, 2007; Khalifa, 2010; Kim, 2011; Lopez-Aguado, 2016). The educators do not understand the cultural nuances of students' backgrounds, which creates strife between teachers and students. Youth in alternative schools and juvenile justice system schools are unable to provide the tools or the resources for their students to complete their GED or high school diploma and transition into adulthood (Chung, Little, & Steinberg, 2005). Teachers in alternative schools are often unable to support the academic or emotional needs of students and are often the weakest instructors (Brown, 2007; Kelly, 1993; Tellez & Estep, 1997, pg. 73). Often, teachers are unable to relate or understand a students' cultural or ethnic background (Fergus, Noguera, Martin, 2014; Tellez & Estep, 1997), which could cause additional tensions and limited effectiveness in the classroom.

Gang membership, or at least affiliation, in some urban communities is almost inescapable for Latino males. It's hard to turn away from gangs when so many childhood friends later decide to join them, also not joining may increase the chances of being a target for physical violence (Flores-Gonzales, 2005; Vigil, 1988, 1999). Gang-affiliated youth have lower educational attainment than their non-gang affiliated peers (Calabrese & Barton, 1995; Calabrese & Noboa, 1995; Krohn, Schmidt, Lizotte, & Baldwin, 2011; Tellez & Estep, 1997; Thornberry, et al., 2003; Pyrooz, 2014; Vigil, 1988, 1999). Pyrooz (2014) states gang involvement has almost immediate negative effects on educational achievement and contributes to the student being academically behind their peers by a quarter-year after one year of gang membership. Although most educators would assume gang-

affiliated youth are incapable of achieving any form of a high school diploma, GED, or postsecondary credentials, Pyrooz (2014) found former gang-affiliated youth, who earn a GED are twice as likely to earn a postsecondary degree compared to their gang-avoiding peers with a GED. Similarly, Huerta, McDonough, and Allen (2016) found 18 of 19 marginalized Latino males attending alternative high schools held high aspirations of pursuing some form of postsecondary education, which is counter to the common view of gang affiliated youth and educational aspirations.

There are additional perspectives that can be used to explain why Latino adolescents join gangs. Many educators, policymakers, and researchers argue the role of culture and gender expectations as well as individual deficits spurs youth to consider gang involvement (Calabrese & Barton, 1995; Calabrese & Noboa, 1995; Carter, 2005; Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Thornberry, et al., 2003; Vigil, 1988, 1999). Vigil (1988) states that Chicano youth identity formation and gang participation is the culmination of "multiple stresses and pressures, which result in a multiple marginality…[and result in being] more at risk to become gang members" (pg. 1). A person's family, socioecological, socioeconomic and psychological statuses contribute to the how and why youth decide to become active gang members (Conchas & Vigil, 2010, 2012; Rios, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Thornberry, et al., 2003; Vigil, 1988, 1999; 2009).

Rios (2011) explored the role of disadvantaged community and environmental influences of Black and Latino male youth who joined gangs. Rios highlighted how young men were constantly physically and verbally harassed by their gang-affiliated peers near their homes, which persisted until the targeted youth decided to join the gang themselves in an effort to avoid local abuse and teasing (Bjerregaard & Cochran, 2012; Thornberry, et al., 2003). Gang involvement, however, only subjected the new members to increased harassment from rival gangs, which increased law enforcement and perpetuated the cycles of punishment (Rios, 2009, 2011; Thornberry, et al., 2003; Vigil, 1988). The

criminalization by police only amplifies the sense of marginalization felt by Black and Latino male youth (Conchas & Vigil, 2010, 2012; Rios, 2009, 2010, 2011; Tapia, 2011). Some gang members are able to easily disengage from gang activity because of parenthood or moving out of state, but most gang members describe the transition out of gang life as a painful process similar to being in "recovery" and frequently relapse back into gang life to help a friend or as a result of feeling socially isolated (Decker, Pyrooz, & Moule, 2014, pg. 274).

For the most part, a 13-year-old Latino boy does not wake up, exit his home, and decide to join a local gang without other internal and external factors influencing his decision-making. Instead, it is more likely that a combination of life experiences leads Latino male youth to go down a particular path that results in gang involvement (Huerta, 2015; Huerta, et al., 2014; Thornberry, et al., 2003; Vigil, 1988; 1999). Early exposure to crime in the home contributes to later involvement in criminal and deviant behavior for adolescents, though mentorship from other peers most likely results in deviant actions (McCarty & Hagan, 1995). Curry and Spergel (1992) found 439 Black and Latino male middle-school youth in Chicago joined gangs for different reasons. The 139 Mexican, Mexican-American, and Puerto-Rican male youth in this study reported that they joined gangs because of: (1) low self-esteem, (2) rising internal frustration with their treatment by educators and (3) a sense of marginalization during middle school. However, the Latino males did not join gangs to engage in delinquency but for more social support from peers and increased access to illegal drugs and alcohol (Curry & Spergel, 1992). Vigil (1988) argues the decision to become gang active for Latino males is multifaceted. He explores the role of family, poverty, psychology, and neighborhood as influences on the decision to join a street gang. Other scholars, as well as Vigil's later work (1998,1999) have shown that these impacts continue to persist in their influence for this student population (Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Thornberry, et al., 2003). Gangs are able to provide social and emotional encouragement to their members and social and cultural capital, which increases their

position and value in gangs (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Moule, Decker, & Pyrooz, 2013; Rios, 2010, 2011; Telles & Estep, 1997; Vigil, 1988, 1999). For some Latino youth, gang involvement seems like a natural progression because of the connection to their neighbors, friends, siblings, uncles, cousins, or other family members who may serve as role models and are involved in gangs (Moule, Decker, & Pyrooz, 2013; Tellez & Estep, 1997; Thornberry, et al., 2003; Vigil, 1988). Limited economic opportunities for families often result in living in disenfranchised communities, where poverty and financial stresses increase marginalization. When families experience continuous levels of financial insecurity, there is a ripple effect on the type of schools children attend, the amount of resources available to adolescents, and even the type of clothes students wear, which may subject them to teasing by their peers at school (Miller, Barnes, & Hartley, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Thornberry, et al., 2003; Vigil, 1988).

Some gangs provide opportunities for members to gain financial stability by engaging in petty theft, drug sales, or stealing cars (Calabrese & Noboa, 1995; Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Thornberry, et al., 2003; Vigil, 1988). Naturally, most studies on youth in gangs focus on the negative consequences of gang membership, but few have acknowledged that youth are also learning the skills of organization and planning, leadership, and other intangible forms of capital (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Vigil 1988). Although McCarty and Hagan (1995) did not focus solely on gang members, their work examined how homeless adolescents share through their embedded network, criminality with each other to avoid being arrested, albeit in a different field than education. Their work highlights how deviant and criminal behaviors are shared through peer mentorship and how mentors are able to teach their peers how to commit and not be caught for crimes such as drug dealing, petty theft, and prostitution. These activities of sharing criminal capital allow learners to avoid arrest and become more proficient in their crimes.

Older gang members must foster the development of gang identities for new members and provide them with financial and emotional resources to further cement the adolescents commitment to the gang (Calabrese & Noboa, 1995; Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Vigil, 1988). Gang mentorship can help new members build and fortify their gang identity and alleviate some of the financial or school stresses previously experienced in their home communities. Similarly, gang mentorship is an opportunity to share social and criminal capital with new and younger members in the effort of building strong ties and reaffirming their sense of community in the gang.

When urban male youth are not recruited to gangs in their local community, they are actively recruited in their schools—it is not unusual for gang activity to spill over into schools (Ayers, 2006; Estrada, et al., 2014; Vigil, 1999). Gang recruitment begins as early as middle school due to the eagerness of youth to build and develop their identities (Ayers, 2006; Estrada, et al., 2014; Vigil, 1999). It is not uncommon for youth to recruit and initiate new members during the school day, especially in disenfranchised schools. Often, students are organized into open, flexible classroom settings where independent study tends to be a primary method of instruction (Kelly, 1993; Muñoz, 2005). For example, in Muñoz (2005) study of Chicana and Latinas attending an alternative school in California, the students were provided packets of worksheets to complete independently. This pedagogical style leaves ample opportunity for repeated informal conversations. One reason for increased gang activity in schools is the large concentration of low-income Black and Latino urban youth in the same environment (Ayers, 2006; Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Rios, 2011; Vigil, 1999). When low-income Latino male youth are together in a school setting that marginalizes their learning and future, a gang provides a safe space and opportunity to develop strong links with peers (Calabrese & Barton; 1995; Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Miller, Barnes, & Hartley, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Vigil, 1999).

Teachers and administrators may contribute to these alienating experiences in implicit and explicit ways. When a Latino male student is identified as a gang member or affiliate, school principals are more likely to transfer the student to alternative schools. These administrative actions represent a form of pushout and they do not address the multiple needs of a student such as providing opportunities to feel a part of the campus community through sports or engaging electives (Conchas & Vigil, 2010, 2012; Telles & Estep, 1997; Vigil, 1999). Alternative schools often are populated with youth who have behavioral problems, emotional problems, or both in combination. These schools typically are not well-resourced or equipped to thoroughly support the needs of their students (Brown, 2007; Chung, Little, & Steinberg, 2005; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2010; Rumberger, 2011; Telles & Estep, 1997; Vigil, 1999).

The transmission and influence of social and cultural capital through gangs is highlighted in the literature about Latino students in schools (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Moule, Decker, & Pyrooz, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Vigil, 1988, 1999). Deviant peers encourage negative and anti-social behaviors such as theft, violence, and drug use, which influences their younger member to concentrate on building gang social and cultural capital instead of the valued academic and cultural capital expected in schools (McCarty & Hagan, 1995; Moule, Decker, & Pyrooz, 2013; Vigil, 1988). Whereas, being academically engaged may result in being labeled a "schoolboy" or "nerd," potentially resulting in verbal and physical harassment (Fergus, et al., 2014; Huerta, et al., 2014; Rios, 2011; Vigil, 1988, 1999).

The pressure placed on Latino males by their peers to adopt anti-school attitudes, especially in alternate schools or schools in poor neighborhoods, is coupled with teachers' and counselors' attitudes discouraging secondary and postsecondary education (Huerta, et al, 2016; Tellez & Estep, 1997). These negative attitudes about school transcend to non-gang-affiliated male youth. Male students are less likely to seek support and information about higher education from college

counselors, which only creates additional barriers for adequately preparing for college (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2009; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). The following section will discuss the experiences of Latino males' pursuit of postsecondary education.

**Latino Males and College Access**

College access is a multi-step process for all students, but is especially difficult for low-income, non-college educated Latino families. These families typically do not possess the valued forms of social or cultural capital needed to access the networks that help students prepare for college (Tierney, 2009). Reaching high school graduation and the likelihood of college enrollment for Latino males is shaped by their previous academic preparation and family involvement (Fergus, et al., 2014; Goldrick-Rab & Han, 2011; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). High school context determines the types of resources available and the postsecondary opportunities afforded to low-income students (Conchas, 2001; Contreras, 2011; Deli-Amen, & Tevis, 2010, Engberg & Wolniak, 2010; Klugman, 2012; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001). Most schools that serve primarily low-income Latinos and African Americans are unable to provide adequate college advising, information about financial aid, or place students in the appropriate courses to increase the college-readiness level of students (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004; Deli-Amen, & Tevis, 2010, Engberg & Wolniak, 2010; Martinez, 2014; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012). When college information is not available or frequently shared with high school students, their ability to build the necessary college knowledge and form a college-going identity is significantly weakened (Attinasi, 1989; Conley, 2005; Martinez, 2014; Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012). Even when those under-resourced schools are able to discuss college information and preparation, it is often limited or incomplete which further disenfranchises students from understanding the importance of test scores or the potential obstacles or shortfalls associated with

attending a two-year college and transferring to a four-year institution (Deli-Amen & Tevis, 2010; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Martinez, 2014). For low-income and potential first-generation college-goers, schools are the primary source and often the only accurate college knowledge (Espinoza, 2011; Martinez, 2014; McDonough, 1997; Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012).

When low-income students depend on peers and family members who may have limited college knowledge, this can create additional hurdles to understanding the importance of adequate preparation, institutional types, forms of financial aid, information about costs, and the value of early preparation. These familial sources of support are typically unfamiliar with the necessary steps and deadlines to prepare for college (Kelchen & Goldrick-Rab, 2015; McDonough, 1997; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, Thomas, & Li, 2008; Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012; Zarate & Fabienke, 2007). However, Kiyama (2010) stresses that a "lack of information does not mean lack of interest [or support], nor does it mean lack of value for education" (pg. 352). Different social contexts impact Latino families and students' abilities to form meaning connections to college knowledge through K-12 and higher education systems. Latino males are more likely to delay college enrollment due to their previous negative educational experiences and their parents' and teachers' lowered educational expectations, factors that further decrease the chances of earning a Bachelor's degree (Goldrick-Ran & Han, 2011; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). It is important to acknowledge the responsibility for providing opportunities for college readiness for all students is not an acknowledged goal of many urban public schools (McDonough, 1997). Instead, the goal that is sought and externally emphasized is high school graduation, which does not equate college preparation. Yet, researchers and practitioners know low-income families, especially Latino families, place huge amounts of faith and trust in high schools to adequately prepare their children for postsecondary education (Auerbach, 2004; McDonough, 1997; 1998; McDonough, Calderone, & Venegas, 2015; McDonough & Gildersleeve, 2011).

Research has shown that low-income students may need assistance in developing a college-going identity (Huerta, McDonough, & Allen, 2014; Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012). Savitz-Romer and Bouffard (2012) stress that high school students must be open and receptive to seeing themselves as "college material" and positioning themselves to pursue postsecondary education. And this is where it becomes difficult to tease out the point of origin – does a low-income college-goer intrinsically know that college is the right and best path based on his understanding of the world? Or does this student need constant messaging, support, and mentoring from high school counselors to achieve a college-going identity? The answer is both.

Espinoza (2011) and others argue that educators must take a vested interest in supporting students to reach higher education and acknowledges that all students are not adequately served equally or at all. Although teachers and counselors may be invested in supporting students' college-going goals, a school's financial resources may be limited. Some high schools have more than 10 school counselors, but often the student-counselor caseload dictates the quality of information and engagement shared with students, and not all school counselors focus on college guidance (Holland, 2015). Although, some schools have 10 counselors, this does not mean the counselors are able to dedicate all of their time and energy to assisting students with college and career planning, but instead have to provide administrative support (Hill, 2012). Other times counselors do not have trusting relationships with their high school students which compounds educational inequities for students of color (Holland, 2015; Martinez, 2014). Stanton-Salazar (2011) urges educators and other caring adults to serve as "institutional agents" to help low-income and minority youth reach and become successful in higher education. Institutional agents are people who hold various forms of social, cultural, and human capital, a multitude of resources, and are in positions of authority in an organization to help low-status youth achieve various educational opportunities (Stanton-Salazar, 2001; 2011) .

For the last twenty-years, Stanton-Salazar (2011) has documented the need for educators to care for and create opportunities for low-income Mexican and Mexican-American high school students. He argues that a lack of institutional agents will continue to "operate the gears of social stratification and societal inequality" in high schools (pg. 1076). Huerta, McDonough, and Allen (2014) emphasis a focus on experiences of the individual student by examining young men of color attending 10 southern California schools and how they developed their sense of masculinity through the college-going identity-development process. The 153 Latino, African American, and Asian American Pacific Islanders in this study shared the importance of being a role model to siblings and other family members, of being able to provide financial stability for their families through college completion, and of enrolling in the military as a method to finance their postsecondary education, among other results. These findings portray a different lens on the purpose of postsecondary education than most other research literature and how low-income males of color see college as a tool for building their individual identities, as well as providing for their current and future families.

Similarly, building students' college knowledge is influenced by a myriad and interconnected experiences with high school coursework, interactions with encouraging teachers and school counselors, and high quality and accurate information to prepare for college such as financial aid, test requirements and preparation, and course planning (Bonous-Hammarth & Allen, 2005; Conley, 2005; Huerta & Fishman, 2014; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2000; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Tierney, 2009; Tierney & Venegas, 2009). Based on a longitudinal study of over 8500 students attending 750 high schools in the United States, 90% of Latino sophomores held aspirations to earn bachelor's degrees, and yet less than 30 percent enrolled in college (Klasik, 2012). Frequently, institutional agents like teachers and counselors' negative stereotypes of Latino males predispose them from encouraging them from attending any forms of postsecondary education (Calabrese & Noboa, 1995; Huerta, et al., 2016; Tellez & Estep, 1997; Vigil, 1999).

No one reason should be attributed in the low rates of enrollment for Latino students, but access to rigorous academic preparation continues to be fundamental and reoccurring issue that stalls college readiness for Latino students and other groups (Conchas, 2001; Perna, 2000). Latino male students are routinely placed in learning settings in which they have no access to college preparatory courses. Although Latino male students sometimes have to fight and challenge counselors and teachers for placement in rigorous college prep courses or advanced placement courses (Sanchez, Huerta, & Venegas, 2012), evidence suggests that even when they are successful in course placement, the course content in numerous urban settings does not sufficiently prepare students for college (Auerbach, 2004; Conchas, 2001; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Howard, 2014; Huerta & Fishman, 2014). Educators serve as primary gatekeepers for college access and can derail educational opportunities when they hold negative perceptions of students' academic abilities (Auerbach, 2004; Conchas, 2001; Espinoza, 2011; Howard, 2014; Laura, 2014; McDonough, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001, 2011).

If a Latino student is able to gain access to accurate college preparatory courses, he then must navigate the financial aid and college cost maze to finance his postsecondary education. Most often, first-generation students depend on school counselors or college access programs for support to understand the bureaucracy of financial aid paperwork and related tax forms (McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Sanchez, Huerta, & Venegas, 2012; Tierney & Venegas, 2009). Some research has shown that these experiences discourage postsecondary enrollment because of personal frustration with the aid process or the large monetary gap in available financial aid and anticipated family contributions to his education (Castleman & Page, 2013; Heller, 2005; Tierney & Venegas, 2009). Most studies that examine financial aid for Latinos and other low-income students suggest that cost remains a major salient concern (McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Zarate & Fabienke, 2007). Latino parents are most often unaware of the various methods available to help

finance postsecondary education, and they often depend on schoolteachers and counselors for information about how to economically support their children's postsecondary goals (McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Zarate & Fabienke, 2007). However, the quality of financial aid advising by teachers and school counselors is poor, as virtually no school counseling programs prepare counselors with the core elements of college-readiness strategies to support low-income and first-generation college students let alone financial aid advising (Huerta, 2015b; McDonough, 2004).

High school college counselors serve as one of the primary sources of college information transmission to low-income high school students (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004; Espinoza, 2011; Mathis, 2010; McDonough, 1997; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008). High school college counselors in urban and under-resourced schools are overwhelmed with the large student-to-counselor ratios and, in some urban areas like the Los Angeles Unified School District, the ratio is sometimes as high as 5000 students to one high school counselor (Corwin, et al., 2008; Espinoza, 2011). McDonough (1997, 2005) has documented that most high school counselors are overburdened with class scheduling, various forms of testing, and student discipline. Even schools with focused college-preparatory missions are susceptible to college counselors being distracted with administrative responsibility due to budget reductions and changes in school administration, which can cause college counselors to step in and serve as quasi-principals roles until new leadership is integrated into the school culture (Hill, 2012). When counselors are inundated with other school responsibilities, they are unable to build meaningful relationships with students and often have to resort to large classroom presentations instead of building one-on-one relationships with students (Hill, 2012; Martinez, 2014; McDonough, 1997).

When first-generation college-going students do not receive personalized attention from their college counselors, the students will often be tracked into inappropriate courses or may not understand the need to put forth their best efforts in their classes, which impacts future college

readiness (Hill, 2012; McDonough, 1997). Tension in student and counselor relationships may be further strained by male high school students being less likely to seek information and support from college counselors (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2009). Bryan and colleagues (2009) were unable to determine why male high school student, but a possible explanation for this finding is that high school counselors and administrators are not aware of the high school completion and college enrollment issues for Latino male students, nor are they trained to assist male students with these challenges in mind (Clark, Ponjuan, Orrock, Wilson, & Flores, 2013). Furthermore, as high school student populations increase, informational student-counselor exchanges decrease as well. (Bryan, et al, 2009).

There are virtually no studies that solely examine the relationships between college counselors and Latino males, as most studies focus on relationships between students of color broadly and their interactions with educators. Moore, Henfield, and Owens (2008) highlight that Black male high school students often feel marginalized and discouraged from pursuing higher education because school counselors and teachers believe they lack the skills and motivation for high academic achievement. The Black male students in their study were placed in special education, but this label is often misused with male students of color, when teachers are reluctant to interact with them (Brown, 2007; Laura, 2014). The role of students' school behavior influences their treatment by educators (Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016). The following section will build on the individual and organization experiences of students.

**Students with Behavioral Problems**

With the additional emphasis on the schooling experiences of boys of color in the United States, educators, researchers and policy-makers need to isolate some of the reasons why so many males leave school. One of the most pressing reasons for increased school dropout and pushout rates is the overrepresentation of boys receiving disciplinary sanctions (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera,

2010; Kelly, 1993; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). This situation is not to say boys of color do not violate school policies, but the response by teachers and school administrators is often to suspend, expel, or transfer the student to alternative schooling programs. This response is inconsistent with the treatment of other student populations. Only recently, school districts have implemented a restorative justice approach to provide mentoring and more individual support to students. A majority of the literature on boys with behavioral problems focuses on African-American male youth in schools. To provide context for the educational challenges for Latino boys and young men, I will pull from the literature on Black males and schooling and highlight when research data is inclusive of Latinos.

When students of color are removed from the classroom or sent to in-school suspension, the student does not have the opportunity to learn and often cannot make up for the missed learning (Brown, 2007; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Arcia (2006) found students who were removed from the classroom through suspension or expulsions had lower academic achievement and reading scores compared to their non-suspended peers.

Kennedy-Lewis and Murphy (2016) discovered in one middle school in the southeast, teachers would quickly refer African American boys and girls to the school's administrative offices for minor infractions such as walking outof-class to avoid peer teasing or speaking too loudly within a group of students. The students did not view themselves as inherently "bad," but they noted that the disciplinary process was unfair and teachers and administrators were not willing to listen to the students' perspectives on what lead to the school infraction (Brown, 2007; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016). Similarly, Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) found in a quantitative study of 11,000 students attending 19 middle schools in the Midwest that African-American male students were overrepresented in disciplined infractions compared to their white peers for similar school offenses. The African-American students were sent to the office for "disrespect, excessive noise,

threat, and loitering" (pg. 332). While these infractions may be disruptive to classroom management, the student offenses are highly subjective to teachers' interpretations, cultural positionality, and awareness of the antecedent behavior (Khalifa, 2010).

Disciplinary infractions may be one cause of early school departure for boys of color. Stearns and Gleenie's (2006) quantitative study of the reasons and timing of high school dropouts in North Carolina high schools found Latino males are more likely to dropout during their first two years of high school. They report 1625 of ninth (12.68%) and 1072 of tenth (13.81%) graders left school because of disciplinary and employment reasons, respectively. The disciplinary infractions were not disaggregated to indicate the number of student suspension, expulsions, or referrals for in-school suspension, which clouds the rationale for the students' dropout. North Carolina has since relaxed restrictions for minors employed by farms, which may influence the number of hours Latino males work. As the remaining Latino male students persisted in high school, the reasons for their early school departure changed, 839 (8.11%) and 622 (5.15%) left school because of academic reasons and attendance. Furthermore, Arcia (2006) noted that students with increased suspensions were more likely to dropout, intended to enroll in adult education, or leave the school district instead of persisting. The study did not document why students were suspended or expelled, but tracked the relationship between the students' achievement and influence of school suspension.

A majority of the discipline literature focuses on students' school infractions, suspensions, and expulsions, but not on the educators who may be abusing the school disciplinary referral process (Brown, 2007; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). When students are suspended or expelled from school, the aftermath of these events affect academic progression and students' sense of trust towards educators and schools (Brown, 2007; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016). Brown (2007) cautions educators to consider the following, "Emphasis on [low-income male]

students [of color] excluded from school through disciplinary action as "disciplinary problems,' rather than as learners, can lead to a greater focus on punishment and behavior modification than on academic learning" (pg. 433).

When schools invest additional resources to support at-risk Latino male students, students demonstrate almost immediate positive responses (Behr, Marstoh, & Nelson, 2014). Behr and colleagues (2014) examined an after-school intervention program for Latino male high school students in one Colorado high school. The students were selected because of their academic and truancy troubles in school and were experiencing one or more of the following challenges: parental troubles (incarceration, divorce, or domestic violence), student or family gang affiliations, students' interactions with the juvenile justice system, housing instability, and poverty (Behr, et al., 2014). The students were paired with teachers, program staff, and other community stakeholders and provided wraparound services to build their social and academic confidence, such as focusing on high school completion and postsecondary opportunities, recovering missed academic credits, and forging strong relationships with program teachers, who acted as advocates and mentors for the students. School staff initially believed these students had the highest propensity to leave school before participation in the intervention program. In actuality, the high school completion rates for the students hovered above 80 percent for one cohort and the students' attitudes and life outcomes positively changed. The students were required to enroll in intensive summer credit recovery program at a local university, which may have helped increase the number of students' with postsecondary aspirations from 5 to 16 in a cohort of 23. The previously mentioned study did not discuss any possible involvement of outside mental health professionals forging relationships with the Latino male high school students, which is really what the students needed considering their background challenges. Brown (2007) suggests schools should focus their efforts on providing,

"[S]tress prevention, early response, and behavioral and academic support for students at risk for disciplinary actions," prior to the students' behavior escalating in the school or community (pg. 436).

Other times schools are mislabeling minority students as learning disabled, mentally challenged, or possessing other emotional issues which require the student to be removed from the regular school space (Losen & Orfield, 2002). The mislabeling is not because the student suffers from a severe cognitive or physiological challenge, but because the teachers do not want the Black, Latino, or Native American male students in their classroom (Losen & Orfield, 2002). There are strong correlations between students with behavioral problems in traditional schools and their placement in an alternative school. The students' social and academic experiences in alternative schools will be dictated by multiple factors including the quality of the learning environments, the culture of the alternative school, the rigor of the curriculum, and how the school might prepare students for life after high school. The following section provides an overview of the history, purpose, curriculum, expectations and culture of alternative education schools in urban communities.

## Alternative Educational System

Alternative schools were initially developed to provide differential learning environments for at-risk students in an effort to increase high school completion (Guerin & Denti, 1999; Foley & Pang, 2006; Kelly, 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lange & Lehr, 1999; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009; Muñoz, 2005). Although the quality of alternative schools vary from city to city, most schools were considered "dumping grounds" for marginalized or low-income students of color with various behavioral issues (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Guerin & Denti, 1999; Kim & Taylor, 2008; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Muñoz, 2005; Powell, 2003). Some alternative schools were isolated, dilapidated campuses with limited auxiliary resources such as libraries, computer or science labs, or dedicate physical education spaces (Kelly, 1993; Kim, 2011; McNulty & Roseboro,

2009; Muñoz, 2005; Powell, 2003). These campuses were and are considered "last chance" schools for students who regularly disrupt the traditional classroom environment (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). Students were either encouraged or forced to enroll in alternative schools and were identified as displaying one or a combination of school challenges related to being credit deficient, constantly truant, or have a history of violence and other disruptive behaviors in school (Brown, 2007; Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Kelly, 1993; Lange & Lehr, 1999; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009; Muñoz, 2005; Powell, 2003).

Alternative schools served over 310,000 students in over 3300 schools in the 2010-2011 academic school year in the United States (NCES, 2012c), however this number does not reflect the over 170,000 students enrolled in vocational or special education schools. A majority of alternative schools are located in urban environments and serve low-income as well as Black and Latino students males, who are often repeatedly suspended or expelled from schools (Brown, 2007; Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Guerin & Denti, 1999; Kelly, 1993; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Muñoz, 2005; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2010). Alternative schools are intended to reintegrate students into school environments, especially for students who have been expelled from their home school. But reintegration not only depends on student interactions with teachers and other educators, but also on the culture and resources available in the alternative school (Brown, 2007; Guerin & Denti, 1999; Kelly, 1993; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Muñoz, 2005; Powell, 2003).

In some alternative schools, students develop meaningful relationships with their teachers, but these relationships can vary based on teachers' gender, educational preparation, school culture, and individual attitudes (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Foley & Pang, 2006; Poyrazli, Ferrer-Wreder, Meister, Forthun, Coatsworth, & Grahame, 2008). Kelly (1993) found male teachers treated boys and girls attending alternative schools differently based on gender attitudes. Male teachers were tougher on boys because of the expectation they become responsible and prepare to be

breadwinners for their future families (Kelly, 1993). As part of the reintegration goal, the at-risk students are supposed to return to their home school (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009), which may be counterproductive for the student due to the stigma of attending an alternative school and the teacher expectations (Brown & Beckett, 2007; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009).

Traditionally, alternative schools' curriculum is framed on basic academic areas, interpersonal skills, or specific vocational content areas (Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr & Tan, & Jsseldyke, 2009). The curriculum is supposed to mirror traditional schools' academic expectations, but often is more remedial in nature, which may impact students' abilities to prepare for postsecondary education (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Foley & Pang, 2006; Kelly, 1993; Kim, 2011). Most alternative schools do not provide honors or college preparatory courses for the students and researchers have found that, "kids can't go to college if they don't take college prep classes" (Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996, pg. 97). Various studies have noted that some students in alternative schools have an interest in attending some form of postsecondary education, but the schools are unable to provide the necessary curriculum to prepare students for postsecondary education (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Kelly, 1993; Kim, 2011; Huerta, McDonough, & Allen, 2016; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Muñoz, 2005; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2010).

However, this literature has not critically examined the students' aspirations or college choice process. Huerta and colleagues (2016) found Latino male students in alternative schools hold high aspirations for attending postsecondary education, but did not receive support or any information from school counselors to bridge the knowledge gap or gain support to complete necessary financial aid forms and college applications. Foley and Pang's (2006) survey of 50 Illinois directors and principals of alternative schools found the lack of physical facilities including libraries, dedicated physical education, and science labs impacted the type and quality of education provided to their students. Although, the students may express an interest in attending college, the schools may not

have college counselors or provide the necessary curriculum (Kim & Taylor, 2008; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2010). The absence of a college preparatory curriculum may not be intentional but is more likely related to the history of alternative schools focus on credit remediation to allow students the opportunity to "catch up" and focus on high school graduation instead of college readiness and aspiration development (Foley & Pang, 2006; Kelly, 1993; Lange & Lehr, 1999; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009; Muñoz, 2005).

For example, Kim and Taylor's (2008) study of one alternative high school in the Midwest highlights teachers' concerns about students being able to recover multiple academic units in a relatively short amount of time. The teachers questioned the academic value of students recovering credit hours through the use of a computer program and worksheets packets, but were unconcerned about whether the students would be prepared for the academic rigor of postsecondary education. Similarly, Kelly (1993) found students were not issued textbooks and were not allowed to borrow them. The alternative school administrators and educators believed students would not return the books because of the fluidity of attendance and dropout in alternative schools (Kelly, 1993). McNulty and Roseboro (2009) highlighted how students were frustrated with the quality of learning in their alternative school. The students watched movies, completed worksheets, and rarely used a textbook during their time in alternative school, and were angry that some teachers would sleep during their scheduled class time.

Some alternative school administrators believe placing undue academic burden on students for college readiness would be "inhumane" and "overwhelming" for students who often need to master basic reading, writing, and other core subject areas (Muñoz, 2005). Some students may feel overwhelmed by higher academic standards, but the relationships between high suspension and expulsion rates directly impact academic achievement because of the accumulation of missed learning (Arcia, 2006). Kelly (1993) used an ethnographic methodology to study male and female

students attending two alternative high school and she found the students were often bored with the weakened curriculum and worksheets. The students' boredom contributed to their weak ties and relationships with the school staff, which then lead to educators decreasing their academic expectations for the students. Muñoz's (2005) study of Chicana high school students enrolled in an alternative school in California found students did not question the limited academic rigor, but simply worked to earn the necessary points to receive daily units versus the pursuit of learning and knowledge. The educators did not push the students to consider long-term goals or education opportunities, but instead the teachers and administrators felt more comfortable teaching the students' basic communication and anger management strategies during the school day to prepare the students for life after high school. The alternative school in this study was founded on a welfare model to provide students primarily childcare and basic skills versus career or vocational needs. Not all alternative schools embrace a deficit-thinking model to engaging vulnerable populations, but unfortunately many teacher education or education leadership programs do not prepare next generation educators with the skills to work with the most vulnerable populations (Foley & Pang, 2006).

Not all alternative school programs are negative or have detrimental influences on students. Lange and Lehr (1999) studied three alternative school programs in Minnesota over one-year and found students who persisted, enjoyed the educational program, built strong relationships with teachers and staff, and decreased some of their negative behaviors such as unprotected sex, marijuana use, and underage drinking. The authors state the students who persisted did so because they have more of a "choice" in the focus and flexibility of programs. However, the educators in the alternative programs wanted to teach in these schools and made efforts to build relationships with the students. Although, the experience of students and educators in alternative schools presents a jaded view about the educational outcomes and limited postsecondary opportunities, these studies

share a limitation about the college-going culture or expectations provided to the most marginalized student populations in the United States. Poyrazli and colleagues (2008) found students in alternative schools who were employed, often reported higher grades than their peers and held a better perception of their teachers and other school personnel. However, Poyrazli and colleagues did not thoroughly investigate the role of race and gender in how perceptions are framed or understood by alternative school students.

Although not focused on secondary school, Brown and Beckett (2007) examined how elementary and middle alternative schools provided comprehensive services for students and their parents. The wraparound services empowered parents to understand how to better support their children, provided legal and medical aid and a dedicated caseworker to integrate the school- and community-based services for the students, parents, teachers, and social service professionals. The students and parents felt more connected to the alternative school because of the relationships built with educators, including the development of strong bonds with parents, which resulted in better support for students with behavioral issues. Unfortunately, the wraparound services at the alternative school were eventually reduced due to budget constraints, which caused the parent and student relationships with the school to slowly diminish and gradually the students' behavioral problems reappeared once they transferred back to their home school. In other cases, alternative schools build strong relationships with juvenile justice officers and probation officers, which may have a positive or negative effect on the student, but research is limited (Foley & Pang, 2006).

For students who previously attended alternative schools for either behavioral, truancy, or other issues, the student may experience some sense of stigmatization from attending the "dumping ground" school (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). The stigma perpetuated by the home school campus teachers towards the students may be further influenced by race, gender, and socioeconomic status (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). The students often carry a

"bad" label, so teachers and school administrators are eager to send the troublemakers back to alternative schools, aggressively reminding them of their "time" for school policy infractions and not allowing the students any slack for dress code violations, tardiness, or acting like a class clown. McNulty & Roseboro (2009) state the boys "found themselves unable to escape their past mistakes in order to move their behavior in more productive directions" (pg. 421). The students' feelings of being stigmatized by educators mirrors Kennedy-Lewis and Murphy (2016) work and although, the students do not feel they are "bad," the social organization of school creates and reinforces the sometimes tense relationship between student and educator. The following section highlights the stigmatization of boys of color and how masculinity is labored and shaped by multiple social forces throughout society.

## The Stigmatization of Boys and Masculinity

When some adults discuss the current condition of boys in society, some reference a state of "peril" (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009); others suggest that Latino boys are "being overly aggressive" in schools and their communities (Howard, 2014; Noguera, 2008); and still others stress the "invisibility and absence" in educational competitiveness and completion for these young males of color (Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2011). Although, not all boys and young men of color struggle in educational settings (Connell, 1996; Huerta, 2015; Huerta, et al., 2014), it should be noted the educational gender gap is not a new phenomenon especially for Latino boys. This gap began to splinter for Latino males in the 1970s (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; NCES, 2012b). The "issues" for Latino boys and men have been examined from a systematic perspective and individual, and now, addressing gender-identity adaptation and masculinity performance is an emerging area for researchers especially since Latino boys are being stigmatized as outsiders in different social spaces. Race, gender and masculinity are socially constructed concepts that may be "decomposed, contested,

and replaced" and vary based on community race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural history (Connell, 1996, pg. 210; Lopez, 2003).

Schools play an active role in shaping how young boys and girls understand gender norms and socialization (Connell, 1996; Thorne, 1994). While young boys sit in their school classrooms and run and jump on the playgrounds, boys learn "how to be a boy" and often peers and educators share cultural markers to reinforce appropriate behaviors (Connell, 1996; Thorne, 1994). Males' early school interactions tend to be one of the primary spaces for creating and socializing the baseline for gender performance and shape long-term identity development (Thorne, 1994). Connell (1996) suggests that school curriculum and educators are not the only force shaping gender identity construction and interpretation because of the dynamic and multifaceted forces in gender. Yet teachers create clear lines of what are "acceptable" methods of "boy" body language, including teasing and chasing, and what games and toys should be played with. It is important to know individual context and environment matters in how identity is framed, reinforced, and achieved for Latino boys and young men. When male students of color are told that "they are the problem" in schools and society, this sense of blame may compound and further complicate how they perform, understand, and shape their multilayered identities in schools and their academic aspirations (Howard, 2014; Lopez, 2003).

For example, Lopez's (2003) study of West Indian, Haitian, and Dominican students in New York City found white teachers would treat male and female high school students differently. The boys in urban and under-resourced high schools would be verbally challenged in the classroom and when the students would resist, they would be suspended or referred to the dean of students for behavioral issues (Lopez, 2003). When the male students would return to class, they were often disengaged and subdued because of the negative interactions with their white teachers. Although these students may see high school and postsecondary education as the necessary path to personal

success, they were more likely to leave because of the multiple negative experiences in their urban school (Lopez, 2003). At times, the students would "act out" in class to impress their male peers and impress the girls in class, but the outcomes were seldom in their personal benefit.

Peer interactions shape and influence how young men of color see and experience masculinity in a "traditional" versus "other" form of gender performance (Connell, 1996; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014). Definitions of masculinity can mean toughness, hyper-competition with peers, and challenging authority figures in school, but can also mean being stoic, academically astute, and being perceived as feminine (Carter, 2005; Connell, 1996). Carter (2005) documents how Black and Latino male teenagers in her qualitative study struggled with the definition of masculinity and how boys should properly express their "manliness." Similar to other studies of boys of color, the tension of academic versus street displays of gender framed how boys engaged with their peers in the classroom (Carter, 2005; Flores-Gonzalez, 2005). This tension is not restricted to coeducational school settings, where boys will try to impress their female classmates with "class clown antics" to capture attention (Lopez, 2003). Fergus, Noguera, and Martin (2014) conducted a three-year mixed-method study on single sex schools to evaluate how boys learn and how male-only schools create curriculum and culture to foster positive racial and gender identity development. Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, (2014) explain the difficulty for young boys of color to maintain an academic identity in urban spaces because of the fear of teasing and physical violence for not conforming to neighborhood standards of masculinity, where the pressure to live by the code of the street is reinforced by multiple peers and family members (Bourgois, 2003; Carter, 2005; Thorne, 1994).

Although not solely focused on school settings, Bourgois (2003) conducted an ethnographic study of Puerto-Rican male drug dealers in New York City and identified experiences of gendered disrespect. The low-income men expressed frustration with their white female supervisors during their professional employment. The female supervisors used their social, economic, and power

positions to belittle and ridicule the men at work. The men were low-level drug dealers in their community and possessed the right social and cultural capital in their neighborhood to maintain street credibility and respect, whereas those capitals were not transferable to a professional work environment. Additionally, the men in his study struggled in schools, did not earn high school diplomas and frequently mentioned feeling marginalized by their peers and educators. This marginalization was a combination of being categorized as learning disabled as well as being the frequent target of alienation by the teachers. The men responded to the marginalization by acting out in class and threatening the teachers with violence and verbal abuse.

The perception of criminalization is regularly an issues for boys and men of color, whether in school and in their local community (Lopez, 2003; Rios, 2011). In the urban high school context, Lopez (2003) and Rios (2011)'s work highlight how school police and security guards would criminalize male students. The school staff was eager for reasons to search, confiscate, and suspend students for simple infractions including wearing a hat in school or wearing baggy jeans. The minor clothing infractions would lead male students to challenging school police and security personnel, and then the student would be suspended or arrested depending on the reactions and perceptions of the school personnel (Lopez, 2003; Rios, 2011).

Lastly, the intersection of the criminology, developmental, educational, and sociological literature presents a stigmatized picture for low-income boys of color especially Latino males in urban schools and communities (Carrillo, 2016; Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Howard, 2014; Huerta et al., 2016; Huerta & Rios-Aguilar, 2016; López-Aguado, 2016; Rios, 2011; Vigil, 1999). The educational system is often referred to as an equalizer for life opportunities and social mobility for low-income individuals. Moreover, our society is open to the idea of second chances for individuals whose past challenges have stunted progress, but unfortunately as this research has shown, school personnel are often not as forgiving of students who have violated the social expectations in schools either

through their behavior or peer affiliation. Although, society has pushed for increased educational accountability systems to measure teacher effectiveness, pupil testing in general subjects, and annual yearly progress, a students' potential cannot be measured to determine, if and when, he will go to college, join the military, or seek low-skilled employment opportunities in his neighborhood (Anyon, 2011). Through this literature review, I have presented how gang involvement shapes students life and educational outcomes, which typically lead some individuals, disproportionality low socioeconomic status urban Latino males, to dropping out of high school and entering a life of low employment opportunities, reduced life expectancy, and an increased cost to social services and the correctional system.

## Summary and Conclusion

Whether a student is a past or current gang member, it is difficult for the average alternative school educator to determine the students' capabilities for postsecondary education. Why? Most alternative schools do not focus on preparing students for higher academic expectations such as college, which can may be rooted in attitudes held by educators in alternative school, but also is rooted in the schools culture of *how* students are treated during the academic year. The continued absence of college expectations for students attending alternative schools in the United States cannot be understated and requires serious attention to help youth advance and be on the path for social mobility. This chapter presented multiple missed opportunities in schools and the community to build students' college knowledge, which is core to help marginalized low-income Latino male students build their social and cultural capital related to college knowledge. The following chapter provides further background and understanding of the intersections and relationships between students, educators, and their community related to social and cultural capital as well as habitus.

## CHAPTER 3: Theoretical Frameworks

### *Introduction*

Gangs can be complex organizations. The various push and pull factors documented in the literature contribute to our general understanding of why Latino male youth become embedded and entangled in the web of gangs and school marginalization. While recent research efforts have focused on the dichotomy of gangs and education, there is an absence of how Latino youth use theirsocial and cultural capital as well as habitus to understand gang and college knowledge. Previous research has documented how higher education and educational credentials are a form of dominant cultural capital, however no previous studies in education, sociology, or criminology have documented gang knowledge as a form of cultural capital. How social and cultural capital relates to gangs is based on the the individual's networks, whether gangs or college-going, and require relationships that must be nurtured in order to receive lasting benefits (Bourdieu, 1986). If students are unable to develop trusting and respectful connections with their school counselor or teacher, the educator may close opportunities to gain access to the professional education network (Bourdieu, 1986). The importance of this chapter is to provide a theoretical foundation to understand the students' social and academic experiences in a public urban alternative school. This chapter is organized to discuss Coleman's social capital and then followed by Bourdieu's cultural capital and habitus.

Gangs or previous gang skills can be a strong method to prepare low socioeconomic status Latino male youth for postsecondary education. In gangs, youth learn to build relationships with peers, foster alliances with *veterano*s (original gangsters), develop the necessary competencies to advance into leadership, and other necessary skills to become ideal foot soldiers for the criminal organization (Vigil, 1988). Non-dominant forms of cultural capital are "critical to status positioning within socially marginalized groups," where, dominant forms of cultural capital are a strong

influence "in social, academic, and economic attainment" (Carter, 2003, pg. 150). Unfortunately, educators' perceptions and understandings of gangs are often limited, where teachers and counselors see a "thug" or a "*cholo*," not as a young man who is able to navigate complicated and deadly relationships with gang peers, drug dealers, and rivals, nor do they witness a young man inspire and motivate a group of teenagers to be loyal to their gangs. These skills built in their community are important to understand not only complex relationships, but the geography of gangs throughout their neighborhood because it could mean a severe beating or worse because of their home location. Lin (2000) stresses "members in resource-poor networks share a relatively restricted variety of information and influence" (pg. 787). The interpersonal and organizational skills developed by gang members on the streets and urban communities does not carry the same value of respect or reputation in the school system or by teachers, counselors, or principals (Huerta, et al., 2016). School educators do not see, either purposefully or implicitly, the college or leadership potential in urban low socioeconomic Latino male youth who may be gang embedded. Whether the educator's blindness is a combination of fear of retaliation from gang youth in the classroom, a racial or gendered bias towards the student, or simply being dismissive because of the perceived or verified gang affiliation, the end result is another student lost and often unchallenged because school officials did not engage the student.

Depending on the complexity of the gang, the organization may present the opportunity to expand an individual's social network, allows more access to information and capital streams and a new method of transmission to learn about police counter-tactics, emerging tensions from new gangs, or creative methods to earn new revenues. The same complexity of social capital and social networks discussed about gangs can be said of postsecondary education networks operated by schoolteachers and counselors. Counselors can offer urban and low-socioeconomic students access to new and different forms of information based on the high school contexts (Holland, 2015;

McDonough, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2001), which provides different forms of capital for students to combine and activate to reach higher education (Mullen, 2010). To further show the importance of capitals and habitus in examining gang knowledge and college knowledge, I intersect the works of Bourdieu and Coleman related to forms of capital and habitus through examples of the college-going process and gang involvement for urban low socioeconomic status Latino male youth because capitals have value in a field and each field differs. Cultural capital is highly valuable but not officially taught or easily accessible in alternative schools.

The use of Bourdieu and Coleman's work is an ideal theoretical framework for my dissertation study because my research population is embedded in a low-income community and attending an underresourced alternative school. Social and cultural capital is abundant in alternative high schools, but is operated and understood differently by the individual student and school personnel. Bourdieu (1973, 1986) critiques the function and roles of schools in promoting social reproduction given that they only value dominant social class families' forms of social and cultural capital. He unpacks the strong connections to how "valued" capitals are used in schools to reinforce social and academic hierarchies to maintain the domination of low socioeconomic status groups. McDonough and Nuñez (2007) state, "Capital can be an object or an attribute, possession, relationship, or quality of a person, which is exchanged for goods, services, or esteem" (pg. 143). However, the individual context, e.g. field, is important in determining how capitals can be activated and converted for individual exchange in the various social settings including schools (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Swartz (1997) stresses the importance of fields as they, "structure of the social setting in which habitus operates" (pg. 117), which will be discussed later in this section. But the appropriate use of capital requires the knowledge and ability by the individual to use the correct capitals in the appropriate situations or fields. The role of habitus is necessary in discussing capitals because it consciously and unconsciously informs individuals' aspiration, expectations, and how to

make connections to the various capitals based on their knowledge of the different situations and how to use capitals. Low-income and working class families transmit social and cultural capitals to their children that are often of limited use in schools and not valued by the teachers and administrators (Carter, 2003; Lareau, 2011; Lamont & Lareau, 1988), but are also unable to help children forge the necessary bonds with their teachers and other educators for social advancement (Bourgois, 2003; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

Low-income and working-class families may not be aware of the appropriate methods to communicate with teachers or use the correct types of symbols to demonstrate the correct form of commitment to their children's education (Bourgois, 2003; Lareau, 2011; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Some Latino families are unable to communicate with educators or provide their children the educational support to do well in the classroom. This mismatch of communication is especially challenging if the parents or guardians are recent immigrants and are illiterate or have had little to no schooling experiences (Bourgois, 2003; Telles & Ortiz, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, 2008). Schools are supposed to be a great equalizer in society and provide individuals the tools and resources for social mobility and prepare students for postsecondary education. But Bourdieu sees these institutions as places that maintain social immobility for low-income and working class communities (McDonough & Nuñez, 2007).

The influence of social and cultural capital for Latino males cannot be understated because educational advancement is based on knowing how to accumulate cultural capital and how to convert it into more valuable capitals (Bourdieu, 1986; Carter, 2003; Lareau & Weininger, 2003) in the correct context especially in preparation for college in high schools. Schools expect students to operate with the correct forms of capital in schools, but do not teach students about the different kinds of capitals and how to convert those capitals into success in the educational pipeline. Latino males' habitus predisposes their understanding of what actions and opportunities are probable and

improbable including the ability to pursue postsecondary education (Barrett & Martina, 2012). In the following pages, I provide an overview of social capital, cultural capital, and habitus and provide examples of how the theories and concepts relate to urban Latino male youth and why it is necessary to use these concepts to understand how opportunities are understood in an alternative school setting.

## Social Capital

Social capital is generated through mutually beneficial relationships within social networks and organizations for the purpose of sharing non-monetary resources for personal use at later times (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Portes, 1998). The depth of students' social capital will depend on their connections within the network and the types of capitals available to draw from, such as gang or college knowledge (Bourdieu, 1986). However, social capital can also be broken or fractured when students move schools or homes (Coleman, 1988), which in the case of this study's students attending Anderson Behavioral School might cause a major disruption in accumulating social capital. Social capital is necessary for individuals to acquire and convert valued resources into other capital for individual gain in traditional organizations (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990; Coleman, 1988, 1990). Moule, Decker, and Pyrooz (2013) highlight how street gangs share relevant social capital to instill an understanding of organizational culture for new members, and help shape information channels that aid in the reproduction and expansion of the gang community through trustworthiness and sometimes violently enforced violent social norms. Many members of the general public see gang connections as a negative or deviant form of capital, but in the field of street gangs, the connection forged is important but does not carry the same meaning or value in schools. In the following pages, I will highlight some of the key elements of Coleman's (1988, 1990) definitions of social capital, which include these three components: 1) Community obligation and cultural

expectations; 2) Information channels; and 3) Social norms, which will be expanded on later in this section.

Social capital has been used to explore various social and educational experiences for various populations, and comes through their social networks (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Portes, 1998). Capitals of other kinds are accumulated through these relationship networks and sometimes with the external networks of the people they are socially connectioned to (Portes, 1998). Although, Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988, 1990) stress different definitions of social capital, the strength and alternative views compliment the complex understanding of how social capital functions for individuals. Bourdieu highlights the method of transmission and the expansion of social networks to create new forms of capital for individuals. Coleman (1988, 1990) discusses how social capital in organizations is delivered, functions and is important to acknowledge the role of how social relationships and social structures influence how individuals accumulate, use, and extend their networks (and therefore their capital) for personal gain (Perna & Titus, 2005), which in the case of Anderson Behavioral School is the focus on school counselors providing college knowledge to students.

Why is social capital important in understanding the experiences of Latino male students in alternative schools? First, one must challenge the assumptions that minority communities lack social capital (Yosso, 2005). The social capital developed in urban low-income communities is vastly different from what is developed in urban middle class families and how they nurture relationships with public school systems for their children (Lareau, 2011). For example, urban low socioeconomic status Latino male youth can use their information channels especially their peer networks to learn about gangs and specific neighborhoods to avoid because of the fear of violence. In schools, college counselors may minimize sharing college knowledge networks with urban Latino male students because of the counselors' perceptions of low-income communities and alternative school cultures

(Kim, 2011; Kim & Taylor, 2008). What often occurs in urban schools is low-income students of color are unable to "decode" valued forms of social capital provided by schools for upward mobility, where middle-income families have the decoding knowledge and have taught their children about the valued forms of social capital to better engage their educators and understand the natural progression of the educational system, which helps build their network to use at a later time (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Lareau, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001; Portes, 1998).

### Obligation and expectations

Obligations and expectations are built on mutual trust between members of an organization. Within social networks individuals learn to develop a sense of obligations and mutual expectations for each other, which can enable reciprocity between individuals. The exchanges of trust through favors is important in organizations especially gangs, where individuals are able to accumulate favors (i.e. "credit slips") to redeem (i.e. "cash") with peers at later times for new information or social favors (Coleman, 1988, 1990). Obligation and trust are critical between individuals and social organizations because if there is not an investment between individuals, the expectation of ongoing mutual obligations fails (Coleman, 1990). Trust cannot be understated in gangs, where information and commitments to members is crucial when fighting rival gangs, distributing drugs, or avoiding arrest. Trust between individuals increases the type of information exchanged, but also elevates the relationship (Coleman, 1990). In large communities, mutual trust is expected between actors because of the level and number of "social transactions" between groups, those individuals who break mutual trust will be sanctioned (Coleman, 1990), this shared attitude can be related to the "code of the streets" (Bourgois, 2003). For example, if a gang member does not provide immediate support to his friends during a gang fight with rivals, his peers will discipline him at a later time because of the violation of their mutual obligations and expectations. Obligations and mutual trust between actors help demonstrate the important role for youth joining gangs. For example, if low-income

youth A wants to borrow clothes from B because A has limited financial resources, B will accumulate credit slips to cash in later with A. This method of trading social capital is built between gang members; whether the exchange is monetary or favors depends on the situation. Coleman (1990) states the importance of obligation is "a kind of insurance policy for which premiums are paid in inexpensive currency and the benefit arrives as valuable currency" (pg. 310).

### Information channels

Information channels allow for organizations to thrive because "information is costly" for the facilitation of action of social organizations (Coleman, 1988, pg. 104). The exchange of information allows members to transfer or channel information to others within a peer relationship or social organization. In the high school context, being a part of a certain social network may predispose a person to either "motivate" or "avoid" building social relationships with institutional agents such as school counselors (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001, 2011). Institutional agents may purposefully omit college information (resources) sharing with perceived urban Latino male adolescent gang members in their schools because of the counselors' negative perceptions (Huerta, et al., 2016). The counselor may believe that gang affiliated students are incapable of being successful in higher education or do not possess the intellectual abilities or motivation to pursue higher education because of the students' perceived gang affiliation (Huerta, et al., 2016; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001). This is one example of how educators may subconsciously work to limit social capital distribution to students, who deservingly need the information to have an opportunity for social mobility (Holland, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

For urban low socioeconomic status Latino males in underperforming schools, information channels with school counselors may be limited because of the lack of trust, which limits the exchange of information for the individual use of students for their benefit. Counselors may not trust gang-affiliated students because of the perceived students' behavior and attitude towards

educators and education in general, so these perceptions will impact the ability of students to accumulate "credit slips" with a counselor. These barriers create additional hurdles for urban Latino male gang youth to develop any trust or increased expectations of support to learn about college from counselors. Coleman (1988) stresses that an information channel, "provides in the form of obligation that one holds for others' performance or for their trustworthiness of the other party but merely for the information they provide" (pg. 104). This is regularly the case where Latino male students do not trust counselors and counselors do not trust and are unconcerned about the well-being of their students (Huerta, 2015; Sanchez, Huerta, & Venegas, 2012). The lack of information exchange between students and educators can shape the types of social norms developed about gang involvement or college readiness for urban low socioeconomic status Latino youth.

## Social Norms

Coleman (1990) states social norms help explain how and why rational actors behave in a "proper or correct, or improper or incorrect" style that is acceptable to their community (pg. 242). For example, a gang member will be punished for not actively supporting, or backing-up, his friends in a gang fight, which could mean the gang member will be punished for not complying with the group expectations (Vigil, 1988). Social norms are arbitrary and an individual can receive either positive or negative responses to their behavior for a certain action or inaction based on the setting and cultural expectations by those in positions of power (Coleman, 1990). McDonough and Miller (in press) discuss cultural arbitraries as an evolving social standard that benefits and advantages the dominant social group so that they can maintain their position and status in society. In the college-going context, cultural arbitraries may be related to the evolving college admissions standards and the types of college preparatory courses needed for potential applicants to be prepared for higher education. Social norms are not controlled by an individual, but are "property of the social system," which helps explains why individuals behave in certain manners and are regulated by others

(Coleman, 1990, pg. 241). Gang-embedded youth may feel the need to challenge and intimidate school teachers because of the social norms of their gang, but schools may expect students to respect and honor teachers. Social systems dictate how individuals should behave in specific environments.

Similarly, if an urban low-socioeconomic status Latino male student is aware his counselor has a history of providing misinformation about college, the student will inform his peers to avoid the counselor's support, which may lead to decreased aspirations about attending college. These interactions often lead to decreased educational outcomes for the student if he believes college is out of reach for him. When multiple individual urban low-socioeconomic Latino male students adhere to the expected social norms of gang involvement, this cohesion strengthens the gang norms and increases the shared understanding of opportunity pathways in urban communities (Coleman, 1990). However, when individuals fail to follow the social norm, it may be seen as a "threat to the solidarity of the group" (Coleman, 1990, pg. 258). Loyalty and devotion are a cornerstone for gangs and when individual members deviate from the gang social norms such as suggesting leaving the gang or recommitting himself to his studies, this could cause the member to be ostracized and eventually punished. Additionally, urban low-socioeconomic status Latino males may unconsciously underperform in schools to "save face" in front of their peers especially if he has fellow gang members in his academic courses (Flores-Gonzales, 2005; Suárez-Orozco, et al, 2010).

## Cultural capital

To further understand the decision-making and educational trajectories of urban low socioeconomic status Latino male students, I use Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1990) cultural capital. An individual must use social capital to acquire cultural capital (Portes, 1998). An individual possesses their first cultural capital from their family, which is accumulated over a long period of time and is

class and social group based. Simply put, "cultural capital refers to the store of experience and knowledge individuals acquire throughout life, influenced by family background and sociocultural experiences" (Marsh, 2006). Cultural capital can and is transmitted at different times from the family to the individual receiving the information. For example, if a low-income family wants their child to attend college, they may begin transmitting college messages in high school (McDonough, 1997), which may not help the young adult fully prepare for college because of the impact of delayed information and how college readiness is built over the years (Perna, 2000). So young Latino boys may be exposed to gang life at an early age and develop aspirations of emulating their older peers or relatives, and believe this is the correct path over performing well in high school and preparing for postsecondary education. While cultural capital can exist in three distinct forms, I focus on the embodied and institutionalized state in this study, which reflects one's preferences and tastes for certain cultural goods, through class specific dispositions, and preferences, and also the academic credentials and related intellectual skills and curiosity (Bourdieu, 1977, 1980, 1986; Sablan & Tierney, 2014).

Urban low socioeconomic status Latino male youth may come to believe that in their neighborhood or family that gang involvement is non-negotiable as part of building their reputation, sense of self and developing power in their communities. Maintaining this identity may happen in juxtaposition to performing well at school (Flores-Gonzales, 2005; Vigil, 1988, 1999). School credentials and accomplishments though are not valued in gangs. Cultural capital is specific to a given field, and it may not have immediate transferability or value in other fields (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990). An example is when a charismatic Latino male gang leader is shamed and embarrassed in front of his peers by his teacher for incorrect grammar in the classroom. Although, the student is able to influence and inspire his peers with his speeches on the streets through urban vernacular,

that cultural capital is not valuable in the school classroom context (e.g. field) because of the institutionalized middle class values in schools.

The accumulation of cultural capital begins during childhood, when parents and other family members teach the valued cultural cues to their children, for example, about how to understand and properly interact in schools (Bourdieu, 1990). For urban low socioeconomic status Latino male students, their families may not be aware of, or know of, the different values in schools and how to teach their children to acquire and convert cultural capital in the classroom (Kiyama, 2010; Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). Latino families value education, but often put too much trust into educators to make the best decisions for their children. The conversion of cultural capital is necessary to reach high academic achievement to provide academic dividends in the future for students. Latino boys may not perform to appropriate or expected standards for teachers, not because of a lack of ability, but because the cultural capital at home does not mirror the untold teachers' expectations (Huerta, McDonough, & Allen, 2016). Yet, there are also instances where boys must downplay their cultural capital in schools to avoid being teased by peers for high academic achievement and success (Dumais, 2002).

Cultural capital is important because it can be "used to transform aspirations into more valued educational credentials," which help middle and upper-class families maintain their class status (McDonough & Nuñez, 2007, pg. 145). For urban low socioeconomic Latino males, they may not acquire school-valued forms of cultural capital related to college-readiness or may not be taught the long-term value of high academic performance in K-12 (Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014), which will hinder their ability to develop and prepare for college (Huerta, 2015; Mullen, 2010). Although, most urban high schools in the United States typically attempt to transmit career and college information to urban youth during their junior and senior years of high school – this exchange may seem like a waste of time for school counselors – not because of the student

population, but because of the amount of effort to correct and unpack extremely dense and complicated information within a limited window of time to students (Bourdieu, 1986; McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). Also, Latino males' cultural capital may be criticized and deemed suspicious by teachers and school counselors for not being as valued as middle class cultural capital (Flores-Gonzales, 2005).

Generally, first generation low-socioeconomic status Latino parents stress the value of education to their children, but are unable to help their sons navigate the complex and often foreign educational system and the maze of the college preparation process (Attinasi, 1989; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Huerta, 2015; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Thus low-income Latino parents, who are not familiar with the college system, may not be aware of the value of educational credentials as compared to wealthy college-educated parents (McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010) and may stress simply completing high school as a necessary milestone to prepare for the workforce or promote the local community college as they are unaware of institutional differences and prestige.

It is important to mention, the possession of cultural capital does not reflect an individual's intelligence or capability, but simply highlights the "individual's social position" (Lareau, 2011, pg. 362). Lareau's argument is important for us as researchers and educators to help position and rethink how Latino males consider their opportunities and how schools play a role in facilitating opportunities (Huerta, 2015b). And for urban Latino male youth who may be perceived as gang members, Lareau's statement is important because gang youth have the potential and talent, but not the necessary capital to be successful in schools (Huerta, McDonough, & Allen, 2016). The primary culture in public schools has been cultivated and reshaped by teachers and administrators who often nurture and expect middle class or higher socioeconomic status white values, which have historically not accepted the cultural understandings of urban Latino male youth. I contend that there may be

even less understanding of the cultural norms and values for marginalized urban Latino male high school students based on the poorly resourced and underperforming high schools.

## Habitus

When thinking about how urban low socioeconomic status Latino male gang youth consider their future options, I assume they simply doubt being able to dream of reaching adulthood and believe certain high school advanced programs are not "meant for them" either because of their race and gender, or because of their common sense about how schools work. This doubtful attitude may be shaped by deeply held attitudes of "what is possible, impossible, and probable," which shape how students' aspirations evolve in "stratified social orders" (Swartz, 1997, pg. 107). Bourdieu (1990) stated, [individuals shape their aspirations according to concrete indices…of what is and is not 'for us'" (pg. 64). Schools, as organizations, create and shape students' aspirations and expectations. The perceived limitations and pessimism about their future is not a knee-jerk reaction to one day of schooling, but is how low socioeconomic Latino male youth create and perceive their conditions of existence over the course of their educational career. Schools have and continue to track students into various educational opportunities, which impact how habitus is shaped in school settings (Oakes, 2005). Habitus is a matrix of how one views their aspirations and expectations, and how they are shaped to different situations (Bourdieu, 1980, 1986, 1990; Horvat & Davis, 2010). English and Bolton (2016) link the role of habitus to explaining how the "cycles of poverty and negative attitudes toward schooling are perpetuated" (p. 29). Habitus is durable and transposable for urban underresourced neighborhoods, where dreaming big and developing long-term plans is not widely accepted. The attitudes and perceptions are inscribed in a person because of how the community structures reasonable and common sense behaviors of how to be successful within their context and individual environments (Bourdieu, 1980, 1986; English & Bolton, 2016).

Habitus provides an individual the internalized strategies and necessary behaviors to navigate the "maze" of society. For example, a young Latino male in high school knows how to forge a strong relationship with the campus security guards, who may be able to affirm to other school staff the student's intentions of leaving the gang or wanting to prepare for higher education. Children learn by osmosis the habitus of their family and community from a young age and once one's habitus is learned about a particular field (e.g. gang culture versus education systems), it takes a lot of time and effort to override or counter the learning (Bourdieu, 1990; Horvat & Davis, 2010). I use Swartz's (1997) definition of habitus: "involves an unconscious calculation of what is possible, impossible, and probable for individuals in their specific location in a stratified order" in order to move around in the social world (pg. 106-107). Habitus can be understood in these distinct stages: accumulation, activation, conversion, and deployment. One example of activation is when a Latino male avoids other gang neighborhoods because of his own gang affiliations; he consciously and instinctually knows the potential dangers involved in that neighborhood and makes an active effort to avoid jeopardizing his physical safety. For low-income Latino male students, the patterns noted above could shape how one considers themselves as either "gang" or "college material" at a young age, and may be unable to see both options as reasonable pathways.

Within the domain of cultural capital is the formal and informal ways of knowing, as well as a willingness to accept that certain social norms are reasonable and desirable while others are not (Bourdieu, 1986). Habitus helps individuals engage in action and convert a disposition. For example, Latino males may convert their gang cultural capital to academic capital when considering the college-going opportunities and long-term benefits. A supporting example is an urban Latino male gang member converting social and criminal capital. He may stay awake overnight to complete a school writing assignment in an acceptable form of academic capital versus sneaking out of his home to party with peers, using drugs, and writing graffiti in his neighborhood. Both examples

highlight how social and criminal capital are converted and acceptable in specific spaces (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990; Bourgois, 2003; McCarty & Hagan, 1997). The deploying of habitus is a cognitive plan of action that operates in someone's unconscious and conscious state and provides the tools to function in various spaces such as schools, communities, or part-time employment (Horvat & Davis, 2010).

The deploying of capital may allow an underage student to unconsciously convert their cultural capital (e.g. knowledge of buying spray paint for graffiti) to economic capital (selling those cans to peers for a profit). There may be further challenges for urban low socioeconomic status Latino males who have been culturally shaped by their boundaries and expectations of their urban neighborhood (Bourdieu, 1980, 1986; Huerta, et al., 2016). Experiences for urban Latino male youth is guided and influenced by their neighborhood and what are acceptable boundaries to explore and expectations to achieve. Habitus serves to guide the idea of what is "possible, impossible, and probable" for them in schools and future opportunities. Although educators may argue that Latino youth are disobedient and unable to learn, but teachers and counselors may not understand that all groups do not share the same form of habitus, and social and cultural capitals to develop similar goals (Flores-Gonzales, 2005).

The success of the practices enacted by an urban low socioeconomic status Latino male, informed by his habitus, will shape the types of capital-building experiences he obtains. Access to high quality college counselors, rigorous college preparatory courses, developing strong and meaningful relationships with his teachers requires preexisting capital and the ability to use the capital in the correct way. For most students attending alternative high schools their ability to gain access to valued forms of capital are not likely. Counselors, teachers, and others may exclude and restrict access to the valued forms of social and cultural capital to provide an opportunity to reach for higher education. If families are unable to align their capital and habitus to shape postsecondary

aspirations for their sons attending alternative high schools – college-going will not happen – this is not due to a lack of love or concern for their son, but their limited college knowledge (which is intentionally kept hidden) and their ability to convert valued capitals to provide different opportunities. The framework presented in this section pushes the perspectives and practices of the urban low socioeconomic status Latino male students attending alternative high schools and how students' knowledge about gangs and college is understood.

## Is Using Capitals a Deficit Method to Examine Students of Color in the Educational System?

Some argue Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital positions low-income people as the "losers" of capital accumulation and conversion for social mobility (Hinton, 2015; Pearl, 1997; Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) argues Bourdieu only values "white middle class" standards and because low-income people of color do not have as much access to dominant cultural experiences, their culture is not as valuable. Yosso (2005) stresses Bourdieu's work values the capitals of white middle class families as the model for society and how people should act. However, Bourdieu (1973) does not posit one group is superior to other groups, but rather identifies the social groups in power are able to manipulate what capitals are valued in specific fields in order to maintain power over others in their social structure and communities. For example, twenty years ago, graduating high school with near a 4.0 Grade Point Average (GPA) would qualify students for a highly selective and competitive four-year university (e.g. Stanford University). However, the current trends require almost a 5.0 GPA reached by access to many AP and Honors courses, top percentile college entrance exams, and completing and earning high scores in multiple advanced placement courses to be eligible for, but not necessarily assured of, admission to Stanford University. Powerful social groups manipulate the educational field to their benefit particularly when standards are a moving target (McDonough & Miller, 2016; Pearl, 1997).

Pearl (1997) stresses Bourdieu values the "status quo" for maintaining current social conditions for low-income people and states Bourdieu claims higher education is not a valuable tool for social mobility. The U.S. has pushed for increased access to postsecondary education (Griffin & Hurtado, 2010), which help various low-income populations gain the necessary access to two and four-year universities, however not all institutions have the similar social and cultural capital to enable their students to tap into networks for desired career mobility and placement (Lagemann & Lewis, 2012; McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). Similarly, not all colleges and universities have access to the economic capital to provide full scholarships to cover tuition and other institutional expenses (Lagemann & Lewis, 2012;), which impact the most vulnerable students in how they shape their college choice from among the over 7,000 U.S. colleges (Lagemann & Lewis, 2012; Mullen, 2010). These subtle differences in capital are why I stress the importance of dominant and non-dominant forms of cultural capital as some are "worth" more in specific fields and others carry no value in different fields. Again, public K-12 educators expect students to "know" what forms of capital are important (Pearl, 1997), but schools do not equitably distribute various forms of capital to students to accumulate in order to advance their social and economic position (Holland, 2015; Huerta, McDonough, & Allen, 2016; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Lastly, Hinton (2015), Pearl (1997), and Yosso (2005) do not directly address the role of organizations in shaping the accumulation and conversion of capitals nor habitus. Public schools and postsecondary education institutions, also shape "how" students' aspirations and expectations are formed (English & Bolton, 2016; Swartz, 1997). Decades of research show that students' academic goals and dreams of attending four-year colleges and universities have been rerouted into vocational, technical, or community colleges by teachers, counselors, and underresourced schools (Hill, 2008; Holland, 2015; McDonough, 1997; McDonough & Calderone, 2006, Stanton-Salazar,

2001; Valenzuela, 1999). The importance of habitus cannot be understated, but also the impact of organizations in shaping how low-income male students of color are strongly influenced by schools to aspire for various pathways. Bourdieu's concepts of capitals cannot be fully understood without the connection to a person's habitus and field (English & Bolton, 2016; McDonough & Nuñez, 2007; Swartz, 1997). Hinton (2015) argues most capital studies omit field and habitus, which are fundamental to understanding Bourdieu's theories on social reproduction, power, and how schools often are perpetuators of class-based systems that prevent low-income groups from gaining class mobility. For example, when Yosso (2005) critiques Bourdieuian scholars she omits the guiding force of habitus and field, which are seminal components to understand the role and value of capital in various social groups, which validates Hinton's (2015) critique of scholars' misuse and interpretation of Bourdieu.

This dissertation study stresses the importance of field and habitus in understanding how and why students select a specific pathway. This section provided multiple examples of the benefits and strengths of using social and cultural capital as well as habitus to examine the social and educational experiences of Latino boys and young men attending Anderson Behavioral School. The following chapter provides the qualitative tools used to executive the study.

# CHAPTER 4: Methodology

## *Introduction*

There are many advantages of using a single qualitative case study method to explore students' gang and college knowledge in an urban alternative school. Case study methodology allows for an exploration of the nuances of the *how* and *why* 13 Latino male adolescents understand the culture of gangs over the culture of college, or vice versa (Yin, 2014). Researching the subtle differences of an alternative school provides an opportunity to discover the rich context that shape educational opportunities for students in their natural setting (Yin, 2012). The focus of this single case study of Anderson Behavioral School is the student experiences, activities with peers, teachers, counselors, and other school personnel (Yin, 2014). Multiple qualitative data collection tools were used to interpret the local context and processes within the alternative school. Yin (2014) suggests the use of multiple data collection tools to build a comprehensive analysis about a research site. Thus, I use two-part individual semi-structured interviews with 13 participants, 200 hours of participant observations, and 11 student letters addressed to male siblings, nephews, family members, or peers.

This research design is ideal to understand gang and college knowledge as these students were transferred from over 10 distinct feeder high and middle schools from Rock County School District. In each case, a school administrator initiated an expulsion which results in a transfer to Anderson Behavioral School because a student violated a school or district-wide policy related to drug use or possession, violence against a peer or educator, possession of a weapon or graffiti instrument, or some other policy. Moreover, most of the students in this study have long histories of suspensions, expulsions, required parent-teacher conferences, and other disciplinary infractions that draw administrators' attention.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the college-choices processes for Latino male students who attend an alternative school in Rock County School District?
2. How do Latino males in an alternative school use their social and cultural capital related to gang and college knowledge to make postsecondary plans?
3. What is the role of school counselors in supporting and sharing information about postsecondary education with Latino males' in an alternative school?

The following sections of this chapter discuss the research design components. I provide information about the case study methods, participants and research site, data collection strategy, coding and data analysis, researcher subjectivity as well as reflexivity triangulation, and limitations.

## Research Site and Community Context

### Research Site

Anderson Behavioral School (ABS) is a continuation school with fluctuating enrollment that serves anywhere from less than 80 to over 300 students from seventh to twelfth-grade. The students are required to transfer from adjacent and feeder schools from around Rock County School District. High school students are not allowed to graduate from Anderson Behavioral School and thus are required to transfer to a local high school anywhere up to one or two weeks prior to the end of the academic school year. Determining the gender, racial and ethnic, as well as special education status of the student population served at Anderson Behavioral School is difficult to determine due to student enrollments of anywhere from 20 to 60 school days based on their school policy infraction, and thus the enrollment count calculated for the district and state is misleading. During the 2012-2013 academic year, ABS served less than 80 students, which more than half (45) were Hispanic, followed by African Americans (15), White (13), and others (4) (NCES, 2014). About 80 percent of the students during the reporting period were male. The state department of education reported zero

students have an assigned Individualized Education Program (IEP) or qualify for free or reduced lunch. However, during data collection, three ABS student participants reported current or previous IEP and two were receiving services during the school day. Although, the state reported zero students qualified for free and/or reduced lunch, ten of the thirteen study participants were eligible and used the nutrition program.

The ABS buildings are comprised of multiple portable classrooms sectioned into a dedicated middle and high school sections intended to separate the students from interacting. Furthermore, there is an isolated portable classroom outside of the chain-linked fence that was converted into a search and inspection center to ensure students do not have any illegal contraband including pencils, chewing gum, cell phones, weapons, drugs, Chapstick, or other items. Anderson Behavioral School did not allow pencils, chewing gum, and Chapstick and similar items on the campus because of the fear of drug transportation or smuggling. Anderson Behavioral School does not have a library, science laboratories, or an adequate physical education space. The only stationary structures at ABS is the seven-foot chain-link fence, half steel basketball court, and the canopy tent covering the ten plastic and metal lunch tables. On an average school day, students can be seen standing in line waiting to be searched by their teachers and campus resource officers, walking to courses, or running on a shared piece of open grass in their grey and black school uniforms.

## Community Context

Anderson Behavioral School is located in a primarily low-income, Latino, and immigrant community in Rock County School District. Over thirty percent of Rock County School District students are Latinos, as is the county where the school district is located (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). This particular ethnic enclave has a long history of gangs and graffiti crews, concentrated poverty, and white flight to the new suburban developments throughout the city (Miranda, 1997). To further illuminate the community context, I combine U.S. Internal Revenue Service and the U.S. Census

Bureau data to understand the annual income, racial and ethnic demographics, and educational attainment of the local residents, which is located in Table 1.

The Internal Revenue Service (2012) reports the local residents would be considered working-class and lower middle class as 11,749 of 25,433 tax filers reported earning annual incomes between 0 to 25,000 dollars and 8,527 earned between 25,001 to 50,000 in adjusted gross income in 2011, respectively. Furthermore, the U.S. Census Bureau (2009-2013) reports almost 60 percent of the residents identify as Hispanic and Latinos. Although there remains debate about how Latino self-identify their race and ethnicity through U.S. Census Bureau surveys (Golash-Boza & Dartly, 2008) which may cloud the exact percentage, misconceptions based on skin-tone, and experiences of racial discrimination, thus I provide the number of residents who identify as Mexican, which represents 50 percent of the 71,150 citizens in the local community to better understand the cultural, racial, and ethnic composition.

The importance of highlighting the educational attainment in the community is the strong relationships between how and what parents expect from schools (Lareau, 2011). College educated parents feel more entitled to demand their local schools to respond to the individual needs of their children (Lareau, 2011; Lareau & Horvat, 1999), whereas non-college educated parents struggle to request and build relationships with schools for similar services (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Valdes, 1996). As seen in Table 1, less than 16 percent of the community residents have earned a college associates degree or beyond and 34 percent of the community does not have a high school credential or equivalent. There are strong connections between socioeconomic status, level of educational attainment, and community context in influencing which students are better prepared to apply and matriculate to four-year colleges and universities (Engberg & Wolniak, 2010; Klugman, 2014; Lareau, 2011). Students in low-income and underresourced high schools do not experience the same level of support from school counselors to prepare for college (Engberg & Gilbert, 2014). The

combination of various elements about the community and the literature about college access led me select Anderson Behavioral School as the site for my dissertation.

Table 1: Anderson Behavioral School Community Context

| **Household Income (N = 20565)** | **Less than $10,000** | **$10,001 - $14,999** | **$15,000 - $24,999** | **$25,000 - $34,999** | **$35,000 – $49,999** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1,815 | 1,178 | 2,555 | 2,533 | 3,192 |
| **Education 25 and over (N = 40,868)** | **Less than 9th grade** | **9th to 12th grade (no credential)** | **High School Graduate or equivalent** | **Some College** | **Associate or Beyond** |
| | 7,152 | 6,825 | 11,810 | 8,582 | 6,498 |
| **Race (N = 71,150)** | White | Black | Hispanic | Mexican | Other |
| | 45,585 | 5,855 | 42,062 | 35,926 | 7,319 |

Adapted from U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder (2010)

## Access to Research Site

During previous academic school years, I conduced a pilot study at Anderson Behavioral School and Sunridge Alternative School, where Mr. Ruiz, a pseudonym, was the principal. Mr. Ruiz was the third principal in five academic school years and building a relationship with him required significant investment of time and energy to build trust. Prior to dissertation data collection, I spent significant time interacting with the students, teachers, and support staff to learn about the culture of the school, how students were treated, the academic expectations, the lunch provided. During the 2014-2015 academic school year, I refined my dissertation data collection to solely focus on Anderson Behavioral School because of the student population, the emerging concern about suspensions and expulsions for students of color, and the opportunity to examine an alternative continuation school.

## Recruitment

Students were recruited through individual and classroom announcements at the school site. The students were approached and read a script to invite their participation in the research study. I made announcements at the beginning or end of the classroom sessions to invite students to share their social and academic experiences in Rock County schools. When students inquired about the purpose of the study, I responded that the goal was to understand how they collect and receive different information about what to do after high school. Each student who expressed interest in participating in the study was given and explained the assent and consent forms, and then asked to receive signed permission from a parents and/or guardian. As students expressed interest, I would write down each of their names in a notebook and follow up with them in two weeks to determine whether they were going to participate in the study. Altogether I approached and interacted with almost thirty students at Anderson Behavioral School to gauge their interest.

## Study Sample

This study used purposeful sampling to identify 13 Latino male students attending Anderson Behavioral School (Merriam, 2009). The students ages ranged from 14 to 19 years old and a majority of the participants self-identified as Mexican or Mexican American. There were no parameters to the grade level of the participants, and thus students from 7th to 12th grade were a part of the sample. The only set parameters for the study were: (1) self-identify as Latino, (2) be male. There were no parameters for individuals to have previous gang or graffiti crew involvement as the purpose of the study was to understand if students had any familiarity with said groups.

**Table 2: Student Participant**

| Anderson Behavioral School Student Participants | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Name** | **Nationality** | **Age** | **Grade** | **Reason Expelled** | **Gang Embedded** | **Wants to Attend College?** |
| Carlos | Mexican American | 16 | 11 | Drug possession | No | Yes |
| CJ | Mexican and Central American | 19 | 12 | Fighting with student | No | Yes |
| Emanuel | Mexican American | 16 | 10 | Drug possession and vandalism of school property | Yes | No |
| Frank | Mexican American | 17 | 10 | Drug possession and possession of graffiti tools | Yes | Undecided |
| Gabe | Mexican American / Native American | 16 | 10 | Threatened school personnel | Associate | Yes |
| Hector | Central American | 15 | 10 | Drug possession | Associate | Yes |
| Jorge | Mexican American | 15 | 10 | Threatened school personnel | No | Yes |
| Julio | Mexican American / European American | 16 | 11 | Violence against school personnel | Yes | No |
| Manny | Mexican | 15 | 10 | Under the influence of drugs | Associate | Yes |
| Oscar | Mexican American | 17 | 12 | Drug possession | Yes | Yes |
| Rafael | Mexican American | 16 | 9 | Fighting with student | Yes | Yes |
| Ronald | Mexican American | 14 | 7 | Fighting with student | Yes | Yes |
| Santiago | Mexican American | 18 | 12 | Drug possession | No | Yes |

## Data Collection

The data for this study was collected during the 2014-2015 academic year. I used a combination of life histories and semi-structured interviews to understand the students' gang and college knowledge, but also to unmask the educational experiences that lead them to attend a behavioral or continuation school (Seidman, 2013). The literature of students attending alternative or continuation schools focuses on low academic achievement, dilapidated school facilities, and the continued disengagement due to the mistreatment by teachers and other school personnel (Huerta, McDonough, & Allen, 2016; Kelly, 1993; Muñoz, 2006). The purpose of the two interviews was to allow each segment of the students' story to be recorded and understood within the student context (Seidman, 2013). The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The complete interview protocol required each interview to last between 15 to 60 minutes based on the individual responses. The goal of the interviews were to capture rich and nuanced data about gang knowledge, college knowledge and the overall schooling experiences for the students. Often, students attending alternative schools are unable to provide a voice to the structures that are working or need to be changed, and thus the students also had an opportunity to provide their perspectives about how alternative schools can improve the educational experiences to better prepare others for postsecondary education institutions.

## Interviews

The use of in-depth semi-structured interviews allows for the conversation to be adapted to the participants' responses and allows for the new themes to evolve naturally between participant and the researcher (Olson, 2011). The purpose of using interviews is to understand the lived experience of the participants and to learn how they interact with each other on a day-to-day basis. One benefit of using interviews is to understand the nuances of the school culture and expectations. Another benefit is the opportunity to critically examine how educators chose to present or abstain

from sharing postsecondary information with the students. The first interview with each study participant focused on the students' life history, educational experiences, and basic college knowledge (See Appendix A). The students provided basic demographic information, such as where they were born, their IEP status, and who they live with. The second set of questions focused on students' educational experiences such as the first time they were in trouble, career goals, and the level of academic rigor of courses. The third category of questions focuses on college knowledge, the cost and names of local colleges and universities, and which, if any, school personnel shares college information with them. The combination of these protocol topics allow students to identify different moments in their educational history that shaped their behavior and perceptions of how schools use discipline, who and how family members or school personnel share information with the students about postsecondary education, and whether their desired career paths requires advanced education. After the first interview, I listened to each of the audio recordings and made notes to follow up with the participant during the second interview with additional follow-up questions or for clarification about specific items.

The second interview focuses on the students' gang and college knowledge to determine if and how they learned about gang knowledge, what skills if any do individuals in gangs or graffiti crews learn, the steps necessary to prepare and be recruited to a gang, and when they first learned about gangs or graffiti crews (See Appendix B). The college knowledge questions focus on basic information about how to prepare, apply, and finance their postsecondary education. Sample questions include: Can you tell me the different ways people pay for college? Are there different types of college? Not all participants were able to thoroughly answer questions about gang or college knowledge, as some students had no interest in attending postsecondary education institutions or had personal connections to gangs or graffiti crews. This unplanned variation in connections to

gangs and college is important to the study, as the goal was to interview students at different groupings, attitudes, and involvement in gangs and college.

## Participant Observation

Building trust with participants cannot be understated. The students grew accustomed to me waiting with them before they were searched by their teachers in the morning, sitting with them during lunch and mentoring periods, and making efforts to not laugh with them when they make snarky remarks to their peers or educators (Rios, 2011). Similar to Rios (2011), as a participant-observer (See Appendix C), I have an insider-outsider lens to the school and community context because of my short term childhood experiences in Rock County School District. I was a student in the district for two years. As students began to trust me, I was welcomed to observe them in their classroom, nutrition breaks, and class transition period, which allowed for a better understanding of the students' social interactions with peers and educators (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2012). To build comfort and trust with the students attending these schools, I helped male students during their physical education course either with strategies on how to lift weights or during informal basketball games. Also, as a male of color, I recognize the importance that athletics and participating in sports can build commonality with participants. I was able to build trust with the students at the school and with the school staff and administration. However, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, the school staff grew apprehensive towards me during the study. Which, I sought advice and support from Patricia McDonough, my chair, and Walter Allen, who both serve as my mentors for this project. They advised me to be honest that the purpose of my study is to not examine race and racism in schools, but the student experience and how students receive information to plan for the future. The needed reassurance from Drs. Allen and McDonough was necessary as I did not want to fracture my relationship with the school personnel and be asked to leave the campus prior to the completion of data collection. More information about the research and school staff interactions are provided in

Chapter Five. Using these participant observation methods, Yin (2014) reminds researchers about the importance of being aware and mindful of "potential biases" because of the connection the participants and the research site. I write more about my potential biases later in this chapter.

## Student Letter

After the completion of the one or two interviews, the participants were asked to provide a written letter to a male sibling, family member, or peer. The purpose of the letter was to understand what advice they would give a loved one about how to prepare for the future (See Appendix D). Eleven of the thirteen students provided a letter addressed to someone in their lives. The letter was used as a method to triangulate the student experience and to understand what values and messages they shared with someone in their social circles (Bowen, 2009). The letters identify sources of dominant and non-dominant forms of social and cultural capital to a male loved one (Bowen, 2009). Within Latino families, the value of oral "*consejos*" or advice is important in sharing life lessons to avoid potential negative influences (Valdes,1996), thus the students providing written consejos counters the negative stereotypes of boys of color being uncaring, unexpressive, or unwilling to write letters (Howard, 2014).

## Documents / Field Notes

I collected the orientation forms and classroom assignment from one science course that were distributed to the students as forms of institutional documents (Yin, 2014). I also produced field notes about my daily and weekly experiences. These documents serve to corroborate and provide an additional source of data and method to understand the students' social and academic setting (See Appendix E). The orientation package provided basic rules and contact information for the school and Rock County School District. The science teacher was aware of the purpose of my study and he provided copies of various handouts for my review, although I did not request them.

As I reviewed the high school science materials, it was difficult to determine the rigor and placement within the larger district wide curriculum. Although, Yin (2014) states documents are "unobtrusive," which is some settings is true, but the class assignments could cause problems as I would have to ask educators questions about how and why specific documents were selected for the students learning. These questions could have lead educators to foreclose themselves to the line of questions. However, most students commented that the science and other courses were "behind" their traditional comprehensive schools. I did not make an additional effort to solicit course assignments from other teachers as the level of distrust with a majority of the teachers because of the perception I was attempting to capture moment of racism and prejudice.

The field notes helped document the students' daily experiences at Anderson Behavioral School. For example, I would stand in the security line with the students before they were searched, observe their peer interactions, how teachers and counselors engaged students. These notes allowed me to reflect on the student experience, but also document my initial thoughts and perceptions about the language used between students, student to teacher, and vice versa, and student to administrator. Throughout data collection, these notes helped refocus my researcher lens and not verbalize strong reactions to educators as they would state prejudicial and often racist remarks towards students. Lastly, these notes were useful to recall small interactions, which help shed light on the larger nuances of the school culture and student treatment.

**Coding and Data Analysis**

The qualitative coding and analysis phase of this research allowed me to combine the various data collection methods to construct a story and decipher the participants' experiences. This process is slow and challenging, as I attempted to honor the students lived experiences. Initially, each participant interview and collected documents were hand coded using descriptive coding strategy to create categories and subcategories. This process lead to the development of themes (Ryan &

Bernard, 2003; Saldaña, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). A codebook was created on paper with each of the major codes and then thematic coding was used to create larger categories of related codes (See Appendix F). The development of codes based on different fragments or sections of data represents a surface analysis of the data, but also an opportunity for data condensation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Descriptive coding focuses on, "what is talked or written about" and is applicable to multiple research sites and participants, and for social settings that require multiple data collection tools (Saldaña, 2013, pg. 88; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The emerging codes were uploaded to Dedoose 6.2.21 version, an online mixed-methods software package that is password protected. The use of Dedoose 6.2.21 allowed me to easily document the emerging themes that guided my data analysis. Using an inductive and deductive process allowed the data to emerge and create themes, and frame the theory guiding the dissertation so that Bourdieu and Coleman's theory of social and cultural capital, as well as habitus played a role in framing the coding and the data analysis (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013). Data analysis was a multistep process that requires data to be condensed and cleaned for a fresh understanding of the participants' experience (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013; Seidman, 2013).

### Researcher subjectivity, reflexivity, and triangulation

After each interview, I wrote reflexive field notes about my thoughts and feelings as means of exploring and checking my subjectivity (Olson, 2011). This exercise helped me process each interview, and channeled my own educational experiences as a former juvenile gang member attending underresourced schools in Rock County School District. It is important for me to be thoughtful with my research process to not try to unconsciously answer questions through the lens of my own negative experiences with school educators. The reflective process was especially important because I witnessed the regular mistreatment of students by teachers, administrators, and school personnel. I needed a space to make sense of what I was observing and how it impacted me

as a male of color in research process. The reflexivity process established credibility and heightens the validity of the findings (Olson, 2011). I analyzed the data and searched for possible interpretations or emerging themes to increase objectivity and influence later data analysis.

### Member checking

Member checking is a staple of the qualitative process. The goal of member checking is to help increase the validity and trustworthiness of the data collected (Merriam, 2009). When working with vulnerable and marginalized populations through the research process, it was important to me to develop relationships and trust. Hallett (2012) suggests considering the emotional and spiritual needs of the participants before sharing the researcher's perspective of the subject's life experiences, conditions, and potential future outcomes. Hallett asks researchers to consider how would a fragile adolescent respond to a researcher predicting he or she is going to fail because the participant's family does not support him? After interacting and developing relationships with the student participants, I did not member check with the student participants in an effort to protect their egos and development. My duty is to protect the well-being of the students. This qualitative tool is important to ensure validity of the methodology, but other qualitative case study tools were used to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research site (Yin, 2014).

### Limitations

As with all qualitative work, the findings from this paper are not generalizable to other high schools, student populations, or geographic regions, however I anticipate that my findings will shed light on the challenges that specifically impact the Latino male students at some urban alternative schools (Schofield, 2001; Yin, 2012). A major limitation of this study was the transient nature of the school, as students could be present for one of the two interviews, and then be unexpected transferred from Anderson Behavioral School to a traditional comprehensive school. This constant

transferring caused additional hurdles in recruitment of new students, as I would have to build trust with each cohort of students who were recently transferred to Anderson Behavioral School each week. An unexpected limitation of this study was the distrust between the school educators and me, which challenged my ability to build relationships with the educators to really learn their perceptions of the students' post-high school opportunities.

# CHAPTER 5: Findings

## *Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to use the lenses of social and cultural capital, as well as habitus to understand how information is gained, understood, and used about gangs and colleges for Latino male students attending an alternative school in Rock County School District. This study was guided by the following research questions: (1) What are the college-choices processes for Latino male students who attend an alternative school in Rock County School District? (2) How do Latino males in an alternative school use their social and cultural capital related to gang and college knowledge to make postsecondary plans? (3) What is the perceived role of school counselors in supporting and sharing information about postsecondary education from the perspective of Latino males' in this alternative school? The case study is informed by data gathered from 13 semi-structured individual interviews, over 150 hours of participant observations, and 11 student letters with primarily low-income Latino male students attending an urban alternative school that serve seventh to twelfth grade to understand their personal and schooling experiences connected to gangs and college knowledge. I chose to organize this chapter into a single case study to share the stories of these 13 Latino boys and young men. The case study provides a narrative of the school culture and then is organized into three parts focused on their personal experiences: (1) college knowledge, (2) gang knowledge, and (3) their hopes and plans for the future. I begin by focusing on Anderson Behavioral School, a school that serves primarily Black and Latino male youth in a predominately Hispanic immigrant, low-income, and working class community. The next section of this chapter describes the Anderson Behavioral School, the setting for the study.

## Anderson Behavioral School

### Getting in on campus

When I first approached students at Anderson Behavioral School to introduce my reasons for visiting their campus, I was cautioned and questioned by the students and the school staff and administration for wanting to be at a school for "fuckups and losers". The staff used other coded language to describe my choice. They said things like, "*these kids* are going to big boy jail," "*these kids* don't want to go to college," or "This generation of Mexicans are lazy compared to their parents." The school staff asked how and why I found their school in Rock County and were confused by my UCLA affiliation such as "You go to *the real* UCLA?" Throughout data collection, which spanned over two academic years, the teachers and school support staff regularly sized me up to try determine my "real" intentions of being at their school and why I would want to meet and research kids who have been suspended, expelled, and not on the obvious pathway to higher education. During one class session, a teacher paused during her lecture to ask me the purpose of the study in front of the students and I responded with, "I want to learn how students learn about what to do after high school." She dedicated over five minutes asking additional questions in an attempt to "stump me," after she was satisfied with my responses, she returned to her lecture. I now believe the educators and support staff was trying to determine if I was a school district informant trying to reveal their regular mistreatment of the students. There were multiple occasions when I had to publicly restate that the goals and purpose of my dissertation was not to investigate racism or their treatment of the students. On one occasion, I received a phone call and voice mail from a school administrator wanting to clarify a rumor they heard from one of the high school teachers. I listened to the voice mail and promptly called the administrator back to inquire about the concern, the voice mail message was: "One of my teachers said you heard racist comments from another teacher, and I need to follow up." As I listened attentively to the administrator, I stood frozen and confused

because I had not shared any of my observations, notes, or preliminary analysis with anyone at the site. I told the administrator, "That rumor is not true. One, because I haven't seen or heard anything, and two, I'm not sharing any preliminary findings with anyone until I am done with my dissertation." The administrator felt reassured, and asked for me to speak at the next faculty meeting the following week. Many thoughts and concerns ran through my mind as I worried about being asked to leave for being disruptive at their school and being unable to complete my dissertation. Luckily, I reached out my dissertation chair and mentor for advice the same day. Although, I did not disclose this to the school administrator, the school staff did in fact regularly made racist and prejudicial comments towards the students, their families, and the community that including, "Black people are entitled," "I can't be racist and teach at *this* school," "this generation of Mexicans are lazy compared to their parents…they just want free handouts, cellphones, housing, and computers all the time" or "the students don't know the difference between racism and prejudice."

There was little trust between the school staff and myself. I would regularly leave Anderson Behavioral School (ABS) feeling frustrated, dejected, and burnt out from the student stories, and worrying about whether I would be asked to leave their campus. I made all efforts to not be the central focus of the classroom time and tried regularly to avoid conversations with educators about my perceptions of the school, teaching, and students, but educators would interrupt their teaching to ask me, "What do you think?" "Tell me about yourself?" "Why do you think some Mexicans or Hispanics don't make it?" or "What do you think is wrong with these students?" I would answer, "My reason for being here is to understand the student experience and what they want to do after high school." Sometimes my answer would be sufficient and other times; the teacher would stop, stare, and wait for me to provide a proper response to their inquiry.

In another instance, a school leader told me, "Our students get confused easily," implying the students are incapable of complex thoughts, possess the ability to behave appropriately, or use

accepted language while at school. The students actively chose to use their non-dominant cultural capital in the alternative school field because there are limited consequences for not following school rules.

As I reflect on my experiences at Anderson Behavioral School, I have concluded that the teaching and student interactions I observed, and the access to college information match the condition of the portable classrooms at the school – dilapidated. When I would ask students, educators, and support staff, why the school pedagogy, environment, and buildings were not in better condition, the common response was, "this is behavioral school." This response meant that behavioral schools by definition have lowered expectations, fewer opportunities to learn about college, and students who have been the most marginalized in the educational system—that these students do not deserve better educational experiences.

*The Transfer and Orientation Process*

It is important to understand how students ended up attending this school. The process is quite simple, when a students was expelled from their home school, they are transferred to Anderson Behavioral School as part of the public school system. The students in my study were suspended for one or more of the following policy infractions: (1) acts or threats of violence against a student or educator, (2) drug use, distribution, or possession, and (3) vandalism or destruction to school property with graffiti instruments. Some students believed the expulsion and transfer to Anderson was fair and others commented the school overacted and that the transfer was unwarranted especially for the students with drug use or possession charges. For example, Manny, "I would just [go to school] high and then I was around the school when I smoked, so that's not allowed, so then I got expelled. It's nothing really big and I think it's dumb." The students commented that the transfer process from their home school to Anderson ranged from five to ten school days, or longer. Julio shares his frustration with the transfer delay, "I had A's and B's too but

they kicked me out for minutes [a long time], so my grades started dropping so now I got lower grades cause I haven't been in school for so long." Students shared their home school administrators did not promptly send their paperwork to Anderson, other students challenged the transfer and expulsion process with their home school, or the parents could not arrange a meeting with the administration to quickly come to terms with the expulsion and transfer. From field notes, a teacher shared that some parents struggled to attend required expulsion meetings or would try to petition the expulsion to a suspension, which caused students to be out of school longer. A school teacher later confirmed the transfer process should only take "10 days max, but most parents can't get it together to meet with the school."

From the study participants' perspectives, the transfer process was sometimes quick and other times long, which meant their school grades dropped or their unexcused absences increased because an administrator at their home school did not "freeze" their school files and attendance records as mentioned by Julio earlier. The decreased academic standing can impact a students' college prospects as he will need to work twice as hard to improve his grades or could result in students' becoming more disengaged with school because of the lack of attention by school administrators, who did not "freeze" their files. So it was not uncommon to hear students say their current grades at Anderson are "D's and F's" and before they were "B's" "C's and D's." I chose not to clarify the disparities between students and teachers about the perception about the transfer and grade process because of my fear the school would believe I would report them to the district. So, I did not inquire with the school registrar about reviewing students' academic records, although I had permission to do so from the school district.

After the students transfer paperwork was processed, they were required to attend a school orientation facilitated by an administrator and an administrative assistant. The administrator required students and their parents or guardians to arrive at 7:30 in the morning and hear about the social and

behavioral expectations of the school. During the 30-plus minute orientation, he lectured the parents and students for making "bad choices" and said that the students should not become people with limited education in "low-skill positions – cleaning up dog poop, making beds, construction," which probably represented a majority of the parents and guardians in the portable classroom. Some parents would nod in agreement and most looked defeated. The parents' body language varied from angry and frustrated to tired. The weight of having to manage their kid's behavior and possible challenges at home seemed magnified in that moment. I am mindful that in this city, some parents work all night in a casino or other service industry, and may have only had time to change their clothes and listen to how their son's bad choices could and will impact their lives.

The administrator went on to say, "I grew up with nothing and my father was a drunk…I would carry him from the bar to our home…unless you are the one percent you have to work for everything you have!" He would regularly talk about his experiences growing up on the U.S./Mexico border with a dysfunctional family and having many family members in low-paying occupations to students individually and during the orientation meetings, but he "wanted more [from life]…to be in a life of luxury" or what he considered to be middle class in the U.S. He paced from one side of the classroom to the other trying to "motivate" students and their family to move into a better position of controlling their "anger" and not "throw your opportunities into the trash." In another orientation session, he told the students and their parents, "Society has rules…you need to follow rules…kids are getting shot by the police for not following the rules!" The administrative assistant sat quietly in the corner of the room silently typing on a keyboard, she rarely spoke during his presentation. Some students looked scared about being Anderson Behavioral School. The reputation of the school had mixed reviews because some students have shared the school was "easy now" compared to past years, where the students had to march and walk in single file lines. Now, the high school students have more autonomy in being able to independently walk from one

classroom to another, even though they still have to file into line when eating lunch or waiting for the restroom. Lastly, during the orientation the students and parents were not verbally informed of the search process. When I asked Ronald about the orientation, he commented about the administrator, "He talks about anger and all that, but, I think he has more anger than all of us." Students regularly shared their perceptions of the school administrator as angry. During my time on campus, he would yell, berate, and belittle the students with comments about their appearance, their behavior in school, and their possible life outcomes of being incarcerated or living on welfare. In one instance, he stood behind me and yelled at top of his lungs at six students for violating the five-person seating policy during nutrition break. This policy was loosely enforced throughout data collection by the school administrator and campus resources officers, and I believe it was an opportunity to demonstrate his power and control over the students (field notes).

*Entering Campus*

The school day starts at 9AM which is later in the morning compared to traditional comprehensive schools that start at 7AM. The later start time was never clearly explained, but possibly the later time was to prevent students from engaging with their peers at the comprehensive schools. Some students walked and other were bussed from around the city to Anderson Behavioral School. All students were required to wear a variation of a school uniform that included black / dark shoes, black slacks, and a gray polo shirt. The students were not allowed to bring more than five dollars to school each day. They are not allowed to bring a cell phone, ChapStick or Carmex, wear makeup, jewelry, facial or large ear piercings, only naturally colored hair, lead pencil, or backpacks to school. Students are not allowed to being their cell phones to prevent theft, fighting, or listening to music or watching YouTube videos. The rationale for banging ChapStick and Carmex lip balm is because of the administration's fear of drugs being smuggled in the tubing or marijuana THC being embedded in the Carmex lip balm, and jewelry, facial, and large earrings were banned because of the

fear of fighting or theft over expensive items, and the items may become a distraction in the classroom. Lead pencils and backpacks could be used to smuggle drugs or any of the other unpermitted items into the school. If a student is found with any unauthorized items, they were confiscated and held until a parent visited the school to retrieve the item(s), or were held until the end of the school year.

Before students were allowed to enter the premises, they stand in a single-file line outside of a portable classroom dedicated to searching and confiscating any unauthorized contraband. The students regularly "talked shit" to each other or joked with the educators who were keeping guarding the students as they were in line. In field notes, Julio commented that other younger students would act tough and attempt to show off during the security line. He and the other gang embedded students would mock the younger students because of their lack of experiences in "real" juvenile correctional facilities. As the students were signaled to enter the portable classroom, they were required to remove their shoes, socks, and belts. The students' clothing items were checked by an educator to ensure no drugs were tucked into their shoes or socks. Once the students passed the first checkpoint, they stood in a two foot by two-foot masking tape square on the floor, and patted down by a school security officer to ensure no other contraband was found, and a metal detector wand was regularly used on each student.

Once the students cleared the second checkpoint, they were allowed to put their socks, shoes, and belts back on, and then walked toward a long table, where they were asked their identification number to locate their school folder. The folder assignment and distribution is an odd experience to observe as young men and women are not assigned any homework during the week. Over the first few weeks of observing the search process, one teacher turned to me and said he was preparing students for "big kid jail." And other times, educators would tease and try to provoke students to the point of student getting angry and frustrated, especially if the student could not

remember their exact folder identification number. The students would use profanity in response, "Come on, what the fuck man? Leave me alone" and would quickly be reprimanded by the educator for their use of profanity or inability to take a joke. At the fourth checkpoint, the student were patted down once more before being allowed to formally enter the campus and eat the school provided breakfast. From observations and field notes, the final pat down was to ensure the student did not somehow smuggle items into the school, but to also ensure the students uniforms met dress code. The complete process ranged anywhere from 15 to 35 minutes and varied based on the number of students in attendance, but also on the number of school staff members available to perform the search process.

*Morning Mentoring*

A little more than 30 minutes of the morning is dedicated to "mentoring," where the students are supposed to sit with each other and mentor each other. The mentoring class is supposed to build social skills, reflect on past behaviors, and improve life opportunities, but this time usually meant seeing the teachers congregated together, checking in with each other about the last evening's dance or singing competition television show, asking each other why a specific student looks tired or irritated, and allowing the students to group together and talk "bullshit" about their previous evening frustrations, escapades with their girlfriend or hook-up, the last time they smoked marijuana, or drank alcohol.

The mentoring class provide little to no academic or social enlightenment during my time observing the Anderson Behavioral School students. Often, I would sit with the students and listen to their stories of overconsuming drugs or alcohol, or fighting to defend their gang or graffiti crews from rivals. Other times, the students would "flame," each other, when students' trash talked each other about the number of sex partners, crimes, or who possessed the best marijuana. After a few weeks, one teacher began to provide worksheets about life plans and goals to their students during

the mentoring class. Once the worksheets were in the hands of the student, Gabe, a sophomore in the study, without hesitation called out the teacher in front of the entire class, "Mr. Smith, (a pseudonym) why you faking it in front of mister [the researcher] about the worksheet? It says sheet 191, we never did 1 – 190?!?" The teacher's face turned beet red and his monotone voice responded, "Gabe, simmer down and do your worksheet!" The other students who heard Gabe began to laugh and nod in agreement about the life goals worksheet being a joke and an attempt to seem productive in front of the researcher.

On several occasions, the students would not do work in their courses, not to be disobedient or because they were not invested in their education, but because they had completed similar assignment or reviewed the same curriculum months before at their previous traditional comprehensive schools. The students were very aware the academic work at Anderson Behavioral School was "dumbed down" and when they felt compelled to complete the schoolwork, they would do so quickly and unchallenged. Manny stresses that the quality of work is, "Easier, hella easier… just do nothing…that's the only thing that I like about this [school] they give a paper [and] you do it…and that's the only thing I like." The school curriculum at ABS will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Before the bell rang to finish the mentoring class, Mr. Ramirez shared various announcements related to the week. Some students were eager to hear the announcements because it could include an announcement that some students were to be released at the end of the week. Mr. Ramirez was sure to remind the students that many "would not" be released before the end of the academic year for multiple reasons. The announcement reminded me of the movie *Shawshank Redemption* when the warden regularly reminded the prisoners, "You're here for the long run."

*Interacting with the Dean of Students*

During the early phases of data collection at ABS, I was able to touch base periodically with Mr. Ramirez before he entered his office or different classrooms to talk with a teacher. I would ask him informal policy and practice related questions about the school such as, "If student X violates this rule, what are the outcomes? How often do parents visit the school? What programs or resources are available to the students who have mental health needs?" The intent of these questions were an effort to understand the school culture and whether the school was interested in serving their students with off-campus services, and also to build rapport with him.

In the classroom, Mr. Ramirez repeated his recent intercom announcement to the students and staff, and shared, "behaviors, grades, and attendance [matter]…if you want to be released this Friday…if you do not follow the rules, you'll start again at this school this fall." Throughout my time at this school, Mr. Ramirez and I would talk about discipline, why students arrived at Anderson Behavioral School, and specific students who would be referred to his office for being disruptive in their classes.

Although, I did not ask him directly about equity and disproportionate suspensions of students of color, he started talking about school wide racism, "Racism? (Deep belly laugh)...Latinos write on the walls [do graffiti] and show PDA (public displays of affection) and is a cultural foundation and that's how we are as a people. Schools do not know how to respond to it [the students' graffiti and PDA in school]." I did not respond to his claims that Latinos are over suspended because of graffiti and PDA. I listened and said, "Thanks for the clarification, that's something for me to think about more as I'm here." He was a teacher in another state before moving to Rock County School District and where he taught for a few years before becoming an administrator at Anderson Behavioral School for last three years. He mentioned he earned a

Master's degree in Education from a private for-profit institution. Ronald described his view of Mr. Ramirez like this:

> He abuses his power…I sort of feel that to me… it was windy and we didn't feel like holding the folders and [one time Mr. Ramirez] comes and tells everybody [at my table to] stop [playing with our folders], and he comes and smacks the folders, and the folders went flying [everywhere]!

Ronald's example of Mr. Ramirez may seem a little extreme, though in other sections of this chapter, I highlight how Mr. Ramirez would, without warning, scream very loudly at students for minor transgressions. A countering example is provided by Jorge, who mentioned Mr. Ramirez did not increase his stay at Anderson Behavioral School after a suspension and may consider contacting Jorge's previous high school, so he can return:

> [Mr. Ramirez] was like…I was trying to talk to him [and] I asked him to talk to [my last high school], he didn't offer but I brought it up, so he was like, "yeah," he wasn't really like in a denial sort of tone, I guess, kind of said, "Yeah, just do good and I got you."

Mr. Ramirez would often interact with Jorge to discourage him from creating additional classroom challenges. Jorge would constantly act out in his classes during the day at Anderson Behavioral School. Mr. Ramirez may have provided a type of optimism for Jorge by using the words "good" and "I got you" in an attempt to decrease complaints from Jorge's teacher. Jorge's behavior in the classroom maintained steady after this conversation with Mr. Ramirez, yet he would continue to talk loudly in other class, disrupt his teachers, and not complete his assignments. It is not clear whether Mr. Ramirez advocated for Jorge to return to his previous high school or met with Jorge privately in his office to encourage him to calm down. This last example of Mr. Ramirez is important to understand the complexity of managing student relationships, but also trying to maintain structure for the students to not continue to disrupt the classroom.

*Moving from classroom to classroom*

Once the school bell rang, the students would walk slowly to their next classroom. From field notes, the teachers would stand near their classroom doors and yell at students to "hurry up" and students did not physically demonstrate an urgency to enter their class quickly. The security officers would yell and threaten the students with "referral for tardiness," which did not increase the students' quickness up the steps to the classroom. The students shared they and their parents had little input on their school schedule. Gabe shares his experience, "I don't know [how I was assigned to the classes]…they just put me in whatever they want to put me in." The students were enrolled in courses that met their academic requirements to graduate from high school, but were not sufficient or at the level to be rigorous and competitively eligible for admission into a selective four-year college or university. None of the courses at ABS were categorized as college preparatory, honors, or advanced placement. At times, the math and science courses blended multiple subject areas in the same class session, so it was not uncommon to hear fragments of pre-algebra, algebra, and geometry discussed with the students in the same classroom setting. In one math classroom, the problems for the day had already been solved by the teacher and provided on the white board, so the class assignment was to copy and turn in the completed problems for daily course credit. My study participants shared that they were frustrated about having to copying the problems on the white board to earn daily credit. Some students did copy without challenging the teacher, and others grew angry and resentful during math class because of the content of the assignment, but they knew that earning fewer daily credits meant longer stays at ABS. Carlos was not happy with the quality of learning in his courses:

> For math they will write up the problems on the board, we will just copy them and I do three problems, I do like 15, all the rest [of the answers that] are given to us… I feel like it's easier than like regular public school, here they just give you a piece of paper and make you do it, they do teach you…but it's not like the same!

Julio describes unfair treatment from his PE teacher, which results in longer stays at Anderson Behavioral School.

> Oh, I'll just be working out and then the black fools be talking shit to each other, then [the teacher] tells me to "shut up." I'm not even talking - I'm working out - And then he gives me like twos and fours and lowers my points. I'm like, "you got me fucked up." He's stupid. And then, I'll be like "Why did I get a two?" and he says, "Oh, 'cause you wasn't working out." I respond, "I work out every day" and then he's like, "If you got a problem, bring your dad up here.

The P.E. teacher is aware Julio will not inform his father of the conflict because it will require Julio's father leaving work early in an attempt to advocate for his son. During observations, Julio would teach other students how to lift various weights and perform different muscle building exercises. He would regularly be reprimanded for other students' misbehavior, so from my observations Julio's claims of "you got me fucked up" is accurate. The P.E. teacher would harass Julio, but Julio does not have an advocate on campus to support him. For most low-income workers, like his parents, leaving work is expensive as most hourly positions do not provide paid time off (Lareau, 2011). This subtle, but targeted behavior by the teacher can cause further student frustration with the school and results in distrust of educators who can hassle students with little recourse.

*Classroom Experiences*

A supportive teacher, Mr. Johnson, a teacher with less than five years of teaching experience in Rock County School District, made many efforts to utilize various pedagogical approached to engage the students through PowerPoint, handbooks, videos, and other activities to encourage students' interest in science. The students seemed receptive to his teaching style and curriculum. He reassured them the course material would be relevant to prepare them for the next academic year. Although some students commented they had already covered the course material at their previous schools, they were not disruptive. In other classes, students would exercise, do pushups, throw papers at each other, talk shit to each other, and disrupt and disrespect the teacher throughout the

entire class section. In Mr. Johnson's class, he showed and expected mutual respect from the students, he later commented, "I don't judge the students, I don't know why they're here, but my job is to teach them science." He received multiple teaching offers from selective public magnet and academy schools closer to his home, but he felt compelled to be in a school that "needed him." He seemed committed to teaching students and very infrequently would raise his voice or threatened students with a referral to the administration office. The students felt comfortable in his classroom, which may be a result of the students sharing facts they have actually "really learned" in his classroom. Carlos shares his thoughts about the science course:

> I have learned a lot about earthquakes and all that stuff...there is a teacher that actually teaches you…about stuff that's happening now, you get me? I feel like I have learned a lot about [science in] this past three weeks. It was important to me because I like how the earth works, I don't know…it's just interesting to me. I like to learn about how the earth works, all that, the earthquakes, tsunamis and all that.

Julio shared similar comments about his experiences in science: "Yeah, science. 'Cause, like, you learn about what's going around, like the world and stuff. You get to learn about animals and plants and humans and what goes on in your body and stuff." When I asked the students if they felt Mr. Johnson cared about them as students, they didn't know how to respond and instead would focus on the curriculum and what they learned. The students did not act out in the science course and maybe this is related the teaching style and being shown how science is a part of their daily lives. In other classrooms at Anderson Behavioral School, the high school teachers seemed comfortable using the referral to the administration office as a method to "control" the students. Most students responded to the ideal threat with "I don't give a fuck…I've been locked up…that shit [the referral] don't scare me." I witnessed the referral threat happen multiple times a day throughout data collection. At times, some students would simply walk out of class when they grew frustrated with

the teacher dismissing or challenging them in front of their peers, and the teacher would quickly use their walkie-talkie to radio for campus resource officer or administrative support.

Some students attending Anderson have long histories including drug possession or distribution, violence or threats against teachers and fellow students, destruction of property (graffiti vandalism), and other school-based policy infractions, so a referral is not meaningful in comparison to other punishment they might have received. In one instance, Julio a Mexican American eleventh grade student told a teacher, "I don't give a fuck…my dad will kick your ass…he's been locked up and doesn't give a fuck either," and was sent to the office to sit and wait for a parent. Julio's mother' arrived at the Anderson campus seemingly annoyed with Julio's recent antics; she was at home caring for a sick elderly loved one. Julio's mother's first words to him were, "What did you do now?" and "Your dad's going to kick your ass!" Julio's bravado seemed quickly subdued by the realization that his mother left the elderly loved one alone. In this instance, it seemed the referral worked in momentarily changing his behavior, but he returned to school the following day with a similar "I don't give a fuck" attitude towards school. Most students presented a similar attitude and façade at school.

Always when I walked over to the P.E. area, the smell of methane gas overwhelmed me. I gagged and wondered where and why such a stench was present while the P.E. teacher chuckled to himself. After he stopped smiling and laughing, he pointed to the drain and said, "That's the open sewage drains – you'll get used to it." I looked around the P.E. area which included a half-basketball court on black asphalt, a tether ball stand, and a portable classroom with checkers and other board games, a broken weight machine and a mix of rusted weights. The students were given daily academic credit for playing checkers or tetherball. The students were later tested on health and hygiene, although the teacher did not provide any formal lessons. Throughout my time at the school, I didn't witness any lessons or dedicated curriculum focused on student hygiene, obesity, how to

maintain a healthy lifestyle, or anything remotely educationally related to physical education. The students accepted the P.E. class for what it was, and opportunity to play basketball, relax, or workout unsupervised. The teacher rarely engaged the students in their physical activities or provided techniques on how to work out. When they were inside the classroom, he sat behind his desk and stared at his screen and when he was outside, he heckled the students or stood quietly and watched them play sports.

When I requested a student to interview, the P.E. teacher, Mr. Thompson, called a student by his name and then said; "He [the researcher] wants to talk to you about your crimes!" Never once did I tell the teachers I was researching the relationships to gang and college knowledge, but he often made derogatory statements to the students. I would ask students, "Is he [the P.E. teacher] like that all the time?" and the regular response was a passive, "Yeah." The students didn't get mad and seemed to merely accept Mr. Thompson for his uncaring and abusive personality. Julio did not care for Mr. Thompson and would challenge his brash personality with comments under his breath, "Fuck that guy!" "My dad can kick his ass, too!" "Fucking *güero*." The P.E. teacher did not care for the students and it was obvious to them.

These vignettes of the daily social and academic experiences for the students at Anderson Behavioral School helps to explain how the school culture is experienced by the students and presented by the teachers. It also shows how Anderson Behavioral School contributes to the social reproduction of low academic achievement for my study participants (Bourdieu, 1990; English & Bolton, 2016; Nygreen, 2013).

One goal of high school is to prepare students for graduation and are unable to meet the academic needs of their students to be fully prepared for postsecondary education (Conley, 2005). The Anderson Behavioral School culture plays a powerful role in the lives of the students in how they learn to distrust educators and how curriculum does not prepares them for postsecondary

education in the future (Conley, 2005). The following section lays the foundation to understand what factors and influences caused the students to be suspended and expelled from traditional comprehensive schools and be transferred to Anderson.

## Individual Profiles of Students Attending Anderson Behavioral School

What are the past social and academic experiences that led the students in this study to behavioral schools? Fighting with teachers? Using and selling drugs in school? Fighting with peers? Each of the students share the experience of violating one or more school disciplinary policies that lead to their eventual transfers. In this section of the chapter, I share individual student narratives.

### *Jorge*

I begin with Jorge, a 15-year-old Mexican American, who was expelled for threating a teacher. He claims the teacher overacted to him "having a balled up fist" as he walked toward the teacher after getting in trouble for walking into the girl's bathroom. Jorge is not gang embedded, although believes if he joined a gang he would be a leader because of his "don't give a shit" attitude. At Anderson, he frequently sought to be the center of attention from teachers, peers, and other school personnel by telling jokes, yelling, cussing in class, or "flaming" other students (targeted disrespectful jokes). His father was never actively involved in his life, and only recently they became Facebook friends. Jorge says they have only interacted a handful of times over the last twelve-years. He claims the limited relationship with his father does not bother him and is "whatever." However, throughout the interview he mentioned the lack of male figure to discuss his life and his future goals, but shares the strong presence of his mother in his life, "My mom is a strong woman… she won't try to bring me down, she is going to just keep uplifting me, she is a big help in my life. Yeah, [I'm] thankful [for her]". His doctor diagnosed him with ADHD and anxiety, but he refuses to use the prescriptions and instead prefers to use marijuana to calm himself down after a long day at

school. Jorge does not qualify for free or reduced lunch because his mother "makes too much money" working in a supervisory role in a casino housekeeping area. But throughout my time at the school, I noted that he could not afford to purchase lunch or snacks at schools. He frequently pleaded with peers and school staff for chicken nuggets, bites of bean burritos, chips, milk through comments such as "You gonna eat that?," "Let me getta bite of that," "Man, that looks *good*" or "You gonna throw that away?" At one point, the school cafeteria staff felt empathic towards him and provided him lunch after all the other students were served, but he quickly frustrated the staff by telling his peers, "Look, I got FREE lunch!" The staff felt disrespected and fooled by his seeming mockery of them so they did not offer him any additional meals. He spent the rest of the academic term trying to hustle students for leftovers.

Jorge's mother is the only person in his family and extended family to graduate from high school. His sister dropped out in between her sophomore and junior of high school to search for employment to help support their mother. These brief snapshots of Jorge's life shed some light of the various internal and external tensions that may led to his frequent disciplinary issues in school:

> I've been a behavioral student since kindergarten, I always get in trouble…but it's not like, 'he is fighting', because whenever I did fight, it was on the low, it would be in the bathroom or something, but I never got caught…
> I was getting in trouble for stupid things, talking, talking back to teachers, what else? Walking out of class, just regular dumb things, because I got to go to the bathroom and they [the teachers] refused [to give me permission], it's like regular things, no major things like Oh! I am cussing at a teacher, I will cuss at [the] class and stuff, I get in trouble - not constant but a good rate but just easy things. I don't know…*this one big thing* [threatening the teacher] *that occurred to them, 'All right, this kid with his record, he always gets in trouble, so why wouldn't he do that, of course* [he would threaten a teacher]'.

Similar to other students in this study, Jorge possesses non-dominant cultural capital, which allows him to develop credibility and relationships with his ethnic peers (Carter, 2003). However, it conflicts with the dominant cultural capital valued in schools about how to act and behave properly in schools settings, use appropriate manners, and language with educators and other school personnel (Barrett & Martina, 2012; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Students

like Jorge have limited credibility with their school educators and teachers, who are influenced by their perceptions of students' academic grades, school location and resources, race, gender, and behavior in school (Holland, 2015).

Coleman (1986) stresses that relationships and opportunities shared by an educator to students is predicated on mutual exchange and trust, and this trust will inspire a counselor to connect a student to college-affiliated people. So when Jorge describes himself as "This kid with his record, he always gets in trouble, so why wouldn't he do that [threaten an educator], of course," it aligns with the power dynamic of dominant and non- dominant forms of cultural capital, but also the student's habitus. *These kids don't get the benefit of the doubt.* For four of the thirteen students the study, this was their first time attending ABS (Carlos, Hector, Jorge, and Manny) and the other students had two or more experiences at ABS and other alternative schools throughout the district for similar or other school discipline infractions (CJ, Emanuel, Frank, Gabe, Julio, Oscar, Rafael, Ronald, and Santiago).

*Rafael*

Rafael, a 16-year-old Mexican-American, freshman has attended many alternative schools before arriving at Anderson. He was born in the U.S. and both of his parents were born in Mexico, and he qualifies for free and reduced lunch. He does not remember if this is his second or third time at Anderson, but was recently expelled for fighting at school because he retaliated against a classmate who stabbed him with a pencil, but the other classmate had a clean disciplinary record and was not suspended or expelled, which further angered Rafael. Rafael's memory has gradually diminished over the years due to the overuse of Xanax, marijuana, and the combinations of drugs and alcohol since he began partying with his sibling and brother-in-law and gang friends in a local drug "trap" house. Rafael, along with his brothers, have been members of a local Latino gang for over one year and the gang has a long history of violence in the community. Rafael followed the lead

of his younger siblings and joined the gang in order to help protect his brothers from any gang rivals. Although he has failed a few academic grades and a low grade point average, he has ambitions of attending a four-year college to study either engineering or architecture.

Rafael's father works in construction and his mother works in the service industry. His father regularly travels out of state with his construction company, and his mother works odd hours for a national discount and housewares department store. He has a bald head, dark skin, and low voice, and primarily keeps to himself at Anderson and completed his work quietly. He regularly avoided engaging in arguments with the teachers or goofing off in class with peers at school. He does not like to garner attention and wants to ensure he is released soon or early because he does not like the school or wearing a uniform. He is conflicted as he wants to attend college, wants to leave the gang, but feels a deep commitment to protecting his siblings. His relationship with teachers at Anderson and his previous school were inconsequential as he seemed uninspired by their efforts, teaching, and information shared about college. Rafael's response to his interactions with teachers, "I need like teachers to teach me tell me what to do and everything...And then some other class we just sit there and just don't do nothing." He sees teaching and learning is not happening in his classrooms, which is frustrating for him. He says teachers share minimal information about college too, "we don't do nothing… You won't learn anything [about college]," He blames the teachers and also the disruptive students who are uninterested in learning about higher education.

The day before the pencil stabbing and the fighting incident Rafael had consumed a "few" un-prescribed Xanax pills, which he believes caused him to become more irritable, he recalls the incident below:

> And he poked my hand [with a pencil] and it went pretty deep...I told him don't mess around with me…I warned him too. So I got up and the kid didn't even know I was going to punch him. So when he turned around [after] he was [done] talking to a girl…I punched him right there straight in the face. Because I told him to pass a paper [towards the front of the class] because we used to do warm-ups on the board [and] that teacher told us…to pass it up because she will read them. And then I [tried to] pass it up he didn't want to listen so I just

> like you know, *go like that* [poked his back] with the paper [to have him] turn around and [he] poked me with the pencil, I'm like, "What? Crazy boy and like…And to be honest…the day before that I popped in a few Xanax like I still felt [the effects], so that's what got me more mad [during that situation].

Rafael did not seem remorseful about punching the student in the face as he provided a warning, "don't mess with me," and the other student was not prepared for the hit. In essence the other student was sucker punched in the face, which may have caused the school administration to elevate the incident from a suspension to an expulsion, when combined with Rafael's school discipline and probation records.

*Ronald*

Ronald, a 14-year-old seventh grade Mexican American student, was expelled for fighting with another student, who was later sent to the hospital for the incident with Ronald. He has been suspended and expelled multiple times from school for multiple behavior issues related to fighting, insubordination, and challenging his teachers. He has been an active gang member for over two years and has recruited multiple peers into his Latino-based gang. Ronald's father has drug and alcohol problems and has been involved in his life for only five years. Ronald attributes his anger and school discipline problems to his father's absence, that fact that his family is poor, and that his older sibling passed away unexpectedly in a car accident. He has received support from a counselor, but it is unclear whether his was a school counselor, psychologist, or community health advocate, who provided suggestion to "punch his pillow" when he was upset at night. His mother works on average 20-30 hours at a local Wal-Mart, but her immigration status is unresolved. Ronald believes his mother is undocumented, but shares his mother is reluctant to discuss the nuances of her immigration status with him, but he hears his mother discuss her situation with family and close peers. He shared his experiences that lead him to attending Anderson Behavioral School:

> I was bullied and my mom gave me permission to fight back, that was the worst mistake right there, that's pretty much fights nonstop after that and then this time, it felt like he was

> trying to bullying me and it ain't going to happen…I kept my mouth shut for so many years already, I got tired of it and he knew I was gang related, so I don't know why he tried doing this, he knew I was going to do something, so pretty much he didn't like that I [fought back]…A kid was talking and saying stuff, I so I got mad and I got anger management problems, we got into a fight, and they took him the hospital, [and I] got into trouble.

He received permission from his mother to fight back against a bully, who may have been teasing Ronald for his short stature, being physically overweight, for having a slight overbite, or the teasing could be related to Ronald being held back academically for failing two grades in school. Most low-income families would suggest their children respond in similar methods—to "fight back"—if the family does not believes the school will respond appropriately to their children's' school problems (Lareau, 2011).

Ronald was not clear about what escalated the teasing or if his mother tried to intervene at the school to stop the bullying. It is unlikely his mother made a formal intervention at school because Ronald does not believe in "snitching" or being a "bitch" about complaining about mistreatment in school. He acknowledged the fight "was the worst mistake." The outcome and stigma of being sent to behavioral school could be a central mistake for Ronald because of how teachers and other school personnel will treat him once he returns to a traditional school setting. Although, he felt provoked to fight the other student, Ronald shared the other student was not suspended or expelled, and Ronald attributes his disciplinary record as the primary reason he was expelled and why the other student was allowed to stay at their home school.

Ronald shares he kept his, "mouth shut for so many years already, I got tired of it [the bullying]." The bullying may have lead Ronald to join the gang for protection from bullies, but could of also been a signal to others to leave him alone, which he indicated when he shared: "he knew I was gang related, so I don't know why he tried doing this [bully me], he knew I was going to do something [fight or attack him]." I repeatedly asked him why and what are the benefits of being in a gang, "Nothing, just the way I am, just pretty much all I know pretty much... Most of my family is

pure gangs." His social network is embedded in local and regional gangs, which may have played a strong influence for him to join a gang. Ronald engages in criminal and illegal activities with his gang, but he seems emotionally young and naïve. He seemed honest with his experiences in the school system, and the decisions that lead him to attend Anderson Behavioral School.

The conflicting messages students receive from their parents, friends, and school personnel may cause confusion about how to behave and navigate school political dynamics (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006). Although, some of the students in this study were aware of the consequences of doing drugs or possessing graffiti instruments on school grounds, most are not aware of the larger problems of being labeled and identified as a behavioral student.

*Emanuel*

Emanuel has a hollowness in his eyes, and a layer of pain is palpable in his voice that was dissimilar to any other student in this entire study. He does not allow himself to plan years into the future because he feels death is near because of his past and current actions in the graffiti crew. He expressed, "When I got back to the hood. I was like fuck it. There's no point in me finishing school or some shit like that…I'll probably end up dead or back probably fucking back behind bars." He has experienced a tremendous amount of trauma throughout his life, his parents divorced on his birthday, his childhood friend was murdered in front of him during a drive-by shooting, and he has experimented with multiple drugs and alcohol beginning at the age of seven or eight, near the time he joined a gang. Emanuel is not very optimistic about his future as he regularly discussed violence, drug use and abuse, and feeling isolated in school at home, and the eagerness to leave the state because of all the trouble he has caused.

> I saw [this rival tagging crew member] walking [towards me] and I went up to him and he kept running his mouth. And I said, "Run your shit again and I'm going to deck you!" And he kept running it and I decked him. So my homie came up behind him and started kicking the shit out of him…I was like fuck with us again and your ass is dead. And [the rival] doesn't do shit no more.

In this example, Emanuel describes how he and his tagging crew members attacked a rival tagging crew member who was disrespectful toward their crew. The excitement in his voice caused his tone to slightly raise as he said with pride how they handled a necessary situation, and served as a leader. Emanuel acknowledges his behavior has become worse since moving to Rock County years ago and next he discusses his goal of leaving the state: "My goals are just get out of [here], go back to California, see if I could go work with my uncle," who is a barber in Southern California. He is stressed and feels isolated because of his parents' divorce and from the all of the exposure to gang and tagging crew violence he has witnessed for over 10 years. Next, he discloses how to tries to manage the internal stresses he feels, "I release all of my stress…I just relieve it [by] smoking weed, [which] doesn't help me because it just brings [my painful memories] back. I unload my stress by like tagging or going and getting in a fight." Similar to other boys of color in difficult social and emotional positions, he tries to use drugs to numb the pain (Rios, 2011; Vigil, 1988), which is only a temporary relief for him. Lastly, he talked about fighting others as a method to relieve his stress, which would help explain his eagerness to fight other teenagers who he deems are disrespectful towards him.

It is difficult for him to trust anyone as he has been repeatedly emotionally damaged by his family members' actions, but also by a school teacher, who called him a "fuck up" in class in front of his peers. I am not surprised college is not in his future because that would require a level of vulnerability to ask for help from a school employee, and he does not trust anyone at school. If he reaches the future, Emanuel is debating whether to work on automobiles or become a tattoo artist, he has a deep interest in art and cars. Again, Emanuel is a graffiti artist, but is also involved in local Latino-based gangs throughout the city because of his commitment to Sureños X3 gang.

*Julio*

Julio is a 16-year-old biracial Mexican and European American junior. He was expelled for assaulting a school police officer—a charge that he actively disputes. Julio has been an active member of a tagging crew for the last four or five years. His involvement in a tagging crew may be a step forward considering his father is a *veterano* (original gangster) in a Mexican American gang in the community for the last thirty years. Julio's brothers, cousins, and aunts and uncles are involved in different Latino based gangs throughout the community, and some of which are rival gangs. Julio's father was incarcerated for over ten-years and is an undocumented Mexican immigrant who did not finish high school. Julio's mother did not complete high school. She quit as a teenage mother. However, both of his parents stress the importance of education:

> They [my parents] always tell me finish [high] school. Back in their day, you didn't need school. Like, you could get a job without school. But nowadays it's all about school. Like, you can't even get a license nowadays without attendance for [high] school.

Julio and his family value completing high school as a means of being prepared to enter the workforce.

Julio has a long history of disciplinary issues in school, related to fighting, vandalism, drug use and possession, and has been sent to behavioral school more than five times in the last four years. Fighting is a central component of his relationship with his father, and when Julio gets in trouble in school for fighting, his father's first question was, "Did you win?" If Julio does not win the fight at school, his father would beat him at home. Julio was most recently expelled from school for defending his friend who was was being beaten up by school police officers. When he was describing the details of the event, he stated that the school police officer provoked and challenged him to a fight when the police officer threw his police badge on the ground and said, "I don't give a fuck" and signaled with his hands to "bring it." The fight started between Julio's friend and the

police, when his friend was selling drugs on school ground and was attempting to flee campus. Julio shares more about his experience from that day:

> Julio: Yeah! He threw his badge off and was like "I don't give a fuck," and so I was like "Fuck it then. You don't care? I don't care neither." So I ran up and pushed him off the homie and the homie got up and we left, cause, what the fuck, they're not gonna hurt him – they split his lip, his nose, and everything. And then when they caught us, they took both of us to the detention [center] and we were sitting in the cell and our PO's [probation officer] came and drug tested us in our cells and everything. We went to the back [of the detention center] and got locked up for two weeks. We came out and I started [at Anderson Behavioral School]. I started coming here.

During his interview, he stressed the importance of his friends in his life. He considers them brothers, as they are all members of the same tagging crew, grew up same housing projects, ditched school together, and engaged in illegal and legal activities, which helped form a close and tight bond of friendship and familial support. So, it should be no surprise that he pushed a police officer to the ground to protect his friend, who being beaten by school police. Yes, his friend was selling drugs and trying to avoid arrest, but a police officer challenging a teenage boy to a fight and throwing the badge on the floor does not seem represent the values of traditional comprehensive high schools. Julio's last high school is located in an urban, low-income, and primarily Black and Latino community, so maybe educators and school police officers feel the need to use punitive responses as a part of the social norms and cultural expectations of the community. Julio states the police officer threw his badge on the ground and told him, "I don't a fuck!" implying the police officer was ready for a fight with Julio. Julio did not stand and fight the police officer, but waited until the police officer turned around and pushed him to the ground, so Julio's friend could stand up and run away.

Although this seems like an extreme example of inappropriate adult behavior, this is not an isolated case of students being provoked or challenged by school personnel throughout the school district. Gabe, Emanuel, and Oscar shared examples of teachers and other school officials treating students poorly through comments and unbecoming acts on school ground such as, "You guys are just retarded as fuck […] You're just a fuckup," or calling them "babies," or standing in students'

faces and challenging them and saying "Or else what [are you going to do to me]," The students in this study shared instances in which they were alienated for their behavior, when others are acting in a similar manner in the classroom were left alone.

The combination of these school experiences and troubles at home create synergy for students to act out in school (Kelly, 1993; Muñoz, 20045; Vigil, 1999). It is difficult to separate what internal and external influences cause the students to act out in school (Brown, 2009; Crystal, 2014), but often the school personnel are so disconnected from the students and students' lives (Kim, 2011), that it is easy to simply state, "This kid has problems and so do their parents," and never look into what and how the problems can be solved to help the students reach a better place (Nygreen, 2013). The students and their families do not have the "right" skills and networks to use to challenge educators to lessen school discipline infractions (Brown, 2007; Lareau, 2011; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). The typical sentences for Anderson Behavioral School students is 20 days as required by district policy, but Anderson may decide to extend the students stay if the student is not achieving specific grades or improved school behaviors. The over use of suspension and expulsion has received tremendous attention from researchers and policymakers (Losen, 2015), however little attention is paid to the duration of being transferred to alternative schools those suspensions and expulsions (Brown, 2009).

*Hector*

When I met Hector, he was in the third or fourth week of his stay at Anderson Behavioral School. He is a 15-year-old Central American sophomore and shared his thoughts about the length of stay, "I'm not really sure. They said a minimum of 20 days, which is a month. So I'm not sure how long I'll be here." Hector's time spent at the school was now close to four months for drug possession. He is the oldest of five siblings and wants to attend college and work in the health industry, where he can use his bilingual skills. His parents are no longer together and his stepfather

works construction, and his mother is a homemaker, who cares for toddlers. He was raised in Los Angeles County and vividly described his community as dirty and would regularly witness gang violence between Latinos and African American gangs. While in Los Angeles, he attended a college preparatory high school and he enjoyed his time there. His cousins and extended family are gang involved, and he is associated, but does not actively affiliate with gang members, but "kicks it with them." He did not disclose how or why his family moved, but most families live in Rock County because of the low-cost of living and multiple jobs in the service industry. He was not sure why the 20-day sentence was extended for such a long time and he did not share whether his parents inquired with the school administration about transferring him back to his home school. He is very smart, analytical, seemed very thoughtful with his responses, and well mannered. He did not immediately respond to each question, but waited and his eyebrows frowned at he concentrated and gave honest responses. Every morning he would great me with "Good morning Mister" and "How are you doing today, Mister?" In class, he would sit quietly and complete his work without drawing too much attention from the faculty or school resource officers. He is aware of how to conduct himself with school staff, and is easily able to code switch with his peers to discuss drinking alcohol and different types of marijuana strands.

*Carlos*

Carlos, a 16-year-old Mexican American junior was caught with drugs while ditching school. He is a middle child and only son to his Mexican immigrant parents, who have a middle school education. His father works in the construction industry and his mother is a homemaker, and they both support their three children. Carlos' eldest sister graduated from a Rock County School District high school, and enrolled in a local community college, but eventually dropped out during her first year when she became pregnant. His sister now works for a regional hamburger chain. Carlos

parents' want him to enroll in college, but leave the decision to him to select whichever career or educational pathway he chooses.

Carlos acknowledged this is his first expulsion from a traditional comprehensive school although he had a few in-school suspensions and required parent conferences (RPCs) during his freshman and sophomore years for ditching and low grades. He sees himself as a good kid, but uses a lot of marijuana during high school, but he does not want to return to ABS. Carlos' shares:

> I was ditching and a teacher saw us and they called the radio and I had weed on me, so [the Dean] told me to come in and she is like, "they are going to check you" …and it was a Dean and I told her, "I had stuff on me," so I walked out of the backdoor and I was walking [away from school] and a cop pulled up and I was already halfway down [the hill], I was on the main streets, and the cop pulled up and he stopped me.

Carlos was not clear whether he was arrested or simply cited due to the drugs. During classroom observations, Carlos sat quietly and kept to himself as other students challenged the teacher, goofed off, and discussed the next party with drugs and alcohol. He sees himself as different from the other students, and comments, "My behavior was good, I wasn't like a troublemaker, I was a good student, quiet, I wouldn't disrupt class." And other students would add their comments to the on-going class discussion and wisecracks or sometimes question the validity of each other's stories especially when it included driving cars as many of them may have had their driving permits. Returning to Carlos, he was unsure about what pathway to take after high school, but considers college an option, but is unsure how to prepare or finance it. Maybe he'll work for a while before pursuing some type of college, but feels challenged because he's unsure what to study when he enrolls in college. Carlos wavers with his post-high-school pathways, initially he said, "College" directly after he graduates, but then said, "After high school, first I want to get a job and hopefully sign up to a college and see if I am eligible for any colleges." He does not know what is necessary to apply for college or what major to select in college. I will discuss more about college access and readiness in the later sections.

*Gabe*

Gabe, a 16-year-old Mexican and Native American student, shared his recent confrontation with his teacher. Gabe's family is involved in various levels of the criminal justice system and his parents and stepparents have gang ties. In his previous high school, he was enrolled in Honors courses, but said he was bored and didn't complete his work. He shared that his teachers know he is smart. Gabe shares about his motivation and being enrolled in honors courses:

> I have to be motivated, or interested in what I am in to focus and pay attention…in elementary school, I was in the GATE program…the gifted and talented education. In middle school I had all accelerated classes, then in high school it wasn't interesting, so I just kind of stopped paying attention and it's like that with all my schools, if I am not interested I won't pay attention…I know some people say, just do the work and get it over with, that makes me even more bored, it just makes it worse, so I would rather sleep and do a little thing or whatever...

He is smart, thoughtful, analytical, very aware of social and racial stratification, and the role of racism within the school district bureaucratic structure. He is aware of social and racial stratification because of a previous sociology course he completed at his last high school. He shared, "…Schools are close minded, schools and school systems, they are never really going to change, they are always going to be the same because it's just a bureaucracy." His teachers are aware of his natural intelligence, but probably not familiar with his external distractions of living in Section Eight subsidized housing, his mother and step-father struggling to provide basic needs, and constantly moving apartments because of their inability to pay rent. He believes schools are unable to change because of their large size and does not feel as he is valued as an individual or his unique learning style. Although, he is not embedded in a gang, his friends have attempted to recruit him multiple times to join the Bloods gang. His close friends and family members are involved in different Latino and African American gangs in California and other western states. Throughout the interviews, he would look at me through his hipster glasses and also give a knowing smirk with different responses, knowing he is smarter than most of the adults he interacts with. He has a small frame, but is not

scared or intimated by any of his peers or educators at Anderson Behavioral School. When asked what lead him to Anderson Behavioral School, he shared:

> I have really bad anger issues and I am going to start counseling pretty soon and one of my teachers, we had gotten into an argument the week before and he kept bringing it up and we got into an argument, and he said, "I am not going to babysit you," I told him to sit down, he listened...but
>
> Adrian: He told you to sit down?
>
> No, I told him to sit down. He said, 'I am not going to f'ing babysit you' and he is yelling at me and he is in my face and I told him, I pointed to his chair and said 'Go f'ing sit down.' He did and he kept talking and I was like, 'You don't know how bad I just want to get out and deck [punch] you.' Then he got up, walked over me and said, 'Do it and show me what I got.' I told him, 'If I hit you…I am not going to stop,' so I left [the classroom]. Then next period I had gotten a referral and expelled.

Clearly, Gabe did not make a good decision when he chose to yell profanities to his teacher and direct the teacher to sit down in the chair, but the teachers and other school staff should not provoke students into violence. Gabe disclosed that his family lives in Section Eight housing and that he has multiple siblings and extended family members involved in the different levels of the criminal justice system. He has a sincere interest in attending college to study psychology with a minor in criminal justice. Gabe is one of the brightest students I interacted with at this school site; he was articulate, thoughtful, and very analytical. He has an extensive vocabulary and was able to easily explain and describe his thoughts and feelings during the interview. His boredom in school and anger issues lead to various disciplinary issues at Anderson Behavioral School, but also traditional comprehensive schools.

Other students shared incidents of teachers and substitute teachers openly challenging students to violence or belittling them in class in front of their peers. Oscar and Emanuel responded differently to the incidents as Oscar punched the teacher and Emanuel ditched school for over three or four weeks. Both Oscar and Emanuel have long histories of problems in school that lead them to Anderson Behavioral School. Returning to Jorge's school troubles that led to his expulsion, he

shares his teachers called him an "idiot" or a "fucking idiot" before he balled his fist. Jorge's expulsion from school is related to threatening violence towards an educator. He elaborates more:

> [The teacher] was like, "You are real fucking idiot, you know that?" I was like, "What the fuck?" and then ended up walking by her. But the crazy thing is the teacher says as soon as I turned the corner, I guess…I walked up to her - I walked straight to her with a "balling fist," but she didn't come out of the door first, she walked up to me, you know, [she said] "What's the attitude and stuff?" and she said that I walked up to her with balling fist. Supposedly, [the school claims] I said, "I was going to punch on her fucking face, if she didn't get out of my way" and I guess she got scared, supposedly, and then she locked herself in the classroom, that's what she said. It didn't even go down like that, it went down, you know, she called me an idiot, I was like, whatever.

Whether the teacher called him an "idiot" or a "fucking idiot" adds another layer to the claim of feeling threatened. Jorge may have felt provoked or angry by the teacher's comment, and although he waves off the remark with a "whatever," at that moment, he may have felt angry or hurt that a teacher would call him an "idiot" or a "fucking idiot." He claims he did not threaten her, but the school sides with the educators account of the moment. This interaction reminds me of Ferguson's (2000) study of Black boys in elementary school, teachers and other educators would assume seven and eight-year-old boys could have adult understandings of their behavior and the consequences of actions, although they were young children. This treatment of young boys resulted in increased behavioral outbursts and students feeling alienated. Ferguson's work on elementary school children could provide a context for Jorge and other students in this study that teachers and other educators believe middle and high school students fully understand the consequences of their behavior and the outcomes to their educational experiences. Jorge understood the power in the teachers' claims, and his lack of credibility to refute her description of events. He explained it like this: "This kid with his [behavioral] record, he always gets in trouble, so why wouldn't he do that, of course [he would threaten a teacher]." Jorge sees his behavioral incidents as "stupid things" such as talking back and cussing in class. Whereas his teachers may see regular acts of insubordination and a lack of impulse control.

Throughout my observations at Anderson, Jorge would leave his desk without teacher's permission, would escalate joking with peers into near fights over who smokes the best marijuana and whose girlfriends were the most attractive. However, at other moments he would discuss with me the importance of education and how college is the only way he could be successful in his life. He spoke enthusiastically about the need to graduate from high school and enroll in the local four-year university to study business and construction, the excitement about meeting with people from all over the country at this university, the parties, and being known for his contributions to society. Below he shares his excitement about college.

> Of course…hell yeah…hell yeah [ I want to go to college]! [...] Because I want to learn, it's not even about learning…I want to have fun. People will say like, you think school is over right now? No, I am like, no, the best part in school is college, you meet so many different people, so many amazing people, there are parties. It's not only about parties and stuff, the shit that you can learn is crazy… Endless learning…endless learning…I can't even say one because if I say one, it's like tree branches, you got that one long branch… (popping noise to depict growth) you got six more baby ones and then those baby ones you probably got three or four and then more, so that's how I feel, you can't just say one thing because it always leads into something different, if you understand me.

Jorge is eager to attend college in the future. He is excited about not only building relationships with new people, but the "endless learning" opportunities about new subject matters. Although he shared great enthusiasm about going to college in the future, I do not believe his teachers would not believe the sincerity of his wishes to attend and graduate from college because of his disruptive classroom behavior and extensive school disciplinary record. He needs the support from teachers and counselors to prepare for college to convert his high aspirations into action. Before data collection, I underestimated the role of drug use and possession at schools as a leading reason for expulsion and transfer to Anderson Behavioral School.

*Manny*

Manny, a 15-year-old Mexican undocumented immigrant, was expelled for being under the influence of drugs at school. Manny is the second youngest of five siblings of a mixed-immigration status family. Manny's parents are undocumented, as are three of his siblings. His father works in construction and his mother stays at home. The weight of being undocumented is a heavy burden on his shoulders and as he is worried about his future. He is not a member of the neighborhood Latino gang, but is embedded with the group and is on a first-name basis with the *veteranos* and the younger members of the gang. He does not hesitate from helping his friends write graffiti or beat up someone if problems arise within his neighborhood against rival gangs. Although his actions seem negative to outsiders, the social norms within his community value the contributions and he is able to accumulate "credits slips" with the gang through those actions (e.g., fighting rivals, graffiti, smoking weed with members, and drinking alcohol with other teenagers). Manny shares the regular encouragement he receives, "they [the *veteranos*] are the ones who give me advice and good advice too, they're like, don't get into gangs and […] that's a waste of time! Get into school, focus on school [and go to college]." He does not have a strong relationship with the school counselor or teachers at Anderson Behavioral School or his past traditional comprehensive school, so has not received accurate college readiness or financial aid information. The fractured relationship with educators will be more evident later in this chapter. The depth and quality of social capital shared between the *veteranos* is valuable within their social context and environment, but does not easily translate into status attainment because of the constrained networks and the limited resources compared to other resource-rich social networks (Lin, 2000). The *veteranos* share focused messages about the value of high school and college, but are unable to provide concrete college knowledge or the needed actions to help facilitate the accumulation of more college knowledge. If Manny had stronger relationships with counselors and teachers, his aspirations to attend college could be better

facilitated because of educators abilities to connect him to the necessary information channels and requirements to learn how to finance his postsecondary education as an undocumented immigrant (Perna, 2005).

This is Manny's first expulsion from school, his father does not believe Manny will qualify for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) a recent federal initiative to help undocumented youth secure work permit and exemption from deportation (Gonzales, Terriquez, & Ruszczyk, 2014). Manny is worried and seems emotionally defeated about the possibility of being ineligible for DACA because of his school record. He is the only undocumented student, who shared his immigrant status with me. He has a slender build, dark skin, slick back hair, and is very serious demeanor. He wants to attend college to study automotive bodywork. He worked hard at Anderson Behavioral School to avoid additional negative attention from peers and educators, and focused on his classwork and avoided joining peers who goofed off in class. He recalls the past events that lead to his expulsion:

> Manny: We didn't have nothing [on us] we were just high [on marijuana].
>
> Adrian: So you got kicked out for being high?
>
> Manny: Yeah, because we were coming back [to school], and then we were on the school property and they [the school officials] were like oh, "Where are you guys going?" And we were like, "We are going back to school," then they told us like, "Where we were coming from?," we said at that moment, "[Fast-food restaurant]," but then they separated us and then, you know, how the cops will be like, "Oh, your other friend he already said where you guys were going, so just tell us the truth." And my friend - he told them so, and I was like I'll go ahead and tell them the truth, we were smoking [marijuana] when we came back [to school], then they just expelled us.

In accordance with the zero tolerance policies frequently used in schools, an expulsion from school for 20 days for being under the influence of drugs is the standard protocol for school districts due to the multiple liabilities of a student being hurt on campus (Brown, 2009; Kelly, 1993). School districts may be unaware of the criminalization strategies they use with urban boys of color and the use of police tactics in the disciplinary process (Huerta & Rios-Aguilar, 2016; Rios, 2009, 2010, 2011; Rios

& Galicia, 2013). In Manny's case, the school decided to follow the district policy and expel him from school for the required sentence, however Manny was upset about the perceived lack of equity in the school's decision. He shared,

> There is lot of kids that go high to school and then before I got expelled I had a friend there they just sent him to his house, because I guess he was too high. So he, they just sent him back to his house until the next day.

Manny stated the drug charge was his first serious infraction at school and did not receive a chance as his friend did earlier in the academic term. He was upset about the lack of equity in the use of discipline policy and maybe he thought he would be given a break to go home and sober up from the marijuana. The interpretation and frequency of school disciplinary policy is an emerging area of research that requires additional attention in the high school setting (Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016), but ultimately Black and Latino middle and high school boys of color are over suspended and expelled compared to other groups of students for similar infractions (Losen, 2015; Morris & Perry, 2016). Manny's discipline experience contributes to the over suspension of male students of color, and considering this was his first expulsion from school, he should have been considered before he was required to leave school. Manny believes the school administration is trying to transfer out the Latino students to increase the school's academic profile. Below he shares his suspicions about the school's motive.

> Because last year [the school] had, they were one of the highest schools that graduated, so I guess they want to, they want to improve that, like that way they couldn't recognize it as a better school, so trying to, taking out the bad kids so they would be a better school.

Most of his Latino friends were transferred to Anderson Behavioral School during the academic year and Manny believes the efforts are due to students' race. Manny believes the school decision to expel him was to serve as an example to other students who decide to enter campus ground under the influence of a controlled substance will be expelled.

*Frank*

Frank, a 17-year-old Mexican American sophomore, was expelled from school for possession of marijuana and graffiti tools. He has been a member of a tagging crew for less than one year. Frank has moved multiple times throughout his life and cannot recall the total number of elementary and middle schools he attended from the California to the southeast part of the U.S.

Frank's mother graduated from high school and recently quit her job to start her owning house cleaning business. He does not have a relationship with his biological father and is not aware of his current location or employment. His mother's partner works in the construction field, but also cuts hair on the weekends to earn additional money to support their family. Frank's older sister recently passed away in a car accident, which caused him to become depressed and disengaged from school and his family. Although Frank has one younger brother, Frank highlights when he gets home from school, he eats and then sleeps the rest of the day. Frank shared, "[my sister] was like a second mom, she had been taking care of us since I was born" because she cared for him all of his life especially when his mother was working odd hours. His sister was attending the local community college before her death and she encouraged him to attend college, too, but Frank was unsure about what college was meant for him. Frank has been in trouble with suspensions and expulsions a few times in school. Frank is short, slender, unassuming, and quiet. He surprised me with his quick wit and slow speech pattern in his responses. It was unclear if the speech pattern was related is natural or the physical impact because of years of illicit drug consumption. He succinctly shares the events at his last comprehensive high school.

Frank: First, I was caught with weed and graffiti implements, and they sent me here.

Adrian: So, you said that you got caught at your last school for graffiti stuff?

Frank: Graffiti and implements?

Adrian: What does that mean?

Frank: Like marker and stickers.

Adrian: So are you part of a tagging crew?

Frank: Yeah

Frank was often concise with his responses about his life, school, and his future. He showed me the scars on his wrist and states, the campus police officer, "slammed me on my head first on the concrete floor at the school," which resulted in a fractured wrist that took two months to heal. His friends were in the cafeteria and almost started a fight, but the police and school administration arrived, which caused all of the students in the cafeteria to run out of the room including Frank. Frank continued to share about his interaction with the school administration and police: "The police came and he was searching me and I had my hands in my jacket and he is like, 'Take your hands out, what have you got in there?' I was like, 'nothing.'." He claims he did not provoke the police officer, but the cop yelled his "cop stuff" such as "don't resist" and then slammed him on the ground because they believed he had a weapon in his hoodie, but he only had chips and an iced tea. Frank was charged with resisting arrest and the campus police officer was not cited for over-aggression with a student. The over policing of boys and young men of color continues to be a serious concern, and his example further highlights the tension.

He did not shy away from sharing his involvement with the tagging crew, the culture of the group, and methods to move up in the tagging crew. At that moment in time, he had not gone tagging in a month or so and attributes the lack of action to his "laziness." I am not sure if the laziness is related to a coping strategy to deal with the loss of his older sister, he seemed pained and shared he has not sought external help to deal with his depression. The relationship between the tagging crew did not seem deep compared to other taggers in the study, who stressed the brotherhood and companionship with their male peers. Frank shared he could be more involved in

the tagging crew but, "I probably could be…like if I go there more often and stuff," but his tone did not seem enthusiastic when he discussed the tagging crew compared to Julio or *Emanuel.*

These vignettes provide a look into the students' lives, but also the different types of interactions with adults in their schools, where some resulted in school expulsion. These brief moments and the social norms of the schools helped shaped the disciplinary outcomes for the students, whether to be suspended or expelled from their home school. To stress again, different schools have different expectations, the expectations of low-income urban schools that primarily serve students of color is to embrace zero tolerance and punitive disciplinary decisions to help students learn to follow the rules, especially if a student is suspected of being gang embedded (Brown, 2007; Brown & Beckett, 2007; Huerta, McDonough, & Allen, 2016; Munoz, 2005; Nygreen, 2013; Rios, 2011). These students freely shared their negative experiences with teachers and school personnel throughout their lives, which helps illuminate the limited trust and sense of caring provided by schools for the most vunerable student populations (Valenzuela, 1999).

Although the goal of most schools is to provide safe learning environments for all students, the students at Anderson Behavioral School describe "war zones" for student to student, student to teacher or administrator, and student to school police officer interactions in their previous school settings. The war is not only physical, as in the case of Frank, Julio, and Ronald, is an emotional and mental battle to position and hold power in the classroom or on school grounds. The conflicts are opportunities to challenge moments of feeling disrespected where the antagonist is a teacher, a school police officer, a school administrator, or a peer. Students' have built up internal stressors: poverty, loss in their family, or constant school alienation, which has reached a breaking point and punching or challenging a school official may feel the best method to resolve their internal struggles.

The social norms and the non-dominant cultural capital within the student community assists in managing the stressors, which in this context is appropriate for the students to use.

Different communities have varying strategies to resolve personal problems and when youth do not have trust for adults or have spaces to seek positive role models for mentorship – the streets provide avenues for socio-emotional comfort (Vigil, 1988, 1999; Rios, 2011). This section described some of the student background and experiences related to their infractions in traditional comprehensive school that lead them to Anderson Behavioral School. These stories also shed light on multiple instances of violence between the students and school leaders and police officers. These student experiences help to explain why the students in this study did not feel they have advocates in their schools to support or mentor them. If this is the case, then how or who will students approach to learn valuable college knowledge to prepare for their futures?

The following section focuses on the students' college knowledge and specifically how students become aware of postsecondary education and the different required steps to become college ready. The college-going process is complex and requires the ability to navigate and use support systems to learn the game to become successful to enroll in college (Conley, 2005).

## College Knowledge

High-income and college-educated families begin to shape their son's college-going habitus at a young age. They pass along valued social and cultural capital about how and when he will begin college, what major(s) and career possibilities he might choose, and may even tell him about the various savings and investment accounts they have to help offset his college costs. The information sharing can be in small snippets over time, which are absorbed by their son and accepted as facts. This information sharing is natural, simple, and creates an awareness and gradual accumulation of college knowledge. For this son, he will be asked one day, "Which college will you attend?" and is likely to never be told, "College isn't for you!" Scholars have and continue to document how information is crucial for all students to prepare for college and the accumulation of social and cultural capital is not equitable for all children in the U.S. (Conley, 2005; McDonough, 1997; Mullen,

2010; Perna, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005; Tierney, 2009; Tierney, Corwin, Coylar, 2005). The disparities in college-going rates for low-income and high-income students will continue to widen, as most public schools will continue to imagine all families have the skills and access to valued forms of capital to aid their children in forming the necessary traits to reach college.

I focus on Julio as his comments serve as an exemplar to the incongruence between schools' expectations and family college information, he was asked, "Has anyone shared any information about college with you…what about your parents?" He responded, "No, they've never been to college to have experience to talk about it."

While Julio does not have anyone in his familial network to build and draw college knowledge from, two of his tagging crew friends are currently attending community college, so he could gain information from them if he chooses. Students like Julio must depend on the school to share college knowledge with them (Conley, 2005; McDonough, 1997; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). As demonstrated in the previous section, the students do not trust educators or other adults in their past or current schools. The purpose of this section is to consider students' perceptions and understanding of college knowledge, as well as their knowledge of the steps necessary to reach and enroll in a postsecondary educational institution.

## College Readiness Through School Preparation

The pathway to college readiness is complicated. Completing the *correct* high school courses, and college exams, earning a competitive grade point average, learning the nuances of the financial aid and institutional types, and potentially working with a high school counselor or teacher to get reassurance and additional attention (Espinoza, 2011; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2000). Only two seniors who participated in this study, Oscar and Santiago have completed six and seven of the nine steps in the college-going process, 1) aspirations to attend college in $10^{th}$ and $12^{th}$ grade, 2) minimally academically prepared for college,3) sought college guidance, 4) applied to colleges, 5) accepted to

colleges, 6) applied for financial aid (Klasik, 2012). Oscar and Santiago did not take a college entrance exams and have not enrolled in college yet, but have completed a majority of the steps needed to prepare for admission to a local community college and the other for a private for-profit automotive two-year college out of state. Lastly, Santiago has not applied for financial aid yet, but is aware he can receive student loans to pay for school.

The eleven other students in this study range from seventh to eleventh grade. They are at different stages of the educational pipeline (see table 4.2) and are aware of only very basic levels of college knowledge such as names of local colleges and universities, limited understanding of the methods to pay for college, and the importance of working with college counselors, which will be highlighted in the upcoming pages. However, not all schools are equipped to prepare their students to become college ready (Conley, 2005) or prime them to "navigate the system to obtain a [college] degree" (Duncheon, 2015, pg. 5), which creates challenges for their students.

College knowledge is embedded in schools, higher-SES families' social capital, cultural capital and habitus. If a student possesses the valued forms of social capital, he can cash his credit slips with school personnel to learn about the nuances of college admissions or be introduced to a local college admissions representative, who can facilitate additional attention and information about the local college or university to facilitate matriculation. If students have strained relationships with school staff because of their regular visits to the office for behavioral issues, the student will have less credit slips to cash out with school counselors for help. Carter (2003) stressed that students who possess dominant forms of cultural capital have skills and tools to recognize the value of educational credentials understand how to engage teachers and counselors. The students in this study, describe a tense or simply absent relationship with school personnel because of years of personal issues that have impacted their daily schooling experiences.

Habitus is a complex filter of perceptions of aspirations and expectations that is class and social group specific (Swartz, 1997), so students who attend ABS, are "less likely" to graduate from high school and go on to college. Swartz (1997) says, "youth might value higher learning and have hopes of attending the university but choose not to attend because they expect to fail" (pg. 109). The internal habitus in the ABS students is strong in redirecting them from postsecondary education because of the strong internal perception of failure or not being "good" at school. Ten students have dreams of attending a postsecondary educational institution. Oscar plans to enroll in a community college and Santiago is focused on enrolling in a for-profit college, but it is difficult to determine which students will actually enroll and become college graduates one day. However, if ABS school teachers and staff viewed the students differently and set higher expectation for them, the relationships and students aspirations could be more supportive to promote higher education opportunities. This statement in grounded in the previous comments from a teacher, who said, "*These kids* are going to big boy jail" and "*These kids* don't want to go to college," which represents one view of the schools' habitus and culture towards students. In the following section, I will focus on four central areas that contribute to a students' college-choice process based on students' responses and the college access literature. These findings are based on interviews and participant observations and informed by the three guiding research questions. The foci will be on: 1) curricular experiences, 2) students' perceptions of financial aid and methods to finance their postsecondary education, and 3) college admission requirements.

*Curricular Experiences*

Students are guided into different curricular tracks based on various academic and demographic traits during their educational experience (Oakes, 2005). This form of tracking is supposed to match students' intellectual abilities on a continuum of extremely rigorous college-level curriculum through basic education, for example such as Advanced Placement (AP, Honors, or

Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) to remedial and developmental education (Kelly, 1993; Oakes, 2005). In some instances, parents are able to negotiate, using their valued social and cultural capitals with school personnel to guide their children into more rigorous courses (Lareau, 2011). The benefits of advanced courses include lower student-to-teacher ratios, increased social standing in the campus community, and increased chances to earn college level units during high school, which increases students' competitive standings in the college admission process (Conley, 2005; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; McDonough, 1997, Mullen, 2010).

However, in most alternative and behavioral schools, students are enrolled in a general curriculum available to all students, no matter if a student was previously in advanced or honors courses in their previous comprehensive schools or if the student has expressed sincere interest in preparing for postsecondary education (Brown, 2007; Kelly, 1993; Kim, 2011). Anderson Behavioral School does not offer the advanced or more rigorous courses. The only exception to the general curriculum rule is for students who are classified as special education, which have a modified curriculum to match their academic needs because of state and federal laws (Ryndak, Taub, Jorgensen, Gonsier-Gerdin, Ardnt, Sauer, Ruppar, Morningstar, & Allcock, 2014).

Anderson Behavioral School students are assigned their courses based on the needed and required academic credits for promotion from middle school to high school or to graduate from high school. There are two academic electives at Anderson Behavioral School. The mentoring course discussed earlier in this chapter is one such course. The second elective offering is a life skills/lessons course, where the students engage in informal discussions about life situations related to relationships, purchasing a home, or infrequently about the value of going to college. I did not witness a formal curriculum or grading system for these courses except for students receiving participating credits for engaging in the teacher-led discussion or by not disrupting the daily instruction. The lack of curriculum means students often go academically unchallenged for an hour

to an hour and a half of their school day. These courses may count towards general electives, but do not aid in the state-required college admission standards for four-year colleges or universities.

ABS teachers do not provide homework or comprehensive weeklong assignments to the students. Students did not engage in large-scale projects or collaborative assignments to build additional social skills and teamwork abilities. The absence of rigorous assignments in classes impacts students' chances to build the needed reading and writing skills required in college (Duncheon, 2015; Hallett & Venegas, 2014). It not uncommon to sit in the high school English classroom and watch *Coach Carter*, a popular film about a Black basketball coach who demands higher academic standards from his students, and then listen while students answering questions about the film. As stated earlier, the class is blended with multiple grades, so sophomores, juniors, and seniors are learning the same materials and the rigor is not differentiated to meet the academic needs of the students, unless the student has a verified individual educational plan. The few moments of student collaboration occurred they would either copy each other's assignments or to help translate English to Spanish, if someone needed clarification. Other times, students were asked to read quietly from a book and answer worksheets based on the text, and most texts did not peak students' interest. In one class session, Julio tried multiple times to ask the English teacher a question about the text, but the teacher refused to answer him because she believed he was trying to joker. He repeatedly pleaded with her, "Come on, I'm not kidding! I really want to know [about this book]." She ignored him and answered other students' questions about the text and he sat dejected and said under his breath, "Fuck this shit." She heard him and reprimanded him for profanity. Although, Julio was trying to sincerely understand a basic concept about the book, she undermined him and he further disengaged in during the class. I highlight Julio's experience, but I saw incidents like this is a common experience for Anderson Behavioral School students.

The previous examples highlight the students' English course and the absence of college preparation. The students need opportunities to build their writing and critical thinking skills to avoid college remedial and developmental courses (Relles & Tierney, 2013), which are barriers for low-income and first-generation college students to persist in college. A central component of students' college preparation is regular access to homework and comprehensive assignments that allow them to be challenged (Adelman, 2006; Perna, 2000). The more difficult curriculum allows students to build comprehension of different subject matters and learn nuanced research skills to complete assignments, which will help in other areas.

The math class was similar in low academic standards, as the daily math curriculum was copied on the board by the math teacher and the students were required to meticulously copy each math problem and answers outlined on the whiteboard to their individual paper. The math, science, and English classes were blended. For example, students who were previously enrolled in pre-algebra, algebra, or geometry courses were sitting in the same class session covering the same daily assignment, regardless of their past academic achievement. The blended course arraignment caused disruptions as the students grew bored during class time and would act out. There was one instance in math class, where a school leader walked into the class and demanded all student to, "Remove your socks and shoes." The school leader received information that a student had illegal contraband, so everyone was being checked. The students griped about the waste of time, but the emotions and tension increased the dramatically as each student was checked by the school leader, campus resource officer, and the math teacher supervised all of the student movement to ensure nothing was passed between students. I felt transported to the MSNBC show *Lock Up*, where inmates in a federal prison are mistreated and constantly scolded for being incarcerated, illiterate, and solely responsible for poverty and social position. Although, the random search only occurred once in my presence, the tension and yelling from a school leader was constant for the Black and Latino boys.

They did not receive a moment of rest from his critiques, whether in person or over the intercom system. It is difficult to focus on the academic preparation because there was an absence of challenging or engaging material. It was common to see students grow drowsy after lunch and lay their heads down on their desks because of the teacher's monotone voice, but also his uninspiring teaching style.

After weeks in the math class and hearing hundreds of combinations of profanity words from the students, the math teacher asked the students to stop using profanity. He began to assert himself and grew intolerant of the students' behavior, and threatened to document each of their infractions. The students' physical presentation, shifting forward in their seats, and verbally reacting to the math teacher's change in demeanor as they responded with "Come on Mr. Smith!" (Field notes). Under students' breath, I heard, "This is bullshit." This change in the teacher's behavior was unexpected because he had ignored students' exercising in class, students flaming (pointed disrespectful jokes) each other during the class period, and minimal effort from students without concern (Field notes). It is difficult to focus on the academic preparation for the students because the teacher and students' effort did not align. The students were not active learners in the math class and this is troubling as math is a major influential factor in determining whether students enroll in college after high school (Perna, 2000).

The science course was substantially different from the rest of the high school courses. The science course was blended and repeated curriculum previous covered by the students in the previous months, but the teacher made great strides to challenge the students, display a mutual respect to all of the students, and refrained from yelling or belittling the students during the class period. When the students were not present, he commented to me that he does not review their school files and did not want to know what school infractions led them to Anderson.

Throughout the decades of research on schools, it has been uncovered teachers develop their own cultures, attitudes, and values towards students (Anyon, 2011; Kozol, 2006; McDonough, 1997). Anderson Behavioral School teachers have created its own social norms about what they believe is in the best interest for their students, which resembles a pseudo-juvenile hall, adult prison, and school. The social norms within the school stress a punitive process from the beginning of the school day, when the students walk on the school grounds to each of the teachers' classrooms. Surprisingly, the students' unquestionably accepted the schools' social norms and disciplinary expectations and low academic standards.

The acceptance of the schools' social norms is evident in the classrooms. As I sat back and observed a math class, only one of the six students was actively taking notes and copying the math problems onto his paper. The other five students were discussing and listening to stories of sobriety and the difficulty of not drinking alcohol and smoking weed. They praised each other for being sober for three days or two-weeks as nothing has set them off to return to their drug of choice. Once the sobriety conversation dwindled away, one male student moved out of his chair and began exercising. He was being cheered on by the study participants, and they laughed and challenged each other to see who could do the most pushups and who was the strongest. There was no hesitation in calling the person doing the exercise a "bitch" or "pussy" in math class for not doing enough pushups – I sat in amazement – the teacher and his aid, did not stop, challenge, or reprimand the students for misbehaving. He continued with his lecture as best as he could and did not write any students referrals to the front office. The teacher and the aid accepted the behavior by choosing not to correct it. The students' giggling and laughing was becoming uncontrollable. I am not sure if the students were acting up because I was in the room or if they did not care, or the students were so bored with the disengaging teaching style, this was their active resistance and defiance towards the school. A few moments later, the math teacher shook his head in frustration, turned around, and

continued writing math proofs on the board as if the six students were focused on the lecture. The math teacher did not threaten to call the school leader or campus resources officers to remove the disruptive students, as almost the entire class would be in trouble. The students slowly lost interest in exercising and returned to their conversation about drugs and alcohol, and they were not as flamboyant as before. The following ten minutes seem to drag on for an eternity. The teacher and his aid were upset. The students did not care. And I sat quietly. What a mess. The bell finally rang, and as I walked out of the room I asked the teacher, “Are they always like this?” and he responded, “Kinda.”

Goddard (2003) stresses the importance of “schooling and learning [as] important” in student and school relationships, but if schools do not stress the valued norms of high or engaged learning the students will lose focus. When I observe students in their P.E. class , where the smell of methane is overwhelming, I was shocked the students are able to intensely play basketball and breathe without complications. All the students would react to the methane smell when gusts of winds grew stronger. But I never heard a student comment they were going to tell their parents about the smell or complain to the school officials. There was an acceptance of the smell. The P.E. teacher leaned on the portable classroom and chatted with the another teacher for most of the class period about their lives and plans for the weekend. As stated before, the P.E. class did not provide any formal lessons or curriculum about hygiene, the importance of a nutritious diet, or the fundamentals of sports. I raise these concerns because the students will be tested on these points at the end of the academic term, but are not receiving gradual information or preparation. Academic learning is absent in P.E. class and the teacher apathy toward the students is consistent.

Students would groan in class, “this shit is borrriinnngggg!” And the teachers assumed the students would say this and similar statements because they disliked school, and no, the students would say these comments because they were bored and frustrated with the lack of learning and

being treated as if they were "stupid" in this school setting. Gabe, a 10th grade student, shares his perceptions of learning at Anderson Behavioral School.

> Gabe: They make it seem like everyone here is stupid.
>
> Adrian: What do you mean?
>
> Gabe: They give everybody work, the quality of work is two grades below the grade we are in, Mr. Johnson's class for example, he teaches Science. Science is already basically is [re]medial class, everything he is teaching I can remember back from the 5th and 6th grade.

Gabe is highly intelligent and was in honors and other advanced courses at his last high school, but he failed most of his classes because he said he was bored, and shared:

> I have to be motivated, or interested in what I am in to focus and pay attention. Since elementary school, I was in the GATE program…the gifted and talented education. In middle school I had all accelerated classes, then in high school it wasn't interesting, so I just kind of stopped paying attention and it's like that with all my schools, if I am not interested I won't pay attention… so I would rather sleep and do a little thing or whatever.

Gabe's academic disengagement may be related various tensions he has at home. His sister was recently released from jail for weapon charges, his mother is disabled and unemployed, and his family depends on welfare and housing from the various government offices. He shared a quick story to help me understand the context of his community:

> We live in Section 8 housing…and recently…some dude killed his baby mama, she was pregnant and her sister, that's where I lived, that happened right in front of my other little brother's house. It's not that bad [of a community], if you know people and you don't do anything stupid - it's okay

The culmination of these personal and community experiences may have negatively impacted his ability to focus on his school work. It is not clear whether he shares his personal dilemma with teachers or other educators at school to garner support or empathy to do well in school.

As I stood and watched students during the afternoon. A male teacher walked and stood near me. He asked me, "How [are] things going? Learned anything new about these students?" I

responded, "Just learning something new every day, it's a process." He responded, "[with these students]...it's monkey see – monkey do…if your parents are on welfare – you'll be on welfare." He said this statement as a matter-of-fact, he did not account for poverty, individual and institutional racism, or how school systems play a role in social reproduction for low-income youth. If teachers hold negative perceptions of the students and their families, will teachers be invested in teaching students and ensuring they are learning – no. Other studies have found teachers and schools often believe students and families are not invested in learning, so if students fail, they are solely responsible for the failure (Patterson, et al., 2007).

The Latino male students in this study said that they *want* to be challenged and engaged by their teacher in the learning process. The students goofed off in class because they can and are able to without consequence. When Rafael, a 16-year-old ninth grade student, was being asked what Anderson Behavioral School could do to help more Latino males prepare for college, he responded:

> Teach more, they [the teachers] need to teach everything that we have to learn, not things that we already know, because all they do is teach the same thing [curriculum] over and over and over…I'm trying to learn something new!

Although Rafael is only in ninth grade, he is aware of the unwillingness by his teachers to engage and challenge him and other students in the classroom. He wants to attend college one day, but is deeply involved with his Latino gang. Rafael's clothes were always ironed. He wore different uniforms combinations each day and often wore new shoes. He stood out among his appears for his appearance. Unlike, his peers, he did not engage in classroom disruptions as his peers constantly did, as he was aware these types of actions would cause his stay to be extended and he would be unable to return to a traditional school until possibly the next academic year.

Santiago, acknowledged the lack of rigor in their school work. He focused on the students' constant disruptions in class, and the importance of actively ignoring his peers' behavior.

> Like [other students] don't even try doing their work [at Anderson] even if it's easier! So they just, they walk out [of class] type stuff. So I don't think [that they'll go to college]…I'm just

> trying to get my grades up. Yeah, I'm just trying to do that, so I don't even pay attention to them (other students misbehaving) -- I just do the work.

Although, it seems counterintuitive to position oneself into more trouble at school and extend the stay at Anderson Behavioral School, however, the students may want to stay longer? The school work is easier, they are with likeminded peers, and the teachers set low-expectations and hardly bother them. Santiago is set to graduate in the current academic year, so his motivation is to not join his younger peers in the disruptions. He may have joined them at an earlier point in his academic career, as he shared his various suspensions and expulsions related to drugs, ditching, and fighting. But he is eager to enroll in his first-choice of a college, a for-profit automotive college out of state.

> [Auto Tech School] … they only accept like 500 students from the whole entire U.S… they told me that they work on more newer cars, and I went to like [another for-profit auto institute] and they only have like older cars…it's because I just like cars…I do…to follow a career I want to do. So, that I could go to work do…something that I love to do.

Santiago believes the Auto Tech School will provide him better preparation to become a mechanic versus the local for-profit automotive institutions with the city or state. He visited the local for-profit colleges with his cousin and determined they do not have the needed technology or equipment to help him prepare. "I think because my cousin went to [local for-profit auto college] and I went with him to go look at it and I think it was like $20,000." Although the tuition at Auto Tech School will be close to 30,000 a year, he does not seem concerned because they will help him with career placement.

*Does Anderson Behavioral School prepare students to return to regular school?*

Coleman (1990) stressed the importance of trusting relationships between schools and students, which will have positive effects on students' academic achievement, but trust cannot be achieved in the classroom if the students distrust the curricular and pedagogical decisions of the teachers and school staff at Anderson Behavioral School. The purpose of this section is to hear the students' perspectives about their learning in the classrooms and whether they will be academically

prepared to transfer to a new comprehensive school. Twelve of the thirteen students believe the curriculum is "too easy" or unchallenging. When the students return to a traditional comprehensive school, they may be months behind their peers, and not provided any additional transitioning or support system at their new school to adjust and review weeks or months' worth of academic content (Brown, 2009). Brown has documented how the suspension and expulsion of low-income and minority male students in alternative schools limits one's chances to finish high school or build the necessary academic skills. This claim is echoed by Jorge, who was asked about his prediction about when he returns to regular school and what his academic experiences may feel like:

> Adrian: So when you go back to your regular [comprehensive] school do you feel like [you'll be academically ready]?
>
> Jorge: I'll be behind, I guarantee it, I know that for a fact, I am not even going to try to play [around].

The "guarantee" Jorge provides may serve as signal that he and other students are aware they are not being challenged in the classroom. During the interviews and classroom observations, he joked often and it was challenging to know when he was being serious. Which, may explain why he stressed, "I am not even going to try to play [around"] to indicate his concern. Jorge and the other students' expressed that Anderson Behavioral School's curriculum align with the behaviors and habitus of other alternative and continuation schools, but does not provide rigorous academic experiences for their students (Kelly, 1993; Kim, 2011; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Muñoz, 2005). Instead, most alternative schools focus on building students "soft skills" or emphasize being respectful or obedient during their time in the school (Kelly, 1993; Muñoz, 2005). Unfortunately, Anderson does not even build the students soft skills or obedience.

After attending schools like Anderson Behavioral School, students with behavioral and disciplinary records become further academically behind (Brown, 2007; Kelly, 1993). After hearing

multiple students complain about the lack of learning and academic preparation, I asked Manny, have you learned anything else at this school? He responded:

> Manny: Nah, I haven't even learned nothing at this school to be honest with you…you just sit down and talk and the teachers, they don't do nothing, it's not really learning.
> […]
>
> Adrian: Is your class usually [where you] just sit around and talk about other [non-school] stuff?
>
> Manny: Yeah. What I heard from, a few years ago, [this place] used to be worse than [right now], you just watch movies and not do nothing, just sit around and talk, I feel the same, you don't really do nothing.
> […]
>
> Adrian: Do you feel that the work is easier or harder than your last school?
>
> Manny: Easier, hella easier… just do nothing, that's the only thing that I like about this [place] they give a paper, you do it because their goes your [academic] credit…and then [you can catch up quickly], that's the only thing I like.
> […]
>
> Adrian: Do you feel like when you leave this school that you'll be ready for a new school, like academically?
>
> Manny: No, I think, I won't be behind, because when I came here, we were like, like for example, what's that fool's name…Mr. [Smith]…there he was, I got in there, he was teaching us like on the board like stuffs and I learned in the beginning of the school year.

We are months into the school year and Manny and others are given material that they discussed months prior at his traditional school. The teachers and school leaders do not inspire confidence in the academic and curricular experiences at Anderson Behavioral School in preparing students to return to a traditional comprehensive school. Some Anderson Behavioral School teachers and leaders would argue their goals are to focus on "behavior, grades, and attendance," but schools also have a moral responsibility to teach and meet the academic needs of their students. There is minimal learning in each of the core subjects at ABS and students are aware they are not developing the needed skills and curricular understanding to return to comprehensive schools. The following section moves the conversation to focus on how students believe they will finance their

postsecondary education. Paying for college is a primary concern for low-income students and students of color (Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Tierney & Venegas, 2009) and especially stressful for Latino male students (Sanchez, Huerta, & Venegas, 2012).

*College Preparation*

Similar to other alternative and continuation schools (Kelly, 1993; Kim, 2011; Muñoz, 2005; Nygreen, 2013), Anderson Behavioral School does not provide differentiated academic learning for their students, with the exception of students with documented IEPs. So students who were previously enrolled in remedial and developmental courses are in the same math course as students who were previously in honors or advanced courses. This section will focus on college preparation with an emphasis on the types of classes the students were previously enrolled at their traditional comprehensive schools. The focus on the previous school is based on students' academic experiences as they have had opportunities to build college knowledge and preparation in multiple schools prior to arriving in Anderson Behavioral School.

The focus on the "types of classes" is germane to how students build their college knowledge due to how ability grouping frames *how*, *why*, or *when* students are provided opportunities and messages about college. Two of the students (Gabe and Oscar) were previously enrolled in honors, GATE, or advanced placement courses. They both have a more nuanced understanding of college knowledge messages from their teachers and/or college advisors from outside of school. CJ and Ronald have documented IEPs which provide them structured learning from dedicated ABS special education instructors. Only Emanuel did not know the level of rigor for his previous courses high school. For this section, I will focus on the students enrolled in average or regular courses and the students in honors or advanced courses because of the possibility of receiving more college knowledge.

*Regular or Average Classes*

Eight of the thirteen students (Carlos, Frank, Hector, Jorge, Julio, Rafael, Santiago, and Manny) were enrolled in regular courses in high school. When they were asked about the rigor and type of classes in their previous schools, Carlos simply responded, "average" while Santiago said, "For sure [I know about college preparatory courses], I didn't take them." Hector said, "no [college prep] regular classes," and lastly Julio provided the most vivid examples of his classes at his last high school, "No... I got kicked out of that one [college prep] class because I told them I don't wanna go to college, and they kicked me out." Carlos, Hector, Jorge, Rafael, Santiago, and Manny discussed their aspirations to want to attend some form of postsecondary education institution. Frank is undecided about going to college and Julio is unwavering about not wanting to go on to college. For students enrolled in average or regular courses in high school, there is an increased probability for required developmental courses in college (Relles & Tierney, 2013).

When the students were asked if they learned anything about college in their average classes they said, "no." Students did not have strong reactions to their previous curricular experiences in their last schools, even though twelve of the thirteen students focused on how Anderson Behavioral School's class assignments were much less academically challenging than in their previous schools. I attempted to understand their previous college preparatory coursework and possible homework assignments, but it was not fruitful. The students either could not remember or provide specific examples of the differences in coursework and assignments, but they all knew it was different in Anderson Behavioral School.

The students are aware of the course differences between average, college preparatory, and honors or advance placement. For example, Jorge, a sophomore, was recommended to enroll in honors courses during his freshmen year because of his high test scores in middle school and below he discusses his experiences:

> I didn't [take honors freshman year] because I got all F's in my 8th grade because I was like a bad student, bad, you know…but I was smart…[The counselor] wanted to put me in honors [for sophomore year], I was like, "nah"… I know that I am that smart, I have seen the work that [my friends in A.P.] are doing, it's not much difficult from the work that [I] do…but I feel I could take regular classes and still be able to do what I got to do. I don't need extra classes or extra questions to help me go to college, I can take these simpleton classes, get my good grades and then go to college and still excel…I never wanted to go in harder classes for no reason, same material basically.

Jorge focuses on the short-term benefits, "simpleton classes and good grades," to not enroll in honors courses. He, like other male students in this study, may not be aware of how informal college knowledge is embedded in the expectation of honors and advanced placement courses or that colleges give more credit for AP and Honors classes (McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). These types of courses share various forms of valuable social and cultural capital to students related to higher education (Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Perna, 2000). So, for the students who are enrolled in average or regular courses, they are least likely to gain access to similar college information networks or develop the same level of aspirations or expectations about higher education. Jorge maintains that he will, "go to college and still excel."

Santiago is aware of the college preparatory courses available in his last high school, but he "didn't take them" as he believes, "to be a mechanic [no one is] going to check [my] reading or social studies...don't think a mechanic is going to be doing history." He was told by the for-profit recruiter, "I'm just going to teach you all about cars." So the combination of his attitude with the expectations set by the recruiter help influence his habitus about the types of courses to enroll in during high school. He further elaborates about his decision to not want to be in college preparatory courses:

> I don't know…it was for some reason, it felt like they was just teaching more like college, about more for the main [majors] like math's and all that, that's how I felt like they were just teaching us about college. They didn't show us like about other colleges. It felt like it was more about writing and all that. So, I didn't feel like taking them.

Santiago believes his teachers were too focused on traditional colleges and universities versus the automotive mechanical institutes: "They didn't show us like about other colleges." He has had a long interest in cars beginning around freshman year of high school after he enrolled in an auto body course, and his passion has grown to purchasing two classic cars with his father and they are restoring the vehicles together. He does not see traditional two and four-year colleges meeting his personal and professional needs, so he believes the for-profit is a better fit. The Auto Tech School recruiter informed Santiago the automotive education and training program out-of-state provides advanced opportunities that are superior to the for-profit schools or local community colleges.

Julio does not envision himself going to college after high school. He was enrolled in regular courses in his previous school. He was "kicked out" from classes that would help prepare him for college. He grinned about the teacher's reaction to being kicked out of class as he thought it was funny because of how quickly the teacher grew angry and frustrated with him. He does well academically when he is in school, "Yeah, I get A's and B's, and when I go to school, I get good grades." As will be discussed in the following section higher education seems out of reach for him due to the "risk" related to college cost. He would be venturing into an uncharted area as no one in his immediate or extended family has going to college. He does not have anyone within his family or peer network to advise him about the potential benefits of college preparatory courses in high school.

The examples provided above are the most specific statements by students related to attending regular or non-college preparatory courses. The six other students provided one, "No," or two word, "No…nah" answers about the classes they were previous enrolled in and if those were college preparatory. The current literature stresses the need for students to be enrolled in college preparatory or advanced courses in high school to do well academically in higher education (Duncheon, 2015; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Perna, 2000; Relles & Tierney, 2013). I did not

thoroughly examine students' previous academic transcript to evaluate course placement, which would be beyond the scope of this study, but warrants future investigation to determine if students understand the potential consequences in higher education.

*Honors and Advanced Placement Courses*

Gabe and Oscar are the only two students in the study who shared that they were previously enrolled in honors and GATE courses at their last high schools. They both have long histories of school discipline challenges and have moved multiple times due to income insecurity. In the last three academic years. Gabe has attended three different schools, Sunridge Alternative School, Hilltop High School, and then Anderson Behavioral School. Here is what he shared about Sunridge:

> Gabe: I really couldn't take Honors classes at Sunridge and even if I did, they still wouldn't be regular on these classes.

Sunridge Alternative School had limited availability of honors courses compared to traditional comprehensive schools. Sunridge Alternative School serves domestic and recent immigrant students. Gabe commented the honors courses welcomed students who did not have a mastery of the English language. The inclusion of ELL students caused the teachers to focus on language acquisition over the course content, which was frustrating for Gabe, so he then switched schools to Hilltop High School.

Gabe and his mother met with the teachers at Hilltop High School and felt the courses were not meeting his academic needs. Although, they were advanced and honors, and he struggled with his motivation to complete the work. He said, "Yeah, I know some people say, 'Just do the work and get it over with." That makes me even more bored, it just makes it worse, so I would rather sleep." There is some type of disruption occurring in Gabe, as he shared his past academic history, he has been in GATE, advanced, or honors courses since elementary school.

> We did [meet with the school about honors]. We had a parent-teacher conference at Hilltop a couple of weeks prior to me being kicked out about my classes and my grades, and [the teachers] said, "I was a good kid and that I was smart." I wasn't right for their class, it was too slow paced. It wasn't good for me there.

The classes were too slow paced for him and may have caused him to "ditch or just sleep so I don't really remember many of [my classes]." Clearly, his intelligence is documented through his enrollment in GATE and accelerated courses in elementary and middle school, but the actually learning in the classroom is difficult to determine because he slept or ditched multiple times. He is aware of some forms of college knowledge which is in the following sections, and somehow he lost "interest and stopped paying attention" in high school.

Oscar is a senior and this is his first year enrolled in honors courses. He has attended thirteen different schools including three high schools, "because of family problems of paying rent, we don't have enough money, and we just kept getting evicted, or we just ended up moving 'cause we can't afford to pay the rent." He is enthusiastic about graduating from high school and enrolling in community college. He applied to a community college, a state four-year college and two four-year research universities. He opted for the community college because of the cost. When he was asked about his learning in school he focused on Anderson Behavioral School:

> I am actually learning because in my science classes, I [am] learning…what a normal school would teach you. You know, [Mr. Johnson] is a good teacher and then, Mrs. Lee, she's smart, too, like she's actually teaching us things that we should actually be learning. She is teaching us to write essays. Today, we just wrote an essay…. I just did a whole page essay, like fifteen sentences. So like my introduction, first paragraph, second paragraph, and my conclusion.

He seemed surprised to be covering materials are the foundation in traditional comprehensive schools. Besides the example Oscar provides above, he did not identify any other examples of college preparation in the classroom. This is troubling as he is planning to begin college in the fall, but he does show motivation to do well in school as he raised his GPA from a low to a high C. Students' course placement and level of college preparation was inconsistent. They overwhelming

said, "No" they are not learning about college or feel they are being prepared for postsecondary education, whether a for-profit, community college, or four-year university. As documented throughout this section, the students have strong aspirations to attend college, but are not receiving the preparation in writing, reading, critical thinking, or math and sciences. The absence of rigorous preparation will impact the students' ability to perform at the college level in higher education, which is a major concern. What's more troubling about this section is the students who come from honors and advanced placement courses have experiences almost similar to amounts of college preparation as the students in average or regular classes in Rock County School District. The more advanced courses are supposed to incorporate college knowledge and preparation into the curriculum in order to prepare these students for college, but that is not the class for Gabe and Oscar.

*Financial Aid*

Low-income families are often unaware of the steps necessary to secure financial aid or do not have the necessary personal connections to college officials to champion for their sons to learn the rules of the game (McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). More often, the individual low-income and first-generation student is left to maneuver the financial aid and college-going processes by themselves (Tierney & Venegas, 2009; Venegas, 2007), whether unraveling the college-going experience is successful or not depends on the students' possession of valuable social and cultural capital about the higher educational system and possible personal relationships with school guidance counselors or college recruiters (Huerta, et al, 2016; McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

Twelve of the thirteen students did not mention the words, "FAFSA," which is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid – the financial lifeline for most low-income and Pell eligible college students (Heller, 2005; Tierney & Venegas, 2009). Students' identified three different

responses when asked how they would pay for college. Seven students mentioned, “working and paying for college at the same time,” students loans were mentioned by eight other students as the primary method to pay for their college education, and the last source of student aid was “scholarships” based on a combination of skills, talents, and racial and ethnic status mentioned by seven students. The other methods to pay for college are listed in Table 5.1 on the following page.

| **Table 5.1 Methods to Finance Postsecondary Education (N of students)** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Drug Dealing** | **FAFSA** | **Grants** | **I don’t know / Haven’t thought about it** |
| Emanuel<br>(1) | Oscar (1) | Gabe<br>Oscar<br>(2) | Carlos<br>Jorge<br>Julio<br>Frank<br>(4) |
| **Student Loans** | **Military** | **State Merit Scholarship*** | **Individual Savings Accounts** |
| Carlos<br>CJ<br>Gabe<br>Hector<br>Jorge<br>Oscar<br>Ronald<br>Santiago<br>(8) | CJ<br>(1) | Gabe<br>(1) | Julio<br>Oscar<br>Rafael<br>(3) |
| | **Parents Resources** | **Work** | **Scholarships Based on Race, Athletic Ability, or Skills/ Talents (e.g. Being left handed)** |
| | Hector<br>Jorge<br>Rafael<br>(3) | Emanuel<br>Jorge<br>Manny<br>Oscar<br>Ronald<br>Rafael<br>Santiago<br>(7) | Emanuel<br>Gabe<br>Hector<br>Jorge<br>Oscar<br>Ronald<br>Manny<br>(7) |

Access to individuals with knowledge about the financial aid system is critical for low-income students to expand their college-choices (Espinoza, 2011; McDonough, 1994, 1997; Tierney & Venegas, 2009). The students in this study range from 7th to 12th grade, which means there are

possible knowledge gaps based on *how* and *when* schools share college and financial aid information to their students (Bonous-Hammarth & Allen, 2005), and many school systems delay until students' junior and seniors years to distribute information (Hill, 2012; McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). However, the state in which this study offers comparatively low in-state tuition rates (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, n.d.) and state based financial aid options. Students who enroll in state colleges will pay virtually nothing for tuition, books, and fees, if students become eligible to combine and use the local, state, and federal scholarships and grants. It is not clear that students understood how and when these options might be open to them. Here is how Julio described his financial aid options:

> I would have to look into classes and online schools and stuff [to learn about how to pay for college]. How I'd get benefits to pay for college 'cause I don't got money like that neither – that's why. My family's kinda poor. We're from the ghetto.

Julio is aware of the multiple social and economic benefits of attending and graduating from college including: increased wages, prestige, and career opportunities, but is not familiar with the different methods to pay for college. He shares, "Because when you get college degrees… they give you benefits…can get a better job…get paid a little more…doing better." He knows college graduates earn more than others with a high school diploma, but his fact does not inspire him to want to pursue college.

> When I'm done with high school, I'm trying to paint cars for a living. I'm trying to sand it, prepare it, and paint with, like, metallic paint and all that stuff with the glitter and all that. I'm trying to learn how to do that…I would look [around] and not that many people [who are successful] go to college…a lot of people make a lot of money, and they don't go to college… Mayweather didn't go to college neither.

Within Julio's network, he has family friends who own and work for auto body shops throughout the city and he has practiced over the years. For Julio, a college education does not equate to being successful as he uses Floyd Mayweather, a professional boxer, who did not attend college as an example of someone who earns large sums of money for each bout. Returning to financial aid, Julio

listed two methods to pay for college: 1) saving money to pay for college, and said, "Some people have savings. Like, they save up for college" and 2) later he plainly stated, "Nah, I don't even know [to pay for college]."

The cost of college is too much for him to finance individually; he is aware his family is not in the financial position to supplement any of his college expenses, so it may be easier to push college out as an option. He identified himself as "smart" and gets good grades, when he is not getting in trouble or distracted at school. The financial investment for college is too great for Julio and he is unwilling to take the risk because of the cost, "…If I were to go to college, it's high risk" and the cost is not only about money, but the possible failure of not doing well in college especially with limited support from his family. The sentiment that "college is a bad investment" is echoed by Emanuel. His mother attended some type of postsecondary institution to learn massage therapy, yet now while she works at a local 7-11 convenience store. Emanuel states:

> I don't really see the point of me going to college. To me, it's a waste of money…If I was going to waste $13,000 for like one semester, I could have bought a house or a car with that shit [money] or I could just open a [tattoo] shop. But my parents want me to go to college, so I could get a better job…Yeah, because all of that money I will be making [instead of going to college], I could be buying something with it. I could help my mom look for a house…I could of [taken] her out of the ghetto instead of making her stay there. I could put her in a better house in a better place. My dad, he already has all of that shit [nice things], so there ain't no point in helping his ass…
>
> Adrian: How will you pay for college?
>
> Emanuel: Probably the thing my cousin is doing [to pay for college]…I'll probably drug deal.

Again, the need to emphasize the importance of sharing financial aid information early to low-income Latino male students is critical to increase their college-choices. Emanuel does not believe college is the best decision because he could use the money to care for his mother, who lives in the "ghetto." Emanuel is aware of three methods to pay for college: 1) drug dealing, 2) earning an athletic scholarship, and 3) attending college and working to pay simultaneously. Julio and Emanuel bring with them non- dominant forms of social and cultural capital to school related to drugs,

alcohol, gang structures and connections, and graffiti styles (Carter, 2003; Huerta, McDonough, & Allen, 2016), which is often ignored or dismissed by school personnel. Their teachers may highlight the importance of going to college in order to access high-paying careers, but for Julio and Emanuel and others attending Anderson Behavioral School, pursuing higher education is not an immediate priority, or if it is, they have not received the needed financial aid information in order to matriculate to a postsecondary institution.

*Working and Paying for College*

Seven students believe they will be able to work and pay for college costs. They estimate tuition costs at local colleges and universities ranging from 3,000 to 50,000 dollars for tuition and fees. When Rafael was asked the different methods to people pay for college he mentioned saving money, asking his parents, and working:

> By working…and pay off the school… I'll pay [for college], I'll probably ask my mom for a little bit and I'll pay the rest…I'll probably get a job first, save up at least $10,000 [dollars], so I can pay half of it and the other half too.

Rafael's believes working and saving a large sum of money is the best method to finance his postsecondary education. Rafael's efforts of wanting to securing employment and save a large amount of money before attending college can provide a level of financial independence from his family. His father works construction and his mother works for a large retailer moving boxes, and they want him to pursue better career opportunities and "not like them getting a sucky ass job." His decision behind wanting to save so much money is so he will not have to ask his family to contribute to his college education. This attitude of not wanting to be a factor in parents' financial insecurity is felt by many of the students' families as they are aware money is an issue.

When Ronald was asked about the different methods to pay for college, he responded:

> Mostly, I guess you could try and get a scholarship [for college], but mostly I have to get a

> job, at least get $10.00 an hour…I am going to say loans too [to pay for college], but you have to pay those back.

During the time that I was on site at the Anderson Behavioral School, I never observed a counselor helping the high school students learn about financial aid in an organized or informal way. It is not clear that college counseling or career planning was part of her regular duties. The same can be said for the some of the students' traditional comprehensive school counselors, as they did not provide the students with substantial financial aid information either. Not one of the thirteen students mentioned a financial aid night or workshops at their previous schools to help them prepare for the FAFSA applications. It is a vital form of cultural capital that is absent for the students that will further impact their ability to create expectations, an understanding and competency about how to pay for college.

The disparities in how and when low-income students receive accurate and timely college information has been well documented (Holland, 2015; McDonough, 1997), but has not fully explored how students with records of suspensions and expulsions are taught the college-going process. The following section considers the study participants' views on student loans as a primary method to pay for their postsecondary education. This section is unique because the students know student loans can pay for their college, but there is an apprehension about living in debt.

*Student Loans to Pay for College*

Latino students and their families are afraid of carrying college student loan debt and the possibility of student loans influences how and why Latino families select specific postsecondary institutions to attend (McDonough, Calderone, & Venegas, 2015). The students in this study have mixed feelings toward how they will pay for college, some Latino males believe student loans are the most reliable options, as they can borrow the funds, pay for college, graduate from college, and begin to pay back their loan debt. Other students in this study, do not want to be in debt, which is

captured with Jorge comments, "You could take a [student] loan but sometimes that can put you in debt, so I am not trying to do that." Debt is burden especially for low-income families, who often do not have the resources to pay for basic needs (McDonough, et al., 2015). As shown throughout this dissertation, some of the families have switched apartments and single family homes multiple times because they were unable to afford rent, the constant disruption of moving causes families to disrupt the types of depth of social and cultural capital accumulated with neighbors, friends, and schools (Coleman, 1988). The disruption may create an additional burden for families to build strong relationships with schools and to receive the needed support to help their children prepare for college, but also create a bond with educators to understand the needs of their sons, who have had various disciplinary issues.

Hector wants to attend college to study an undecided health-related field. When asked how to pay for college, he responded:

> Yeah, they could borrow money [for college]. And then when you start working on your own after you go to college, you could pay them [the government] back little by little. That's another way I know. And that's mostly all of it…I'm going to borrow [student loan] money and then see if I can pay it back when I have my own job.

Hector has a very casual response about paying back students loans, he did not seem scared, agitated, or reluctant about student loans compared to other participants for example Jorge. Jorge does not agree with the idea of being in debt to attend college and although he is eager about attending college and learning new academic materials and meeting new people, he was very perplexed about the financial aid system. He is waiting until his junior year to learn more methods to finance his postsecondary education and said, "Most likely my junior year [of high school] I am about to get more information on that [financial aid], so you know." The sad truth is most urban high schools wait to provide college financial aid information to their students during the final year of high school (Hill, 2012; McDonough, 1997). Waiting for the final two years of high school in Rock County is detrimental for low-income students because if they have grade point averages

below a 3.25, they become ineligible for the state merit scholarship, which is $10,000 to be used at any college or university throughout the state.

Carlos and Santiago have upperclassmen status and yet have a limited understanding of the financial aid system. They believe student loans are the primary tool to finance their postsecondary education. Carlos fumbled and struggled to answer the questions about how others pay for college and what methods he would use to pay for his higher education. After some work, he stated, "you could get…loans, stuff like that." Santiago was very loans focused. He stated: "Loans, student loans. That's the only way I'm thinking, student loans." Santiago is on path to attend a for-profit college out-of-state to study automotive engines and transmissions. Santiago was told by his parents and the college recruiter that the for-profit is a "good school." Santiago's parents did not graduate from high school and work in the casino industry in low-level positions, and they are heavily relying on the recruiter's advice. His parents may not be able to tap into their peer network to solicit advice about the $40,000 cost of the private for-profit automotive college. Santiago did seek some advice from his high school counselor. The counselor reportedly said: "Are you sure you're into cars?" and then said using student loans is a good way to pay for college. Others who identified student loans as a financial aid options provided succinct responses such as, "Loans," "Student Loans," or "Borrow money" to pay for their higher education. A majority of the participants at Anderson would potentially quality for full Federal Pell Grants, state need-based aid, and other options to cover 100 percent of their tuition, fees, and books for their higher education. During the time that I was on campus, I never heard these discussions taking place. The limited valuable social and cultural capital about higher education these young men need is not being made available fot them. The following section focuses on scholarships and how students believe scholarships will help them finance their postsecondary education.

*Scholarships*

Seven of the 13 students said they would supplement their college expenses using scholarships as a preferred method. No individual student explained how they learned about scholarships, or what the various nuances of scholarship criteria or requirements are, or the type of local or national agencies who provide scholarships for students to pay for college. But, these seven students are aware scholarships exist. Jorge sums up the various method to pay for college, but stressed the nuances of scholarships available to different student populations:

> There are many ways [to pay for college]. You have what do you call those things, you can get scouted…what is it called? Scholarships, many types of scholarships, being Hispanic, I think you have scholarship for being left handed, writing cursive…being [American] Indian, if you are Black you can get scholarship, but you can get scholarship by sports, cars, because my cousin he went to that ITT tech league stuff like that, you could take a loan but sometimes that can put you in debt, *so I am not trying to do that.* You could have some saved up money I guess, but I feel mostly the way people go to college is by getting scholarships. That's the most way.

Jorge believes students of color are eligible for additional scholarships. He did not mention why minority students can receive targeted financial aid, but knows because he is Mexican-American and other racial and ethnic groups can earn additional scholarship funds to offset paying for college. His mother graduated from high school and his sister dropped out of high school to help support the family, so he cannot rely on his family network for help to learn about the financial aid system. Jorge's relationship with school personnel at his last school was not positive, which could mean that he will not receive any support or guidance from them to learn about paying for college. He wants to attend college and learn business and construction management. His goal is to be recruited to play college football. Jorge's relationship with the staff at Anderson is not positive either, he forged a connection with the campus resource officers, but quickly frustrated them and now they do not speak. When he was pressed further to understand which methods he will use to pay for college, he said:

> Damn!  [I have] never thought about that. My mom said she would always help me [pay for college] but I don't know, I don't know if we have…have enough money, so I always thought to myself…well, I never thought to myself - I am going to get scholarship for sure, I always thought to myself that was my goal [to get scholarships], that's why I got to look into that [getting scholarships], but other than that, I am not sure…I don't know, I am sure, need help in that.

Twelve of the thirteen Anderson Behavioral School students did not have deep understandings of the financial aid process. Ten of the thirteen students want to go onto some form of postsecondary education (See Table 5.2). Only Oscar has successful applied and was awarded Federal financial aid, he was awarded a generous Pell grants, secured two outside scholarships, and declined loans to pay for community college.

**Table (5.2) Future Aspirations Anderson Behavioral School**

| Name | Age | Grade | Wants to Attend College? | Career Goals |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Carlos | 16 | 11 | Yes | Undecided |
| CJ | 19 | 12 | Yes | Law Enforcement |
| Emanuel | 16 | 10 | No | Tattoo Artist or Auto Repairs |
| Frank | 17 | 10 | Undecided | Undecided |
| Gabe | 16 | 10 | Yes | Chef, Law Enforcement, or Video Game Designer |
| Hector | 15 | 10 | Yes | Health Industry |
| Jorge | 15 | 10 | Yes | Business or Construction |
| Julio | 16 | 11 | No | Car Painter |
| Manny | 15 | 10 | Yes | Car Painter |
| Oscar | 17 | 12 | Yes | Juvenile Defense Lawyer |
| Rafael | 16 | 9 | Yes | Architect / Engineer |
| Ronald | 14 | 7 | Yes | Auto Focused |
| Santiago | 18 | 12 | Yes | Auto Mechanic |

If students receive erroneous financial aid information or no formal information at all, their college goals can be derailed (Tierney & Venegas, 2009; Venegas, 2007).

Access to college information is not easily accessible or understood by low-income families (McDonough, 1997), and families receive even less financial aid information if their children attend underresourced schools (McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Anderson Behavioral School did not provide any of their students formal or informal financial aid information during data collection. The limited information is not restricted to Anderson, but to the multiple feeder schools the twelve students attended before arriving at Anderson. Collectively those schools did not provide meaningful or memorable financial aid information to the students. Gabe learned about financial aid through his involvement in the federal GEAR UP program, but the information was stunted due to the site contact quitting in the middle of the academic year. Oscar learned about the multiple nuances of financial aid through his involvement in an off-campus college access program. So, these two students had to take active steps to learn about financial aid, and their school played a minimal role in facilitating the transmission of vital information about how to finance a college education. Anderson Behavioral School is aware that a majority of their students qualify for free or reduced lunch, which they can use as a proxy for family income and poverty level, which should signal the importance of sharing timely and accurate financial aid information to increase the students' aspirations and expectations to attend college. Anderson Behavioral School is aware most of students' parents work in casinos, construction, service industry, which may mean the families will depend on the school site to provide financial aid information to their sons. Gabe, shared the financial aid information his father communicated to him.

> Adrian: What are the different ways that people can pay for college?
>
> Gabe: Scholarships, loans, grants and if you are Native American like me, your blood. Well, if you are Native American, you have the right to go to college, you are automatically born with the right, you get to go to college if you choose to.

> Adrian: Where did you learn that from?
>
> Gabe: My dad, he said, 'Son, I can't give you much but my name and your blood!' […] Being Native American I try to get a scholarship for game design because they have lot of little 24-hour game contests, lot of things you can find off the Internet.

Gabe believes his Native-American background will allow him access to financial aid to pay for college expenses. It isn't clear whether Gabe knows how to retrieve his financial aid funds because of his Native American status and whether his tribe has systems to facilitate access to financial aid information or funds to supplement his college-going dreams. Luckily for Gabe, he is aware of other financial aid options through his involvement in the Federal GEAR-UP Program:

> "GEAR UP, it's a program that they have [at the local university], they send people down here to do [work with us]. They send few people [to work with students] that [have] bad grades or low GPA, I have a low GPA…weighted 1.32, dismal but… [they] tell me about grants and other things like that."

He is the only student to participate in a Federal college preparation program at Anderson Behavioral School, but the GEAR-UP staff member at his previous high school left in the middle of the academic term and was never replaced, which impacts Gabe's ability to learn more about college and financial aid options. Gabe was in the program for one academic year. The GEAR-UP staff member discussed how college impacted and improved his life, and served more as mentor for Gabe. Gabe is unique and does not accurately represent all of the students' views or knowledge about the financial aid system, but his experience is important to identify because although he has been in trouble at school multiple times and his family is gang embedded, he wants to attend college and is aware of the various mechanisms to pay for college, however he will need assistance activating the different financial aid systems.

When Manny was asked what are the different methods to pay for college, he responded, "*Becas* [scholarships] and then in working that's pretty much it…if I could get them [scholarships] that would be the only way." Manny is similar to other Latino male students, who believe in working

and paying for college. Manny's family and siblings are not aware of the necessary steps to prepare or pay for college, so they must depend on the high schools to share any relevant college knowledge. But, they may be fearful of asking for information because of Manny's undocumented status. Manny did not disclose whether his parents or siblings are undocumented immigrants, but did acknowledge his younger sibling was born in Rock County.

Manny's undocumented immigration status limits many state and all federal financial aid options for him. Most school counselors and college counselors are not aware of the nuances of the state and federal financial aid options for undocumented high school students, so they may steer him away from higher education because of their limited understanding or uncertainty due to the complex relationships between immigration and financial aid (Garcia & Tierney, 2011; Olivas, 2009). It is good that Manny is aware of scholarships to help pay for college as not all scholarships require a social security number to be eligible. However, an additional burden for him is the scholarship application, is it requires the social capital to request support from a college counselor to teach the nuances and provide a list of scholarships. He also needs access to dominant cultural capital to use the appropriate language and writing skills to convey his financial hardship and desire to attend community college in the scholarship letters. These financial aid roadblocks are not new burdens for low-income high school students, but simply another complicated step in the college financial aid maze (Tierney & Venegas, 2009; Venegas, 2007).

Oscar's educational path to high school completion was riddled with various encounters with the police officers, the juvenile court system, suspensions and expulsions from school including drug possession and violence against an educator. He states, the educator made derogatory comments against his mother, he felt disrespected and retaliated against the educator. Although, he has been an active graffiti crew member for over five years and been arrested multiple times, he completed the FAFSA application, was admitted to a local community college, awarded two

scholarships, and has goals of transferring to a four-year university to study English and Philosophy. His long-term educational and career goals are to become a lawyer and provide legal defense for juveniles because of his personal experience.

Oscar passionately discussed how he learned about financial aid, scholarships, and college majors. He seems determined to attend and graduate from the local community college and transfer to a four-year university. However, college affordability concerns are extremely salient for Oscar, as his mother is single, undocumented, and works in the service industry making $10/hour. His father has been absent a majority of Oscar's life and has not contributed in a meaningful way. Oscar applied to three four-year colleges and universities and one community college. He opted for the community college because of the lower cost of tuition, but also because multiple counselors, school personnel, and college recruiters informed him the of the cheaper cost of community college, thus he stated:

> I want to go to college…I already applied for FAFSA. I already applied for the college. I already applied for scholarships. I got two scholarships. I'm going to [community college] and from there I am going to transfer to [four-year university]…I want to study law…criminal justice, criminal defense.

Oscar actively searched for college information from various sources including a local college access program. He was not clear about when or how he joined the college access program, but his gregarious nature may have helped him get the necessary support from school staff to facilitate the necessary connection to the college access program officers. He didn't share whether school personnel at Anderson or his previous school are aware of his complicated social and financial position.

In this section, I have discussed how students believe they will pay for college, by either drug dealing (Emanuel), student loans (7 students), scholarships (7 students), or student loans (8 students). Eleven of the thirteen students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, which is often used

as the proxy for Pell-Grant eligibility. Almost twenty years ago, McDonough (1998) stated schools have a moral responsibility to share college information with low-income students because of the awareness most parents do not have the resources, networks, and various forms of valued capital to prepare their children for higher education, and this statement still rings true. Public schools continue to work towards tracking and creating additional hurdles for low-income and racial and ethnic minority students to surpass to reach a college doorway (Bloom, 2007; Oakes, 2005). ABS does not seem to hold itself responsible for these goals.

The following section will highlight the next critical and interconnected piece to the college knowledge puzzle for low-income students and families, what are the college admission requirements for two and four-year colleges and universities.

## Knowledge of College Admission Requirements

Applying for college requires an understanding of the various admission criteria. In this section, the students share their perceptions of what is needed to apply and be accepted to different colleges. When Jorge was asked what are the requirements to get into college besides grades, he stated:

> Behavior…*nobody*…*nobody*…especially for [college] football they are going to look at my [high school] behavior [record], nobody wants somebody with a bad mouth, you know, but it's academics, I feel…academic are big…

Jorge plays football in high school and holds strong ambitions to play football in college. I believe he has exaggerated his level of play in high school. He mentioned playing a few games at the varsity level as a freshmen and during his sophomore year. Jorge's focus and discipline began to decline after football season finished. Football motivates him to stay focused on his goals of graduating high school and then enrolling in college. He really tried to find the correct answers about the college admissions process, but he is not aware of any other requirements besides the belief that a high grade point average is necessary to attend the local four-year university. Jorge's social and cultural

capital about higher education was limited and he does not have the vocabulary or network to easily request these forms of college admission knowledge from his peers or educators. Social capital is about trust and relationships, so if a student and counselor do not have an amicable relationship, the counselor may share little to no information, or simply "close doors" for students to gain access to new social networks with college representatives (Coleman, 1986; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). But, the inconsistent information about the traditional college admission process is a pattern for all of the Anderson Behavioral School students, with Oscar being the exception, the students are each aware of one or two pieces of the college admission puzzle for different two and four-year institutions types. The students are not at fault for not possessing the *correct capitals*, the students' habitus about the college-going and choice process may be tempered to their limited opportunities to learn how to create high expectations for college. The mixed awareness of the college admission process is especially salient for Emanuel. When he was asked about what is required to attend college, he offered the following:

> (Three second pause) …I don't know… (five second pause) …I think you probably just have to have good grades or something…I heard that you could get someone to write you a letter of recommendation for a college. Like a recommendation letter from some important person (uncertainty in his voice)…High school diploma. I think you can't have no felonies or some shit like that…

Emanuel's statement highlights the complexity of various messages he may received from peers, teachers, counselors, media, and others within his social network. Emanuel was confident with his responses about his gang experiences and the steps necessary to determine if someone is "down" [committed] about fighting rival gang members, but at this moment he did not know and could not fabricate a response about the college admission process. Only Oscar and Emanuel listed letters of recommendations as needed pieces in the college admission process. Emanuel like Jorge, were perplexed, not because they are not bright and generally knowledgeable about various areas about gangs and urban culture, but their access to people to share the college information is not being

facilitated because they are students with long histories of disciplinary records. Emanuel was able to quickly list over 15 gangs and graffiti crews in the community, which gangs have tension with each other, and how gangs splintered to create new factions based on the Sureño affiliation. Carter (2003) identifies these forms of cultural capital as non-dominant, and within the proper fields, as valuable. However, Emanuel's cultural capital has tremendous value in his community and within his peer groups, but does not warrant the same worth at his school with teachers and counselors. Emanuel held a high level of confidence and pride as he discussed the various gang networks and his families' connections to notorious California based gangs. But, Emanuel does not know *who* the letter of recommendation gatekeeper is, or what is required in the letter to help him be admitted into a college. Although, Emanuel identified himself as undecided about whether to attend college, months later, he said, "maybe" about attending college and he would look into it.

*High school diploma*

Six of the thirteen students identified a high school diploma as a core requirement to be admitted to a college or university. Although, the other seven students did not identify a high school diploma as a prerequisite for college, they know the importance of a high school diploma for future employment and social standing. Julio adamantly stated he does not want to go to college and college is not for him, as he wants to be a car painter, and he states that profession does not require any formal education, but is more focused on technique and skills, as he has learned from his father's peers, who paint cars and own auto body shops. Julio's father is a *veterano* from one the most notorious Chicano/Latino gangs in Rock County, and that gang has been in the community for over 40 years. Although, Julio's father is a retired gang member and his mother a high school dropout, they both agree Julio needs to complete high school and Julio provides the following comments about his views about a high school diploma.

> 'Cause without a [high school] diploma, you ain't nothing - this is the United States - without a [high school] diploma…you can't even work at McDonald's without a diploma. With a diploma, you could do mostly anything. It's easier in life with a [high school] diploma. That's what it is. That's what my parents and everybody says, "That piece of paper. That's all you need, is that diploma". 'Cause my older brother graduated too, so I don't want to let my mom and dad down, and I…'cause if he [my brother] can make it then I can make it, why not? 'Cause he was fucking up just like me too, he'd been to behavior school and all that, he made it, so I can make it too, if he could.

With the exception of Oscar, the five other students may have just assumed a high school diploma is a necessary step to be admitted to a postsecondary education institution. It was not clear how and why the students assumed a high school diploma is necessary for college enrollment, and due to students limited knowledge of the financial aid process, students are possibly unaware of the need to either posses a high school diploma or a general educational development (GED) to be eligible for financial aid. The students did not provide long narrative about the college requirements in general and very little about the high school diploma besides identifying it. Santiago, the senior who plans to enroll in a for-profit college, discussed the little value a high school his diploma plays in his preparation for the automotive focused college, he states:

> "Just high school diploma that's what they're [for-profit college] asking for, this one. The [for-profit] college I was going to…He [the for-profit college recruiter] was just saying, 'to be a mechanic, I'm not going to check your reading or your social studies and stuff like that,' I don't think a mechanic is going to be doing history and stuff. He was like, 'I'm just going to teach you all about cars to do this and that.'

C.J. wants to join the military after high school and then attend college before beginning his career with the police department. When he was asked what are the requirements to attend college, he stated:

> Get a high school diploma and stuff like that.
>
> Adrian: Anything else?
>
> C.J.: I don't think so.

C.J. was not aware of any other college admission requirements besides a high school diploma for consideration for a two or four-year college or university. He never was enrolled in college

preparation or advanced courses in high school, and this may be related to his special education status. C.J. did not disclose why or how he met the special education criteria, but received additional support in his courses at Anderson Behavioral School. Although, C.J. was entitled to additional learning support services, he didn't have a strong relationship with his teachers or school counselors at Anderson or his previous traditional comprehensive school. He is behind in academic units and needed a few more courses before he could graduate from high school, so he did not share all the same classes as his male peers.

*Good grades*

Highly selective colleges and universities regularly tout their entering freshmen class grade point averages of 4.5 or above and multiple completion of Advanced Placement (AP) courses. First-time freshman admitted to UCLA, Stanford, Harvard, and peer institutions represent the students who have successfully navigated the educational pipeline, excelled in their high school courses, and were shared various forms of valued social and cultural capital from their families and/or school personnel to learn the game (Espinoza, 2011; Mullen, 2012; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Realistically, not all high schools same the same habitus about who and what types of college their students attend (McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010), and regularly low-income students, who are high achievers are guided into local community colleges and state universities instead of shepherded into selective public and private universities (McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Radford, 2013).

Only five students identified "grades" or "good grades" as necessary to be admitted into a college or university. Of these five, only Frank, Jorge, and Oscar were aware selective colleges and universities require higher grade point averages to be considered, but did not know the exact number or range. Frank simply stated, "High GPA, medium GPA, you could get into a regular one [college]. High ones [ grades] are for Ivy League or if you have money." Frank is aware there are differences in colleges and universities, but was unable to identify their locations or any additional

information about the various postsecondary institutions. I quickly followed up and asked, how he learned about the Ivy League institutions, "I've always known." Frank's mother recently created her own home cleaning business and his step-father works in construction. He does not believe either of his parents attended college and was not sure if they graduated from high school. The other students plainly said, "high academics," "good grades," or "high GPA." Traditionally, in honors or advanced placement courses, students are awarded additional points to their GPAs because of the rigor of the courses, and none of the five students identified this technique to increase overall grades.

Oscar, the community-college bound student, provided a more nuanced response and touches on each of the elements needed to be admitted to a college or university:

> Community college is more for everybody and anybody that can enter. As long as you have your high school diploma or GED, you know? You could enter this school [community college] and become higher in there. You just start from the bottom at [community college] and it just accepts anybody. At the university, it's…there's qualifications you gotta meet. You gotta have a 3.24 or a 3. something to get into there with a SAT/ACT test scores. I was supposed to take the SAT last month, but I got kicked out. I missed it. (emphasis added).

Oscar is aware of the college admission process, as he recently completed all the needed steps to be considered for a two and four-year college and university. His experiences are unique, as he is an active graffiti crew member, enrolled in honors courses, sells drugs to supplement his mother's income, and is college-bound.

Teachers and school leaders do not view Anderson Behavioral School students in the same light as college-bound students because of their past disciplinary infractions. Although, these students should be celebrated for attending school on a regular basis as they are constantly ignoring requests to ditch school for parties or do drugs, they have the potential to earn high academic grades and learn how to prepare for college. ABS teachers and other school personnel accept and promote an organizational habitus that inhibits and subdues high academic achievement, and instead promote passivity in learning and attitudes. Although, students are encouraged to complete their class assignment, students are awarded daily points in class, so their course grades do not align with the

learning or imitation of learning. Earning good grades is a form of valued and dominant cultural capital, students in college educated or college-going families may receive messages from their families or school personnel, who may stress the importance of earning high grades as a necessary step to prepare for college. Anderson students are not aware of the academic rigor of their courses and school personnel do not have the same level of commitment to their academic success, simply wanting them to *do their time* and go back to a new traditional school. This is not to say, the Anderson students could not excel in advanced and honors courses, but it is easier to provide basic curriculum and hope the students are attentive enough to copy and complete assignments instead of excelling.

It is important to note, for the students who were aware of their prior school grades mentioned their overall grades decreased due to the transition from the regular comprehensive school to Anderson. Thus, students who had low Bs and Cs entered the school with Ds and Fs because their academic records were not frozen by past school administrators. So, because the students' entered with lower grades, it required additional effort to reach Bs and Cs again. The institutional failure to freeze the students' grades caused a lot of anger and frustration for the students, as they feel they were deceived by the school system for their operating in an equitable manner. Julio shares his frustration with this statement:

> I had A's and B's [at my last high school] too, but they kicked me out for minutes [a long time] so my grades started dropping. So now I got lower grades 'cause I haven't been in school for so long.

Although, this section is about students' understanding of the needed academic high school grades to prepare for higher education admission, it is important to note how students are cheated in middle and high school by the school system. The schools action or inaction to advocate for the students causes an additional level of distrust and violates the relationships needed to foster new

forms of social capital between different students and school counselors and possibly college recruiters.

*Extracurricular activities*

Only four of the thirteen students—Gabe, Hector, Jorge, and Rafael—stated that extracurricular were required for higher education institutions, but Hector and Jorge mentioned high school sports more as a tool for recruitment and admission into a postsecondary education institution versus an activity casually enjoyed or strategically used to game the college admission process. This subtle distinction is important to stress, as the nuances of college admissions are highly valued and differentiate whether a student is accepted into a selective and non-selective college or university (McDonough, 1994, 1997). Moreover, Gabe, the tenth grader, was the only student to participate in the federal GEAR-UP program. The goal of this program is to help low-income and first-generation students reach college. Gabe's of length of involvement in the program was not clear, but it ended abruptly when his mentor quit and was not replaced. When Gabe was asked what are the requirements for college, he stated:

> Extracurricular stuff like [colleges] just want to see that you can do something and be able to finish it…not really anything else, you have to do extra things to look good on a [college] application. If [you are] a Native American, that looks good [on a college application], that looks amazing! If you did community service or you volunteered or do little [fundraising] drives for charities, that looks really well and they are more inclined to choose you.

Gabe believes extracurricular activities will help him to gain admission in a four-year college or university. Helping the community and fundraising is important, but he did not say why those activities are important in the overall college admission process. He is aware of the dominant cultural capital in this situation, but does not understand how to convert the cultural capital into something useful yet. In the future, he may be able to include the extracurricular activities into his college application, but he may be unable to explain how and why those activities are important to

different higher education institution types (e.g. fields). Gabe did not know his current grade point average, so determining if he is eligible for a two or four-year college is difficult to know.

Rafael, the ninth grade student, somehow learned that being involved in high school clubs is important in the college admission process. His parents and older brothers did not attend college, so establishing college information channels is difficult to determine. Rafael stated his relationships with school personnel is not strong, so it was not clear how exactly he learned about the value of involvement in high school clubs. After being asked about the other requirements for college admissions, he stated, "I think you have to join clubs or something…at least do something [for the] community to help out or something?" Although, he shared this answer, it seemed like more of a question for me, than a decisive response to my question. I did not ask Rafael how he learned the information about extracurricular involvement, but I am optimistic he will leave his gang and gain support from his siblings and family to prepare for college, so he can pursue his academic goals of becoming an engineer or architect.

Both Hector and Jorge briefly discussed the value of sports during the college admissions section of their interviews. It can be assumed they believe sports are important for the college recruitment process, believing that if a young man is a talented athlete, he will be heavily recruited to a two or four-year college or university. Hector stated, "Well, you could be in a sport and if you're really good at that sport…college will want to recommend you to their schools." Jorge mirrored Hectors comments about sports as a method to be recruited to pay for college, however high school and club sports are generally categorized into the extracurricular activities section of a four-year college application unless you are a highly recruited athlete. None of the other 11 students mentioned high school sports or extracurricular as an important experience in the college-choice process. Although, Rafael played club sports and was being recruited to a professional soccer team in Mexico before a career-ending injury, he did not see soccer as a tool for college admissions, but

more so for professional advancement in major league sports. The absence of sports and extracurricular activities is a staple of Anderson Behavioral School and this may be due to the hyper-focus on behavior and grades, which as demonstrated is an uninspired effort by teachers and students respond in a similar fashion.

## Summary and Conclusion

Previous research on college access and readiness stresses the importance of possessing various forms of college knowledge in order to be successful in the college choice process, and what is revealed for the participants is they all possess some, but not all of the pieces of the college knowledge puzzle. Academic and curricular experiences are important to push the full preparation of students to be prepared for the rigorous material in college, but even low-income high school students enrolled in advanced and GATE courses feel disenfranchised and ill-prepared for college-level math and English (Hallett & Venegas, 2011). However, the Anderson students were not challenged and instead exposed to curriculum and learning that was inadequate to meet their academic needs. The courses were simply an overview of class materials they completed over five to six months earlier in the academic year.

The participants were generally aware of some methods to finance their postsecondary education. But as Tierney and Venegas (2009) highlighted, students and their families have a limited understanding of the complex financial aid system, where students are unable to access state financial aid programs. The state in this study has gradually increased the number of state financial aid options for low-income students to attend college virtually for free. Despite the increased aid options, the students firmly believe they have to self-finance their education, depend on scholarships, or student loans to pay for their higher education.

Similar to financial aid knowledge, the students are not aware of the needed requirements to attend a two or four-year college or university. Only Oscar, the community-college bound student,

knew and understood the nuances of the financial aid and college admission systems. All other students knew of one or two pieces of the nine steps required to apply and be selected to a four-year college or university (Klasik, 2012). A lack of college knowledge will directly impact the participants' abilities to adequately prepare and apply to various higher education institutions as they progress through high school. These students are not fully prepared with necessary and accurate college knowledge to apply for college and it appears school personnel at Anderson and beyond are not invested in the academic or social development of these students. Not all hope is lost for the study participants, but more of a concern that if these students are not aligned with a caring school counselors or recommended for a special college access program, these students will be pushed to the margins again as they try to enter a new level of bureaucracy in a college or university that is overwhelming and cumbersome to understand.

## Part 2: Gang Knowledge

Youth gangs are not a new phenomenon in low-income and urban communities (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Rios, 2011; Vigil, 1988, 1999, 2002). Urban youth created and used gangs to combat the various forms and perceptions of marginalization in their homes, schools, and communities. Gangs provide a space to nurture and respond to being racially discriminated and mistreated in schools by their teachers and other school personnel (Rios, 2011; Vigil, 1988, 1999). Although, most teachers would point their fingers at Latinos and other boys of color and assert that the student is main source of the problem,  (Howard, 2014; Patterson, et al., 2007), various studies have shown schools play a major role in pushing vulnerable youth towards the margins and feeling disconnected from the fabric of relationships and real educational opportunities (Khalifa, 2010). On a surface level, gang knowledge can be described as one's understanding of gang signs, graffiti, knowing the differences between types of adolescent and adult gangs, and how to obtain and sell drugs or

weapons (Moule, Decker, & Pyrooz, 2013; Thornberry, et al., 2003). However gangs are more than symbols, colors, and substances, but a complex relationship of personal connections, targeted recruitment, and the skills needed and valued to thrive within a gang. The participants, whether embedded in gangs or not, disclosed various personal tragedies related to death, murder, divorce, different types of physical, emotional, and substance abuse, pain and sorrow, abandonment, incarceration, and more, but somehow they still manage to move forward and stay enrolled in school.

Students shared a myriad of interesting and compelling experiences related to gangs and graffiti crews throughout their lives. I will focus on the following areas: (1) Connections to gangs and graffiti crews, (2) Participants understanding and personal experiences related to gang recruitment and the eligibility process, and (3) the skills learned in gangs and graffiti crews. These findings are based on the number of student responses and the potential implications for policy and practice (please see Table 5.3) to read which participants are gang and graffiti crew embedded. Therefore, ten of the thirteen participants were either directly or have a family member involved in a gang or graffiti crew, this is a considerable finding when contemplating the accumulation of social and cultural capital exchanged between family members, and how one forms their habitus related to their social group including their parents and siblings. Nine of the thirteen were familiar with gang recruitment and eligibility process, as they were either directly asked to join a gang or graffiti crew, or have a friends or family members embedded in gang life, who are able to share the nuances of gang recruitment. Again, the power of social and cultural capital as well as habitus in shaping how students perceive educational opportunities is important especially as they balance the realities of gangs and graffiti crews in their social and geographical context. Eight on the thirteen are able to identify some of the skills, cultural capital, and knowledge they have learned about gangs and graffiti crews, more of the skills will be elaborated in that section.

| Table 5.3 Gang Embeddedness and Family Connections<br>**Anderson Behavioral School** | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Name** | **Nationality** | **Age** | **Grade** | **Reason Expelled** | **Gang Embedded** | **Family member in gang?** |
| Carlos | Mexican American | 16 | 11 | Drug possession | No | No |
| CJ | Mexican and Central American | 9 | 12 | Fighting with student | No | Yes |
| Emanuel | Mexican American | 16 | 10 | Drug possession and vandalism of school property | Yes | Yes |
| Frank | Mexican American | 17 | 10 | Drug possession and possession of graffiti tools | Yes | Yes |
| Gabe | Mexican American / Native American | 16 | 10 | Threatened school personnel | Associate | Yes |
| Hector | Central American | 15 | 10 | Drug possession | Associate | Yes |
| Jorge | Mexican American | 15 | 10 | Threatened school personnel | No | Yes |
| Julio | Mexican American / European American | 16 | 11 | Violence against school personnel | Yes | Yes |
| Manny | Mexican | 15 | 10 | Under the influence of drugs | Associate | No |
| Oscar | Mexican American | 17 | 12 | Drug possession | Yes | Yes |
| Rafael | Mexican American | 16 | 9 | Fighting with student | Yes | Yes |
| Ronald | Mexican American | 14 | 7 | Fighting with student | Yes | Yes |
| Santiago | Mexican American | 18 | 12 | Drug possession | No | No |

*Connections to gangs and graffiti crews*

Trust within an organization is vital. Whether the organization is a multinational corporation or a local gang, the trust and the relationships between members within that organization will

determine the longevity and ability to foster their desired outcomes (Coleman, 1988, 1990). Thus, the connections between individuals helps frame how and when social and cultural capital is exchanged and accumulated, establishing social norms, peer obligation, specialized language and vocabularies, behaviors of associates, and understanding the larger mission and purpose within their social context and group.

Ten of the thirteen students have either personal relationships with gangs, or their parent, sibling, cousin, or other family members are involved in different types of gangs and criminal activity. If one or more family members are involved in gangs, they have the potential to shape the young Latino males' habitus, aspirations and expectations, for their future. Julio's father, brothers, uncles and aunts, cousins, and other family friends are involved in multiple Latino based gangs through the city. At one point, he mentioned his father and maternal uncles were from rival gangs decades before, but now, because of their *veterano* status, they allow the previous gang and violent pasts to subside because of Julio's mother. Julio was asked when he first learned about gangs, he responded:

> When I was little, when I was like, three or four [years old], on the chalk, I used to write [Latino gang name] on the floor and stuff, 'cause I used to see it on the walls all the time. Like, in my neighborhood, I used to see big ol' block letters and tagging all the time. [Latino gang name]. So I just tried to copy what it said on the wall.

Julio's exposure to gangs began before he started kindergarten, which is possibly around the time his father was incarcerated. Julio was aware of gangs years before he formally heard the word "college" during an elementary school fieldtrip to the local four-year university. Gradually, he has learned about colleges because of the conversations between teachers and students in high school, but he does not feel the need to attend college. He believes that college is too expensive and will not help him with his personal career goals. Julio has been embedded with gangs because of his family and friends' deep involvement, "I didn't even join the crew…I was there when it started…we all grew up

together." Julio wasn't recruited to the tagging crew, he was present since the inception of the group, which may not be case for all of the study participants.

He sees himself as different for not being a gang member, because in a gang he would have to follow directions from older gang members. In his graffiti crew, he is an active and respected member because of the amount of "work" he contributes to increase the local reputation, though they do fight rival graffiti crews. Julio shared, "You don't gotta follow nobody to listen to what they tell you or nothing. You just do you own thing. Tag whenever you want. It's just way better."

In the traditional gang structure, one must follow the lead of the older gang members or leaders. This leadership difference creates a small friction between Julio and his father, who does not understand and questions why youth would simply write graffiti on the walls. He knows Julio is committed and respected within his peer group, but wants him instead to, "Do something you like, 'gangbanging ain't gonna get you nowhere other than this.' Although, Julio's father understands gang involvement will result in negative life outcomes, they are able to share and bond over involvement in gang culture. Julio sees his father as a friend, who he is able to confide in, able to seek advice about dealing with rivals, how to manage trauma and injuries, including when Julio was stabbed and his friend was shot and nearly killed, and how to deal with incarceration. Julio was locked up in local juvenile facility and youth camp for months. Thus, there is an exchange of social and cultural capital with his father and an affirmation of Julio's gang habitus, and attitude towards school. School is something that needs to be completed, but additional college is not necessary for Julio's life goals of painting and owning an auto body and paint shop in the future. Julio's father's friends own auto body shops and stress college is not a needed goal to be successful in their industry.

Deep connections to gangs does not ultimately result in membership. Gabe is not a gang member, but is comfortable talking and engaging gang members from various sets throughout the city. Gabe has an anger management issue, regularly uses drugs and alcohol, and has been suspended

and expelled from school multiple times for various infractions including weapons, fighting, and threats against school personnel. He has been recruited multiple times and does not feel compelled to join, instead he wants to attend college to study psychology with a minor in criminal justice, so he can understand how and why his family has been incarcerated and gang involved for decades. Prior to Anderson Behavioral School, he was enrolled in honors and other advanced courses, but failed them, not because he could not handle the work, but because he was bored and felt underwhelmed by the rigor of the course material. Gabe's father and step-father were members of rival gangs, but have not been active in some time. He spoke with an ease about the numerous gangs in his current and past communities, he admits they have moved a lot because of their Section Eight housing voucher does not always cover their rent. Gabe shared when he first learned about gangs:

> Gabe: Since I was born.
> Adrian: What do you mean?
> Gabe: I grew up around gang members.
> Adrian: Did anyone in your family…were in a gang or something?
> Gabe: Yeah, my father and my stepfather and my mom has ties, but she is not affiliated.
> Adrian: What gangs?
> Gabe: Including myself, I have ties to Bloods, Crips, Mexicans Mafia, people in MS 13, the Cartel, [White Park], [ABC], everyone in my family has lot of ties to different gangs and that's the people that we know and mess with really.

What is important is that Gabe sees and knows people who are gang embedded and these relationships were built over a long-period of time, which shapes his ability to draw on those relationships for access to additional forms of social and cultural capital to learn about the nuances of the different gangs in his community, and but also how those relationships help frame his habitus towards life and gang. Some may question if Gabe has deep or strong connections to the Mexican Mafia or drug cartels, but I did not question him about the validity of his relationships to those groups, as I even have familial and peer ties to various notorious Mexican and Chicano gangs and cartels throughout California, Nevada, and Mexico. Compared to the other participants, Gabe is

unique in that he has ties to both Black and Latino-based gangs in his community. He openly interacted with the African American youth community. Other participants are only embedded in Latino gangs and crews. When Gabe was asked about his personal connections to college graduates, he struggled to identify any family member who successfully graduated from a two or four-year college. When considering how families shape habitus for their children, what familial influences will his family have on him? How does Gabe absorb the fatherly role-modeling of former gang member fathers? Gabe is aware enough to not want to pursue the gang lifestyle because he does not see the immediate benefit, and he understand the larger issues within his community and the problems of schools being unable to adapt to students' needs. Gabe's father and step-father were involved in rival gangs. Gabe did stress the relationship between his biological father is strained because of the number of years he was incarcerated, but feels his father cares for his well-being. Later, I will discuss how Gabe has been recruited to join a gang and one of his first questions, is whether he is allowed to fight back during the initiation process. He does not fear the initiation process, but wanted clarification before making his decision.

Emanuel, a 16-year-old sophomore, has been gang active for half of his life. Both of his parents are not involved in gangs, but his extended family including uncles and cousins are involved in multiple southern California gangs. He founded and is simultaneously active in various gangs and graffiti crews in his community, and somehow he feels safe and supported with his peers. Below, Emanuel explains his first interactions with the gang, but also some of his emotional trauma related to his parents:

> …I was from [different Latino Sureño gang]…A gang - my cousin got me…my cousin is literally my step-brother because my *tía* and my dad got together and shit like that…so it's hard to fucking explain that. So he's technically my step-brother now. He [my brother-cousin] got me and my little brother (which is his brother) into a gang when I was like 7 and he, the little brother, was like 8.
> […]
> Adrian: Wow, did you guys get jumped in?

Emanuel: Yeah.
Adrian: For how long?
Emanuel: 13 seconds.
Adrian: Are there any other requirements to join that gang?
Emanuel: Got to go kill someone.

Emanuel was unclear what individual or multiple factors pulled him into a gang, but because of the multiple levels of marginality he experiences within his home and community (Vigil, 1988), it could be assumed the gang is a safe place for him to feel supported and valued. Although, Emanuel and his mother moved multiple times throughout California, he "started meeting up with people…sooner or later, I got into a gang," and then they eventually settled in Rock County. For Emanuel, joining a gang may have provided the only stability in his life as they moved from northern to southern California, and this was an especially stressful period of his life (Vigil, 2002).

Emanuel has been a part of and created multiple gang sets since his childhood. The challenge for him is sustaining other members interest and commitment to the gang or graffiti crew because they often abandon the group. He does not see himself stepping away from that life because he values the gang ideology of *once you are in - you cannot get out*, however he claims to have reduced his drinking and smoking of marijuana because he recently almost overdosed on prescription drugs and alcohol. Emanuel is so embedded in the gang life and he may feel trapped (Pyrooz & Decker, 2014). He is unafraid of death, "It ain't really nothing to me. To me…death ain't a thing…because you die, you die…cause I seen my friend's head got blown off." His parents do not know about this friend's murder or the various illegal activities he has been part of over the years. Pyrooz and Decker (2014) found leaving a gang is similar to drug addiction, it is near impossible to fully disengage because gang relationships continue to pull an individual back into the life, and it is normal for a gang member to relapse multiple times before they can fully disengage from the lifestyle.

But, also the close connection to gangs because of uncles and step-brother's influences in joining gangs and graffiti crews. Oscar, has been involved with gangs and graffiti crews since he was

a young boy. His two older brothers are involved a notorious gang from North Rock County that has a history in the community for over 40 years. Now, Oscar shares what lead him to becoming gang embedded:

> Oscar: So it was kinda difficult for her [my mom]. She was never around us, growing up. She was always working, so we didn't know what kind of choices to make, you know? Other choices.
>
> Adrian: What do you mean by that?
>
> Oscar: Because, see, my mother wasn't there. We were always home alone. My big brothers, they were always in the street, not knowing what to do, so they…they just didn't want to be at home, so they got stuck with, like, negative peers in the streets and got into gang related and I kind of, like, I learned from that, but I kind of got dragged into that. You know? I just kept hanging around them too, 'cause they were the ones to take care of me. I was young. I was eight years old, nine years old, and that's why I began making, like, bad choices, you know?
>
> Adrian: So were you part of a gang or a tagging crew?
>
> Oscar: Well, I'm in a tagging crew.
>
> Adrian: And your brothers were part of gangs? What gangs are they a part of?
> Oscar: They're from out here…from [Rock City]. They're from, like, [Latino gang] and things like that, you know?

While Oscar's older brothers were deeply embedded in Latino gangs, which resulted in dropping out of high school for both of them and regular episodes of incarceration, Oscar shied away from describing his level of involvement with the Latino gang at his young age, but did disclose he "learned from them." Oscar felt "dragged into" into being involved with a gang because they were "tak[ing] care of him," and Oscar's mother was unable to provide the emotional and physical presence he needed.

For those unfamiliar with gangs and graffiti crew culture, some would assume gangs are vicious and merciless individuals who pray on innocent low-income people and communities. There

is internal and external violence within gangs and that may stem from individuals not meeting the group's expectations, obligations, and social norms (Moule, Decker, & Pyrooz, 2013; Rios, 2011; Vigil, 1988). But, Oscar shared he felt cared for by his older brothers and implied the other gang members were invested in young Oscar and provided various forms of emotional and financial support to their members.

*Gang Recruitment and Eligibility*

Joining a gang requires skills and the correct connections. Ten of the thirteen students were truly clear with their views and understanding of the requirements to join or be recruited to a gang. The ten participants had distinct reasons for how and why they joined a gang or graffiti crew in their communities. Julio shared he was present when the graffiti crew was created; Rafael was jumped by four or five people for 13 seconds in a gang with long history on the West Coast and Southwest. Emanuel, Gabe, Manny, Rafael, and others stressed the importance of missions to prove their commitment and that they are "down" for the gang or graffiti crew and were not cowards for not completing their initiation tasks of beating, robbing, killing, or stealing from *busters* from other gangs or graffiti crews. The next section highlights participants understanding of gang recruitment and eligibility from different points of views about gangs, I highlight Emanuel, who is embedded in gangs, Gabe, who is on the fringe of gang involvement, and Santiago, who is on the path to attend a private for-profit automotive college and not gang embedded.

Emanuel, the long-time gang and graffiti crew leader discussed how he negotiated with his friend to partner and support each other's gangs and graffiti crews:

> And he [my friend] told me to join [his gang] and I'm down. But I still got my graffiti crew. And he was like you could still do that, but you could have our back. And I was like, 'Okay, I'm down'. And then my little brother decided to get in with me, so he got jumped in[to the gang]. I didn't [get jumped in] because I was the one that helped him start it. And from there we started getting people…more and more people…right now, I don't know how many people are in it now…We test you first [before we let you in the gang]. If you want to get

> in…you gotta prove to us that you are down. So we'll take you on a mission and be like, 'Go beat the fuck out of that guy' or 'Go stab that motherfucker over there.' We'll go look for a buster and kill him. And if you're down and you get out of the car and just do it and just walk away, we'll let you in - or we'll just jump you in - but we want to see if you're down. We'll jump you in and we'll take you on a mission.

Emanuel and his friend are clearly setting expectations and obligations with each other about mutual protection for each other's gangs. They believe that this protection will allow them to have a steady support and expand their social networks. Through the lens of social capital, we see building relationships and mutual trust between vulnerable youth in urban communities is necessary, not only for protection, but for the exchange of information about emerging rivals and member recruitment, thus the need for mutual protection. An unfamiliar social norm for new gangs, Emanuel states he can forgo the jumping-in initiation process for his gang, as he is a founder, this norm may be an unstated benefit of being a founder of a gang or graffiti crew. However, this exception does not extend to his younger brother, who needs to be jumped into the group to determine if he is committed or "down" for the crew. The previous example focused on gang initiation and recruitment, mutual trust, and the scaling of the group. Within the gang realm, Emanuel is modifying the admission criteria which is similar to what families with social influence and high-SES are able to do in the competitive college admission practices. Emanuel's actions parallel forms of *hidden* college knowledge within devious groups.

Of the ten participants who are aware of gang recruitment and eligibility, Emanuel was the most vocal about ensuring his peers are committed to extreme levels of violence against other gang members. His attitude was worrisome for me during the interview and at different points during data collection, I was nervous about using the wrong words with him, and face possible repercussions at school for perceived disrespect against him or his gang or graffiti crew. This fear stems from the various stories he shared with me as we walked to the empty portable classroom for the interviews, and also from the hollowness in his eyes that I mentioned earlier in this paper. The

acts of violence he described, from the murder of his friend to fighting and beating rival gang members, differed in the tone and suggested an intense personal fulfillment. Over the years, Emanuel tried and failed multiple times to create and sustain a gang or graffiti crew, and his largest critique of members is their inability to be "down" to escalate the initiation missions of attacking or killing rival gang members.

Gabe is not an active or past gang member, he is embedded in gang culture because of his family and close friends and he is regularly asked to join traditional African American Blood and Crip gangs, but he is more interested in going to college in the future to study psychology with a minor in criminal justice. However, Gabe highlights his exchange with a current gang member about the jumping-in initiation process, but also the role of missions in different gangs and graffiti crews. Below, is the conversation between the researcher and Gabe:

> Adrian: What are the requirements to join a gang or tagging crew?
>
> Gabe: You have to be able to tag really and take the ass whopping it takes to put in, that's kind of it really. And you have to prove that you are down for whatever. Like they hand you the gun and tell you to kill someone and you have to be able to do it and not [wimp] out and if they tell you go beat someone up, you have to go beat them up. That's basically everything.
>
> Adrian: How did you learn about that?
>
> Gabe: I have been invited to join in a couple. I have been invited to join the Crips and the Bloods and they were like, 'We will put you in the big homies…We'll just beat your ass.' And I was like, 'No, but if I were can I hit you back?" And they were like, 'Oh! yeah, we want to see if you worth the shits or not,' I was like, 'Okay, then, I was like, I am not going to do it, but I was like, okay, I just want to know if I can hit you back,' so I am not just going to get hit.

Gabe demonstrates a complex understanding of how both tagging crews and gangs want tough members, but also individuals who are committed to the organization. As Gabe highlights being "down for whatever" connects with the skill to advance within an organization because in different fields, the phrase carries different meanings. For example, in a tagging crew, a member who is

"down for whatever" may be open to fighting other rival crews, carrying a weapon, or brazen in writing larger graffiti in conspicuous locations. Where in a gang, the same meaning may mean more not allowing oneself to be "punked" or treated poorly by others at school or in the community, and then responding by either verbally or physically fighting back against the instigator. In gangs, being down can also mean engaging and consuming large amounts of drugs and alcohol to build friendship, but also test whether someone is "brave enough" to do different types of drugs including Xanax. Gabe does smoke marijuana and drinks alcohol, but the participants deeply involved in gangs or graffiti crews, reported more frequent consumption of prescription drugs than non-gang embedded individuals. The ability to demonstrate a toughness through fighting back is important to Gabe and the gang because it is a type of litmus test of whether the individual will be helpful to the mission of the gang or graffiti crew. The toughness required to persist and be "down for whatever" in a gang or graffiti crew may mirror the expectations some teachers and counselors set for students who want to become college-going. Educators stress the need for students to make necessary sacrifices, be persistent, and advocate for oneself to be committed to learning college knowledge (Holland, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Santiago is unfamiliar with gangs, including recruitment and eligibility. He does not see the point of joining a gang and becoming involved with negative peers, as he prefers to focus on rebuilding his two classic cars with his father. Santiago has been expelled from school multiple times for drug possession and has a long history of behavioral problems in school related to truancy and drugs. Although, Santiago's friends have been suspended and expelled for drug use and possession at school, he sees gang involvement as something negative and counterproductive to his personal goals. Santiago represents the views of youth not involved or embedded in gangs or gang culture. When he was asked about the requirements to join a gang, he responded:

Santiago: No, I don't.

Adrian: No, that's not your thing?

Santiago: No, I don't do it [gang stuff], I'm all by myself.

Adrian: Okay, do you have any friends or family members involved in gangs or graffiti crews?

Santiago: No.

He was not shy or embarrassed about his limited gang knowledge. I tried to restructure the gang knowledge questions to discover if he maybe had someone in his network gang embedded, but he did not shift positions. I do wonder how and why he was able to resist or distance himself from gangs, although began to learn about gangs in elementary school from classmates, who were involved. Santiago is the only participant who does not have any close friends within his network who are involved in gangs or graffiti crews. Other non-gang embedded participants can identify one or two friends involved in gangs or graffiti crews, who if asked could provide gang information about requirements to join a local gang. Santiago had a limited understanding about gangs, and when I inquired about how or why he was able to avoid gangs, he remained focused and shared:

> Because I don't see the point of it [of gangs], it's dumb to me…. I don't know…to me I think it's just a bunch of scared people that can't do anything on their own (chuckles)… I don't know I feel like they always had to have someone there - they can't do stuff on their own!

Santiago sees gangs as dumb and individuals who afraid to stand on their own. How Santiago developed this perception is unclear, as he answers, "I don't know" during follow up questions. He grew up in similar neighborhoods as youth participants involved in gangs. But, maybe his family context is different. He shared how he and his father actively work on classic cars together, and although he has attended multiple behavioral and comprehensive schools for disciplinary issues and has a behavioral record since middle school, his parents support and encourage him to do well and attend college. He said, "Well they wanted me to go to college, but that's not happening this year"

because he was expelled and requires a few academic credits to graduate over the summer or early fall. When he was asked about his GPA, Santiago was unaware of his exact past academic grades point averages and he shared he was not always a studious person and his past grades hovered around D average, but he feels he has improved since attending Anderson Behavioral School. Santiago is on the path to attend a private for-profit automotive college, but overall his college knowledge similar to his gang knowledge is limited. He may be in the margins about learning about both social worlds and the background to how he isolated himself from those groups is unclear. Santiago's relationships with counselors will be discussed later in this chapter, and overall the connections are shallow, as they are with gang and graffiti crew members.

Presented are three vignettes of students who are in different places on the gang knowledge continuum. Emanuel is immersed in gang life, Gabe borders both worlds of gang and non-gang opportunities, and Santiago cannot name a friend or one gang recruitment criteria. What is essential to understand is how Gabe and Emanuel are both experts in gang knowledge, and how this information is valuable within their peer networks and communities, but meaningless to their teachers, counselors, and other school staff. This dichotomy of value for gang knowledge value is misunderstood by outsiders, but the utility of this knowledge for Emanuel can mean the difference between avoiding a rival's neighbor and being attacked or forging new alliances with gangs or graffiti crews, who are eager to build their network of friends (Huerta & Rios-Aguilar, 2016).

As the demands increase for gang embedded youth to prove oneself in their school or on the street, the initiation process is on-going for new or a continued member of a gang, he must always prove he is "down" to fight, stab, or beat a rival who shows disrespect as a part of an on-going mission. So, why is gang knowledge related to the recruitment and eligibility process important? The relevance and utility of gang knowledge is important not only for self-preservation, but also to understand the dynamics and expectations of peers who are also gang embedded. The

social norms and expectations of gang culture is what helps sustain the groups. Their habitus, aspirations and expectation, of gang peers is important to determine if someone can achieve a higher in-group rank within their gang or graffiti crew or provide the necessary support or back-up for their peers. Emanuel is able to clearly state what is needed to join, advance, and be successful in a gang, and who in his family are gang embedded, these relationships will help shape not only his habitus, but also the access to various types of social and cultural capital, most of which does not have immediate value with school personnel in a traditional or alternative school setting, yet within his community, Emanuel is able to command respect and success because he is respected by his peers, but also because of his willingness to fight rivals who show any type of disrespect, however this respect does not quickly transfer to his schools experiences, where teachers perceive him as a troublemaker. Thus, the value of the field is so important for the student, but also the need to learn how to activate, convert, and deploy their habitus is critical for the students to learn how to navigate both their schools and the streets because Anderson Behavioral School teachers are not eager to adjust their perceptions of students to advocate on their behalf. Most ABS teachers are unaware which participants are embedded in a gang or graffiti crew, the discovery of crew affiliation is only revealed if the students explicitly share their status. Teachers and aides witnessed students writing in the textbooks, but it's difficult to determine what the student scribble or tagged in the books as they are all covered in graffiti.

For youth who are gang embedded, gang recruitment and eligibility are important forms of social and cultural capital. These forms of knowledge allow access to a social network that provides direction to social norms, expectations, aspirations, and cultural cues about behavior and language are manifested within his social context, these sometimes formal and informal learning show a skillfulness that cannot be easily taught. Within the larger conversation about gang knowledge, there are clear connections between gang connections and gang recruitment and eligibility. When youth

have family members or close peers embedded in gangs, the individual is easily able access the social and cultural capital about gang recruitment and eligibility, which may help them advance within a gang or easily stand on the fringes of gang life such as CJ, Gabe, Hector, and Manny. Again, there are parallels in these connections and relationships with gang embedded youth when considering how college knowledge is shared. In high-income and college educated families, conversations about college, the benefits, and nuances of admission may be regular discussions with their sons (McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). For example, if a parent or close family member has attended, completed, or currently enrolled in college, he is able to share similar social and cultural capital about the benefits of college success with a young Latino boy and man, these conversations and examples contribute to his habitus about postsecondary education.

In the following section, I focus on the most prominent findings related to the skills developed through gang knowledge. The skills learned in gangs and graffiti crews is indispensable to maintain active members' interest and involvement in the organization, but also allows members to increase their sense of self-worth and ability to assume ownership over their knowledge of their gang and gang culture. The knowledge of gang skills accumulated by individuals are a form of cultural capital that could be be used, if translated, in their school and community, fields, for advancement within their peer groups.

*Skills learned in gangs*

The induction of new gang and graffiti members requires a formal and informal trial period, where the member learns about the culture, the expectations, the nuances of the group, and methods to increase their status and reputation. The gang and graffiti crew induction period will range and is based on the group history, as new members may require more time to learn the legacy and origins, graffiti style techniques, or the symbols and meanings of different gangs and graffiti crews (Huerta, McDonough, & Allen, 2016). Within the induction period, new members may learn

the geographical territory claimed by a gang and how they must work towards protecting their space from rival gangs or graffiti crews (Vigil, 1988, 2002; Rios, 2011). A gang territory may be a city block (e.g. specific gang embedded street), apartment complex (Low-Income Housing Projects), or section or region of town (e.g. East Side or North Town), these physical and symbolic settings are tied to the gang identity and new members are expected to embrace and embed themselves in each of the nuances. Whereas, a graffiti crew has more fluidity as their goal is to increase their reputation by expanding their names throughout the city or region (Huerta, McDonough, & Allen, 2016). Thus, the induction period is *how* and *when* members begin accumulating their gang cultural capital to succeed in their communities. Two of the leading findings related to skills developed within gang knowledge: 1) Names of local Black and Latino gangs and graffiti crews and their meanings, and 2) How an individual can increase status within a gang or graffiti crews.

*Names of local Black and Latino gangs and graffiti crews and their meanings*

The students were asked the names of gangs and graffiti crews in their local community. There are two purposes of these questions: one) gauge participants' understanding of the local adolescent and adult gangs and two) to determine if they had any connection or were embedded with the local gang scene. Some students immediately shared their gang or graffiti crew affiliation with me, which was a surprise because of the personal nature of the topic. Others participants waited to determine if they could trust me and disclose their gang or graffiti crew embeddedness, which was often late in the interview process.

Eleven of the thirteen participants were able to provide the names and meanings of various gangs and graffiti crews throughout the city. For example, Emanuel listed over 15 different gangs and graffiti crews, and which gangs were direct rivals. He could describe the depth of the current physical battles on the streets and "slicing" of each other's gang or graffiti crew names. Slicing means using spray paint or markers to cross out the names of gangs or graffiti crews painted on

walls. Whereas, Carlos, said, "I don't really know the names, but there are lot of Bloods and Crips here, different clicks, you get me? But, I am not really into it [gangs]…there is ABC, DEF, those are tagging crews." It is important to note, besides Carlos, CJ, Hector, and Jorge also were only able to name one to four gangs or graffiti crews in the community. The ability to identify the various gangs is a form of gang knowledge. These four students are not deeply strongly embedded in gang life. Below, Emanuel lists the names of gangs and graffiti crews he is familiar with, but also rival groups:

> Emanuel: Um, ABC, DEF, GHI, JKL, XYZ, um, 1st St, Latino-based gang one, Latino-based gang two…um… (2 second pause) …*Norteños*…Little faggot ass niggas…
>
> Adrian: Well, besides Norteños, because I know they're your rivals, but what other crews are rivals for you guys?
>
> Emanuel: For me, I stopped banging – But, I just carry my flag [bandana] to show that I am a *Sureño*…for my tagging crew. For me it's just TUV, WX, YZ, who else? MNO, just like all of North town or any eastside cliques. We just don't get along with them because they sliced us or we sliced them, so they started all of this beef…we just gotta get down.

Developing an awareness of the current gangs and graffiti crews landscape allows Emanuel the ability to understand which groups are friends or adversaries especially as crews "slice" or actively disrespect his graffiti crew. Slicing other groups' names leads to physical confrontation and then to eventual shooting and stabbings, and later we will read about Julio's experiences. Emanuel has been involved with gangs for half of his life and his uncle and cousin/brother, and peers who are also gang embedded have also exposed him to the nuances of gang life and culture, which allow for the long-term accumulation of gang social and cultural capital. He takes pride in possessing a strong command of gang and graffiti crew knowledge about the different groups in his community, and of all of the participants, he is aware of the most established and emerging organizations. Emanuel later shared he learned a rival slicing and disrespecting his tagging crew he shared:

> I ditched school and when I bounced over there to [my old high school] to see what's up, I found out that this little nigga was talking shit about my crew and dissing [disrespecting] it. And we got down [fought]…I seen him [other kid] walking and I went up to him and he kept running his mouth. And I said, 'Run your shit [mouth] again and I'm going to deck

> you.' And he kept running it and I decked him. So my homie came up behind him and started kicking the shit out of him and my other homie grabbed a brick and threw it on his back. I was like, 'Fuck with us again and your ass is dead.' And he doesn't do shit no more. The other two [fights] were because we were going to rumble it with some other people, but I forget.

The mutual trust and obligation to each other allows for an increased bond, but also necessary support if they rumble with a larger gang or graffiti crew and are outnumbered. As gang embedded youth, then learn about Latino-gang regional differences such as North versus South side gangs, this information becomes more important especially as members become adults and involved in the legal system. For example, Julio describes his relationship and understanding of the North and South sides gangs and how his graffiti crew peer became affiliated with the Sureños gang while in prison, he states:

> Julio: But I got a lotta haters too. I gotta watch my back a lot too when I walk on the streets.
>
> Adrian: You guys have a lot of rivals?
>
> Julio: Yeah, a lot. Like, we beefin' [fighting] with half of [Rock City], almost. Like, we beef with all of Northtown, half of the East Side…We're a tagging crew, but the big homies are South-siders, 'cause they got locked up in prison, so they gotta…'cause when you get locked up in prison, they [other inmate leaders] tell you what you're gonna run [who to affiliate with]. Sureño, El Norte, the white boys, the *mayates* [Black inmates], and then they roll with the South Side, so they get out and they're still from the crew, but got *trese* [thirteen] on them, they got the big ol' South Side. Like, the homie [moniker], that fool just went back to prison, but he got a big ol' South Side on his chest. It's all big across his chest [used hands to demonstrate size].

The North or Southside affiliation for Latino gang members carries heavy significance within the low-income Latino communities. Similar to a gang member walking into the wrong or rival neighbor, the seriousness of Norteño or Sureño can mean being killed or severely beaten by the rival gang. Although, not all Sureño or Norteño gangs operate or work in harmony with each other, they share a common opponent of the rival region.

An interesting caveat to the skills acquired is how deeply-embedded-members are permeated within this world of information and students who are not deeply-embedded or on the fringes are aware of the skills and methods to advance, but only possess marginal information. Although, Julio stresses his tagging crew affiliation is his primary bond, he does not question his peers ties to the

Southside or Sureños gangs, as he is aware of how the social and cultural capital within gangs and communities' shapes and dictates how allegiances are formed and nurtured. Furthermore, Julio has been incarcerated multiple times in juvenile hall and camps, he has a special understanding of the culture. Although, he did not share much details about being incarcerated, one could assume the exchanges of information, posturing, language, and affiliation shape how people will behave while incarcerated. These subtle interactions may allow an increased understanding of social and cultural capital of gangs, graffiti crews, and regional affiliations, but also how to behave in the juvenile facilities field. This immersion process may be similar to attending a two-week intensive college-bound summer program for first-generation high school students, where students learn the rules and develop a deeper connection with the groups.

When Jorge and Hector were asked what the names of local gangs and graffiti crews, Jorge responded, "I think…ABC, WX, it's all weak to me, I don't really like talking about it because it's weak, it's not my style." Hector was not as connected either. He stated, "One is Sur13, and some of them from RST…and that's all I know." Neither Jorge or Hector are deeply involved or embedded in gang life, although Hector's peers and cousins are involved in gangs. He does not want to join or become actively involved in gangs because of the possibility of incarceration or death. Also, Hector moved to Rock County a little over a year ago, so his exposure to gangs or graffiti crews may be limited compared to his peers, who have lived in the city and community for a longer period of time. Where, Jorge views gangs as a "weak" and "not [his] style," he grew up in the community, so he may be aware of who is a gang or graffiti crew members and that life style does not appeal to him as he sees himself going to college and playing collegiate football. He mentioned previously, if he were to join a gang, he would see himself as a leader because of his personality, but again he sees college in his future. Hector also foresees a future in postsecondary education to study a health-related field, so does not see joining a gang or graffiti crew as a viable option. The sentiments expressed by Hector

and Jorge also align with Carlos, CJ, and Santiago, who are not on the path to become gang active and do not have a profound knowledge of the different gangs or graffiti crews in their communities.

*Advancing individual status or reputation in gang or graffiti crew*

If a male high school student possesses dominant cultural capital in a school field, he will work to increase his profile by earning high academic grades, volunteers in and out of school, and work towards building relationships with teachers and counselors. His ability to function within the school field is important in preparing for postsecondary education. He will be able to draw from his earned social capital with school personnel for letters of support and recommendation for college and scholarships. These actions allow the student to build his reputation and academic prestige within the school and also become a competitive applicant for college admissions. The importance of the field determines what forms of capital have value and in the streets and community, as discussed thus far, gang and graffiti crews assess actions, expectations, and networks differently.

Nine of the thirteen participants are aware of how to increase status in a gang or graffiti crews. The nine students described various methods to increase one status or prestige in a gang or graffiti crew. These nine students are all embedded at different levels in gangs or graffiti crews, thus the examples will focus on their experiences. They share the commitment to harm their rivals, recruit more members into their gang or graffiti crew, increase notoriety through the city because of writing more graffiti, selling more drugs, not allowing oneself to be punked or disrespected, and a commitment to their gang or graffiti crew. The intersection between not allowing oneself to be punked and a commitment to a gang or graffiti crew has a lot of meaning because as an individual immerses himself into a group, he may adopt the ethos of not allowing himself to be disrespected or punked. He may not tolerate perceived gestures of disrespect from other students, teachers, or other school personnel.

For this section, I will focus on the skills of not being punked and one's commitment to a gang or graffiti crew as this information is valuable on the streets for survival and navigating communities. Not allowing oneself to be punked is a skill that requires not only an immediate mental or physical response to different social situations. It also requires the ability to assess the circumstances of who is present, and how to proceeded with the next steps. These responses may also be shaped by one's involvement in a gang or graffiti crew because of the obligations, expectations, and social norms of gangs and graffiti crews. The commitment to a gang or graffiti crew is important not only for one sense of self pride, but also to build their reputation within the group, but also to others who are aware of their involvement. Peer relationships are significant for a students' development especially how others' perceive his toughness matters to adolescents (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006). I begin this section highlighting Julio, the youngest member of a graffiti crew, who shares some of his actions to demonstrate his commitment to the graffiti crew.

> [I'll] go do whatever. A beer run, rob someone, tag, go hit the freeway, like, tag on the freeway, or something, and then if something goes wrong, your homie has to have your back…We [my friend and I] got shot at together, we ride together, we rob together, everything…he got my back all the way to the end…he would have done the same thing for me [attacked a school resource officer] ...Yeah. I put in a lot of work too. I'm the littlest one that puts in the most work…I got a word too. If I say something, they think about it like 'Oh.' Yeah, 'cause I done a lot of it. I beat up a lot of haters. I [engaged in violent acts] at fools before and stuff, so they know I'm not scared of nothing

Julio's graffiti crew habitus is strong and focused. He did not indicate any motivation to leave the group to pursue other opportunities. There are no leadership positions within his graffiti crew as they see each other as equal members and although he is the youngest member, he has engaged in in various criminal actions to demonstrate his commitment to the group. Julio believes his efforts have earned him a place within the crew to provide advice on which graffiti crews to engage in fights and locations to write more graffiti. His group uses a consensus method to come to conclusions. His provides examples of his friends with multiple outside priorities who help cement his relationship to

the group, as he believes, "If they can do it, I can do it." Below he discusses the outside commitments his friends have, but maintain their loyalty to the group.

> 'Cause both of [my friends] go [to community colleges], and they're both taggers. They both, running around in the streets, but they both go to [college] too…He'll be catching freeways, billboards, and everything, [and] he has a daughter and everything too.

Julio's friends have families, attend college, and work, so he expects to remain active within the group although in the future he will have a family. Julio has witnessed and been involved in fights with other crew members, has seen friends shot or stabbed, and has been shot at himself by other crews, and these events have only served to increase his commitment to the group. Below Julio describes two difference experiences where other tagging crews have shot bullets at him or his group:

> I walked out [of the liquor store], and this fool's said, "Hey, do you write?" 'cause that's what they say when you tag: "you write?" So, I was like "Yeah. What up, dude?" And then he's like "Oh, fuck [your crew]. This is [another tagging crew]." So I took off my shirt and put it in the car and I grabbed the crowbar, 'cause there was like eight of 'em…so I get the crowbar out the car, and I was like, "What up?" and I start walking to 'em. They said [mimics gun shooting] boom boom boom boom! I was all like "Oh shit" and I run behind my car and jump in the car, 'cause I had to get out of there.

Above Julio shares a moment when he was nearly killed by a rival tagging crew as he exited a liquor store that sells marijuana paraphernalia. Although there were eight rival tagging crew members, he was ready to fight all of them by himself to defend his tagging crews' reputation. In the next example Julio discusses a drive-by shooting that hurt his tagging crew friend.

> [This time] when the homie got shot in the neck…And then they turn around and you see a [car] window roll down. Their [car head] lights turn off and then the window rolls down and we're like, "Fuck!" Everybody tries to run back [into the house] and you just hear [mimics gunfire] and the homie Reach, he's tall, so he tried to drop down and boom, they shot him in the neck before he got down.

In this moment, his friend was shot in the neck during a drive-by in front of his friend's house. They drove his friend to the hospital and his vocal cords were damaged. Both of these incidents would

typically cause a person to retreat or simply quit a gang or tagging crew, and for Julio it has not dissuaded him from abandoning his childhood friends. Now whether Julio commitment to the group is fueled by the actions previously listed or are an effort to prove he cannot be punked is difficult to decipher. Julio is quick to share he is not scared of anything and he has been locked up before, so the threats of expulsions or referrals to the school administrative offices do not mean as much. These attitudes are confirmed with the following comments:

> I'm good until somebody messes with me. I'm doing my own thing until somebody messes with me. I'm cool…I'm just chillin' until somebody comes to me. I do my work and everything [and] I mind my own business and talk to my friends and whatever. Learn stuff from school. But when someone tries to trip on me or when someone tries to act like I'm their bitch – like I gotta do everything they say - hell no. You could do that yourself. I ain't no one's bitch or nothing. A lot of kids over here be trying to punk you too. They ask you, "Where you from?" and I'm not scared. I grew up in a ghetto neighborhood, too. [Street name and low-income public housing location]. I got stabbed in my leg. I got shot at. Nothing scares me no more.

Julio is smart and learns at school when he feels compelled and academically challenged. I witnessed him complete worksheets, copy assignments from the whiteboard, try to ask his teachers meaningful questions, but was often met with skepticism from his teachers (Toshalis, 2015). When Julio interprets that he has received a disrespectful response from his teacher, he begins to acts out and seek attention from his peers and disrupt the classroom (Toshalis, 2015). As Toshalis (2015) states, a students' "resistance is often rooted in inequity," which for Julio can easily be pointed to various situations, being incarcerated, growing up in a community riddled with gangs, poverty, and violence.

But these experiences for Julio and other students is coupled with an underresourced school and limited community programs to help youth redirect their lives from gangs, so one could assume the community habitus for the young Latino boys and men may be filled with high aspirations for gangs and deviance. Julio was cognizant of when teachers, students, or school personnel tried to "punk him." He would respond with a profanity-laced tirade about not being scared, previous stints in juvenile hall, youth camp, not "giv[ing] a fuck about school," and his eagerness to graduate from

high school. Although I did not witness Julio's interaction with other students of being "hit up" by another gang or graffiti crew member, he reminisced about the different people who challenged him and he beat up.

Anderson Behavioral School students who are gang or graffiti crew members will "check" or "hit up" other students they believe are active or embedded in a gang or graffiti crew to investigate their membership. If a student is involved in a group, he or she is expected and obligated to identify their group and be prepared for uncertain outcomes from their peers. Some students who are embedded in a gang or graffiti crew may opt to remain silent as a safety mechanism, if he is outnumbered, but this may mean a physical beating from his own peer gang members for the group denial and being timid (Vigil, 1988). For youth involved in gangs or graffiti crews having the ability to openly declare one's affiliation is a part of the gang embeddedness process because it displays how deep-rooted their commitment to the group (Lopez-Aguado, 2016; Rios, 2011). The more entrenched an adolescent is with his group, he may be more brazen to challenge larger groups of peers and not suppress his desire to represent his gang as highlighted by Julio earlier in this section.

Similarly, Rafael joined his gang a little over one year ago and his involvement stems from his two male siblings. He has been arrested for vandalism, has fought rivals in school and the community, and is actively engaged with his older gang peers. When Rafael was asked if other students had inquired about his gang affiliation or tried to punk him, he responded:

> Yeah, I told them -- I got to tell them. I can't be like a wussy. You have to like man up, tell them…There was this one person, but I told him, "What's up?" But he didn't want to get in trouble so he sat back down…He just wanted to say, "What's up?" I was like "What's up dawg?"

Rafael feels an obligation to maintain his gang affiliation and is captured with him stating, "I *got* to tell them [the other students]" about his commitment (emphasis added). Whether he feels an internal pressure or the gang habitus coerces his response about being involved in the gang is

difficult to determine. But, his commitment to the gang may be strongly swayed by the unfavorable reality that his two male siblings are also involved in the same gang, and one is currently incarcerated for selling drugs at school. He shares an ambition of attending a four-year college and when he was asked why he does not leave the gang, he shared his commitment to his siblings and the neighborhood refocuses him back to the gang. It is very unclear whether Rafael will disengage from his gang and I believe his siblings involvement will continue to swing him back into illegal gang activity (Decker, Pyrooz, & Moule, 2014).

Rafael's internal obligation about his gang may be symbolized with the following statement, "I *can't* be a wussy! You *have to* man up! [to others about gang affiliation], and also now allowing himself to feel punked by another student (emphasis added). He did disclose fighting with other rival gangs and graffiti crews to prove his commitment to his gang, so the social norms of the gang manifests itself in various ways with him. A potential benefit to Rafael for accepting the perceived challenge from the other student is the ability to share the story with his gang peers about how he dared another to confront him at school, but decided to back down. This action may allow him to build additional credit slips with his peers to use for increased status or reputation within his Latino gang.

## Summary and Conclusion

As shown, the nine students described how their gang social and cultural capital allowed them the skills to build their status and reputation and navigate the different gang neighborhoods in the city, but also have a space to feel a part of a community. The students' gang knowledge provides valuable forms of capital and builds habitus to understand the sub-culture of their schools and communities as most students grew up in low-income neighborhoods with long histories of gangs and violence. This connection is important considering 10 students shared their have a parents, sibling, or other family member embedded in a gang or graffiti crew. Most adults are able to

disregard any potential value of gangs or graffiti crews because of the larger negative social, education, and criminal justice implications for youth (Calabrese & Noboa, 1995; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Vigil, 1999), but for the students in the non-school fields, the youth are able to assume leadership positions, share gang knowledge with others, and accumulate various gang and graffiti crew skills, which contribute to feeling valued and a strong sense of self. Not all participants possess a deep understanding of gang or graffiti crew nuances, but they could easily collect information from the known gang or graffiti crew members in their schools or communities should they decide to investigate. The potential outcome of the misalignment of gang knowledge between the Anderson Behavioral School students and the staff is another layer of distrust, misconceptions of what is valued and why, and how to reach students who are on the margins.

As the 10 students discussed their personal connections to gangs and how they *learned about* gangs as young as three or four, *joined* at age eight, or were *initiated* by family member, these memories shaped how youth consider and develop their aspirations and expectation for life and school. The deeper their embeddedness in a gang, the larger the struggle to consider a prosperous future and this was salient for Emanuel who witnessed death, violence, and tremendous disappointments, which is ignored his hopes for the future. The four students not embedded in gangs have slightly different ambitions for the future and are more focused on college, even though their college knowledge is weak. The deeper the participants' embeddedness in gangs means more social connections that allows access to learn more about gangs and graffiti crews, which in a non-dominant field is helpful, but in schools does not provide positive returns in their schools.

Personal connections to gangs may allow an individual easier access to not only build key connections with active members, but also gain the necessary status to be eventually invited and recruited. As Manny would affiliate with his local gang, participate in their illegal activities, but was

not an official gang member. In some instances, the students were actively recruited and shared the necessary skills needed during the initiation process to be eligible, but then not join as Gabe discussed being recruited to the Bloods and Crip gangs. Once involved, youth begin to accumulate the necessary skills to become successful as Emanuel, Julio, and Oscar shared. Eventually, the more embedded the individual is in the gang, he may want to convert his gang aspirations to increased expectation in order to build their status and reputation within the gang or graffiti crew as demonstrated by Emanuel, who was a part of a Latino Sureño gang, but then also created various graffiti crews.

The students' personal connections, knowledge about gangs and graffiti crew eligibility, and some of the skills learned in gangs all equally contribute to students increased sense of commitment to their gang or graffiti crew, and the perception of not wanting to get punked. The connections between gang commitment, not being punked, social and cultural capital as well as habitus really highlight the nuanced dynamics of how youth understand how to advance their status and reputation in a gang or graffiti crew. The potential increased reputation could be paralleled to dominant cultural capital which values high educational credentials.

**Part 3: Students Letters**

Boys of color struggle with their reading and writing proficiency and can sometimes be years behind their peers (Howard, 2014). Eleven of the thirteen students provided a letter addressed to one or more of the following male family members, either their siblings, nephews, and/or future children. The students were asked what advice should that person know for the future? The themes that emerged from the student letters provide an insightful perspective and advice for their male loved ones. The students encouraged their loved ones to better prepare for the future, stay out of trouble, to go to college, and many others suggestions. In this section, I focus on the three most compelling and salient suggestions for their loved ones: 1) Be a thoughtful decision maker; 2) Stay in

school and/or do well in school; and 3) Do not join a gang or graffiti crew. The central focus of each message may also be influenced by the author's personal gang or graffiti crew involvement as five participants requested their loved one to stay out of gangs and graffiti crews. The letters are a type of personal *consejos* (advice) they hoped for other males to have a different future. A majority of the students asked their loved ones to not follow a similar educational pathway or involvement in gangs or graffiti crews.

*Better or thoughtful decision making*

Prior to attending Anderson Behavioral School (ABS), the student participants made decisions that disrupted the social norms of their traditional comprehensive schools by either threatening teachers or other school personnel, fighting and hurting other students, and using or processing drugs at school. Most ABS educators would assume these students are unable to be thoughtful or forward thinking in their decision making because of their past transgressions (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006).

In their letters, five students (Emanuel, Frank, Jorge, Rafael, and Oscar) made pleas to their loved ones to make better or more thoughtful decisions. I selected four students (Frank, Jorge, Oscar, and Rafael), who provided compelling statements about the need to be different. The students hoped that their male loved ones choose different pathways as Jorge shares, "There is no need for him to make life difficult by making dumb decisions…I am gonna try to prepare them for the future because it's coming fast and hard." Jorge does not want his loved one to increase the difficulty within their life and he hopes to prepare him for alternative pathways. Similarly, Rafael wants his younger nephews to "Always listen – don't mess up like us. It won't take you nowhere." I did not ask students to provide any coaching for these letters, so the emphasis Rafael places on "listening" may be related to following the advice or mentorship from trusted adults, as he may have been advised to not join a gang, which he disregarded. His advice to the younger family members

may be grounded in his sentiment of feeling trapped in his gang because of the commitment to protect his brothers from rival gangs. Rafael shared he wants to attend college and is aware active gang membership "won't take you nowhere" in life.

Oscar has a number of nephews in his family and wants them to "Think about your behavior [before] you do an action. Think about the consequences when you make a choice." Oscar has been arrested, suspended, and expelled from school for fighting, drug possession, hitting a teacher who disrespected his mother, and being an active member of a tagging crew. He also sells drugs to supplement his mother's income. He is aware of the behaviors, actions, and consequences, but does not feel he has a choice in his life situation. During the interview he shared, "I'm just tired of being poor… This shit's a struggle… It's not something I want to do. It's just something I kind of have to do. 'Cause working my job and everything ain't helping me nothing." Although not explicit in the letter, he does not want his nephews to live a similar lifestyle and he hopes they have more options as he shared he did not have other options in supporting his family. He has made mistakes in the community and in school, but hopes his family members can have a different life style.

Frank is a part of a tagging crew, he does not want his nephew to "fall down the wrong [route] in life like me – you are an intelligent young mind that can't be wasted." Frank has been arrested for resisting arrest, and suspended and expelled for possessing graffiti tools and paraphernalia, both at school. His path in life is unique to other students as he has moved over ten times and lived in multiple states throughout the U.S. He did not explain why, but something motivated him to want his nephew to follow an alternative "route" in life and not "waste" his "young intelligent mind." Frank sees potential in his nephew and did not mention any additional information about his younger family members. Frank hopes his nephew will make different and more informed decisions about his life and reach for other opportunities, and it unclear whether

Frank searched or was presented different chances in his life. During the interview, Frank was asked what his future plans in life are, and he responded, "I don't know…Just free styling life, see what happens" and maybe Frank wants his nephew to have more structured opportunities in his future. These young men hope their loved ones can move on and have successfully lives, and prosper. The common theme shared by these three is "don't mess up," "think about the consequences," and "young minds can't be wasted," if their loved ones combine or use any part of these suggestions, their lives will be different.

*Stay in school and/or do well in school*

Students attending Anderson Behavioral School are not typically known for doing well academically in school or having consistent attendance. These students have missed schools for weeks or months related to being incarcerated, ditching school, or related to suspensions and expulsions. When they are in school and focused, they can perform well academically, which is confirmed by Julio's statement, "I get A's and B's, when I go to school, I get good grades. It's just stuff happens and then I get kicked out and locked up." Six students (Carlos, Emanuel, Frank, Julio, Rafael, and Oscar) made various comments about the importance of school and doing well, I selected three students' (Emanuel, Frank, and Julio) statements from their letters that capture their sentiments about towards school.

Of the many statements Emanuel wrote for his nephews, this one may have application for them in different stages of the their educational trajectory, "Do good in school and always stay on task." He stresses the value and importance of education for them. In order for them to receive multiple educational benefits, trusting relationships with teachers and counselors, and good grades, a student must "Do good in school" by "stay[ing] on task." These nine words may influence them to avoid negative attention from educators especially if they deviate from his recommendations. If the students, "do good in school and always stay on task" it may help them to steer away from

potentially joining a gang or a tagging crew, as they will be more occupied with their education instead of leading to disciplinary issues that will cause them to be removed from school.

Julio stresses the necessity of his male family members finishing their education. He pens, "For school, if you don't like it - don't fuck up, and just get it over and done with, so you can start your life." He emphasizes the importance of tolerating school in order to move forward to the next stages of their lives. The signals he highlights are the moments "they don't like it," but "get it over and done with" to build their perseverance to finish school. The challenges he may be identifying can be related to relationships with educators or other students, who are potentially annoying. His use of the words, "don't fuck up" is powerful as he is placing the onus on the male family member to remain focused versus the institutional role on educational experiences.

Frank's recommendation for his nephews is "Do what you need to do in class and in school [and] go to college." He challenges his nephews to be responsible for their academics and behavior in school through, "do what you need to do," as the students should be mindful of the expectations placed on them in the classroom, but also in their school. He begins to mold their habitus, aspirations and expectations, for their future by writing, "go to college." Frank is setting an awareness for his nephews to see the interrelationships between doing what you "need to do in class," and how that is grounded in performance in school, and later in going to college, as each build on each other to become college-ready.

Emanuel, Frank, and Julio hope their male family members assume responsibility for their education and persevere to complete their schooling. For Emanuel and Julio, they ask their male loved ones to finish school by not having any missteps and staying on task in their schools and Julio stressed the point, even if they "don't like it". Frank pushes his family members to consider college and complete the necessary steps in the classroom, but also in school. Be responsible for yourself and doing well in school.

*Don't join a gang or crew*

The written messages about gang or tagging crew membership favors avoiding these groups. As, three of the four students (Julio, Rafael, and Ronald) are deeply-gang or tagging-crew embedded. They suggest their nephew and other male loved ones stay away from gangs or tagging crews. Hector is on the margins of gang membership, as his cousins and close peers are embedded in various gangs and tagging crews, but he does not see himself joining a gang because he has to set a strong and positive example to his younger siblings. It is interesting the students who are gang or tagging crew embedded are giving opposite messages about the groups they are involved and committed to.

Rafael wrote, "Never join a gang. A gang doesn't make you [tough]." As highlighted earlier in this section, Rafael leans towards wanting to pursue other educational options such as attending college, but he is invested in his gang because of his male siblings and does not want his younger cousins to follow in his footsteps. Clearly and concisely he writes for others to avoid gangs and the group does not increase one's toughness. This message about toughness is a powerful statement as many young people see gangs as a pathway to increase street credibility and reputation, and Rafael is writing that gangs are the opposite.

Julio writes a different message about gang or tagging participation that focuses on the potential retaliation from rival tagging crew:

> If you are trying to get into a gang or [crew] in [this state] – don't because [the city] is way too small, you will have haters and you always have to watch your back and you are gonna run into someone sooner or later.

Julio message may be rooted in his various rumbles and street battles with rival groups. He has witnessed friends shot and almost killed because of their embeddedness in his tagging crew. The underlying advice may be to avoid gangs, but also to be aware of the increased vigilance needed because of potential retaliation. Most youth involved in gangs are conscious of the potential negative

outcomes of beatings, death, or incarceration (Vigil, 1988; Rios, 2011), and this idea is also echoed by Hector, who wrote: "Also not to join a crew, click, or gang because it's all filled with negative [influences] such as violence, drugs, psychological disorders, criminal charges, blood shedding, etc." Ronald simply shares, "Never hang out with gangs." He provided four simple sentences, which are important for his male family members to adhere to. Ronald is a member of a Latino-based gang, and a majority of his extended family members are embedded in different gangs throughout the community, but in his letter, he writes his hopes they will "never" join or affiliate with a gang.

## Summary and Conclusion

The reoccurring theme between these three subsections is to make better decisions, stay in school, and never join a gang or tagging crew. If youth were able to make better decisions, would they have joined a gang in the first place? This question is difficult to determine as many interconnected factors influence how, why, and when someone joins a gang or tagging crew. But, these young men, who are gang or tagging-crew embedded, are telling their male family members to stay away from this lifestyle, and remain focused on their studies. These students are optimistic about others futures and see the potential in them with written statements such as, "intelligent young mind that can't be wasted." I do wonder, if the advice they penned was information they needed to make alternative decisions about their lives.

The students offer advice for others to think about their actions, behaviors, and potential consequences of the decisions. This advice underlines a level of maturity to recognize the consequences of their own actions and the impact to their current situation attending Anderson Behavioral School. The student attitudes add a level of complexity for educators to consider, for students who may be labeled "resistant" or "troublemakers," why are they suggesting other male family members be mindful of the consequences of their behavior? What triggered the change for

the students? These findings stir more questions than can be answered with the data collected, and will be deliberated more in the section dedicated toward future research studies.

### Part 4: Impact of School Counselors on Latino Male Students

The role of college and guidance counselors as the gatekeepers of college information for low-income students attending under-resourced schools in order to learn the nuances of how to apply, select, and prepare for higher education is well documented (Corwin, et al., 2004; Hill, 2008; Holland, 2015; Huerta, 2015b; McDonough, 1997; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, & Bell, Anderson, & Li, 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 2001, 2011). Whether the students receive adequate advising is based on multiple factors including trust (Holland, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). If a counselor does not trust or have a strong relationship with students, that counselor will not feel compelled to help their students in need of support to complete necessary forms or provide the verbal encouragement for students' to feel confident in selecting a specific college or university (Holland, 2015). Each high school has a unique model and strategy on how to share information, advise, and support for their students to learn about different educational opportunities and pathways to college (Hill, 2008, 2012). However, the quality of each counseling model and methods used by the college counselors vary based on multiple factors, including the number of counselors in a school, the high schools' relationships with two and four-year colleges, but also the organizational habitus for what they believe their students should expect and aspire to achieve from college (McDonough, 1997). This section will position the students' relationships with college and guidance counselors as either positive, neutral, or negative. I begin with students whose interactions are positive.

The students attending Anderson Behavioral School are marginalized in the educational system. Although two seniors have discussed their college goals with their counselors, not all of the other participants have received constructive and complete college information needed to easily transition into higher education and for most first-generation college students there is an expectation

that school counselors will bridge the gaps in their college information (McDonough, 1997, 1998). Some counselors expect all their students to be proactive to receive college information and advice, and often students believe counselors will simply understand and address their needs (Holland, 2015).

Which for Oscar and Santiago, the two seniors, they were proactive to get information and validation from their counselors about their college-choice process into a community college and for-profit automotive college. But unfortunately, the other students have not received complete information from their college and guidance counselors about how to move forward with their college goals or overall college knowledge. The decision to include past middle and high schools in the questions is important to document whether student's have prior experience with counselors, but also due to the limited time period spent at Anderson Behavioral School the students may not have an opportunity to forge meaningful relationships with the counselors to hear college messages.

When Santiago was asked if he ever talked to a counselor about going to college he focused on his relationship with his previous comprehensive high school counselor.

> Santiago: Yeah [I've talked with a counselor].
>
> Adrian: What did he or she say?
>
> Santiago: I told them about the [for-profit automotive college]. They were like just saying 'Okay, like that's a good college,' and yeah like they went, 'Are you sure you're into cars?' and, 'I was like yeah I'm really into cars' and they are like, 'Okay, if you're really into it you should just stick to that.'
>
> Adrian: Did they ever tell you about like how to pay for college or anything or did you guys ever talk about that?
>
> Santiago: Yeah were like just saying, it would be better if I get student loans. So, I don't get to pay that much, so they are helping me do student loans.

Santiago shared his goal of attending a for-profit automotive college with high school counselor, which resulted in the counselor verifying a strong interest in cars. Santiago shared the cost of the

for-profit will be around $40,000 and he does not seem concerned about the large cost. He feels confident in maintaining an interest in automobiles and rejected the local community college and for-profit automotive institutions because of the perceived prestige and selectivity of the out-of-state institution. Santiago said his counselor did not share or provide any additional information or perspective about his college-choice process. There is a rising concern about the predatory enrollment tactics of for-profit institutions on low-income students of color (U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pension Committee, 2012). Not all students are planning to enroll in for-profit institutions, and instead focus on the local community college system. For example, Oscar is a senior and has completed his application for the local community college and must complete his subject placement exams.

Oscar holds high aspirations to transfer from his community college to a four-year college or university to study English and philosophy with long-term goals of becoming a lawyer. His decision to attend the community college was influenced by his interactions with community college recruiters who told him he would save a lot of money on tuition and he would become prepared to transfer to a larger college or university. Thus being a low-income, first-generation student, and his mother works in the service industry, he felt the community college was the best financial option for him. Oscar is proactive and gregarious which helps him ask school personnel and college recruiters questions about courses, transferring, and financial aid options. He is the only participant enrolled in honors or advanced courses in high school is and doing well academically. Although he has a record of disciplinary infractions at school, he is motivated and does not allow his past transgression prevent him from being assertive with school personnel to ask for help. When Oscar was asked about his relationship with his school counselor at his last school, he responded:

> She wasn't like a counselor to me 'cause she never pulled me out of class, she never did that. So actually, I used to be a student aid. I had an open period. I have all my [academic] credits, so I got an open period and I took the challenge to be a student aid. [I] learn[ed] more about the office and they put me in the office of all the counselors. All from freshman to seniors.

> And they're [counselors] all in this office, but there's more counselors on the [second floor], you know? But all these counselors are real smart and…I asked questions…they got to know me more better. Like, "Hey, how can I involve myself with…how can I apply for [the community college]?" [They would say], "Oh, look – we're having a recruit[er] coming down here on [early this year] and doing this" and I [would] go. They just give me so much advice, too.

Oscar feels his counselor was not engaged with him or performed the *typical* counselor activities with him such as "pull[ing] him out of class' to discuss his educational goals and opportunities. He was dissatisfied with the relationship with his counselor, so he took the initiative to become a student aid for the counseling office. When students have official roles in counseling offices or are trained by counselors to become peer advisors, students typically gain more nuanced social and cultural capital about college-going strategies as they help others (Tierney & Venegas, 2006). His friendly demeanor allowed him to forge trusting and open relationships with his counselors and he gradually started to ask questions about community college and other higher education institutions and in total he applied to four community colleges, colleges, and universities, and was accepted to three institutions, but opted for the community college because of his perceptions of affordability. If Oscar did not take the initiative to become an office aid, he may not have learned the necessary deadlines for FAFSA or college applications, but also when the college recruiters would be visiting his high school. These simple and necessary steps are often the responsibility of students if not the student suffers because he will not access to timely and accurate information from these reliable sources (Bonous-Hammarth & Allen, 2005).

When school counselors are not occupied with scheduling, testing, and discipline (McDonough, 1997, 2005), they must balance their remaining school day either with students who are channeled into the postsecondary pipeline or need support to stay and graduate from high school, and the participants in this study fall into a third category, a disciplinary category. When counselors are overtasked with managing the multi-layered challenges for students with suspensions and expulsions, it may be difficult for them to imagine those students being college material or

needing information about how to prepare for college. Previous research has highlighted that students labeled troublemakers are treated differently in school especially if they are gang embedded, but little research has examined the relationships with school counselors. The following quotes help frame the depth of the students' relationship with their school counselors and highlight the neutral impact of school counselors on the college-choice process for marginalized students.

> Adrian: Have you had any conversations with your counselor at this school or last school about going to college or anyone at the school about you wanting to going to college?
>
> Jorge: This school?
>
> Adrian: Uh-umm.
>
> Jorge: Plenty.
>
> Adrian: Who?
>
> Jorge: Security Guard 1, Security Guard 2, told [school administrator] a little bit.
>
> Adrian: What did he say?
>
> Jorge: [School administrator] he was cool about it, I didn't tell him about college, I was telling about the football career and how I want to get going again but I talked to security guard 1, security guard 2, they like me a lot, I like them too…they understand [me]. I talk to them about my football and stuff, and they get happy to see me wanting to do something with my life, you know, but just as any adult I am pretty sure you would be happy to see one of your nephews or just any other kid a kid who came not from nothing…but kids who are right here [at Anderson Behavioral School] actually…ACTUALLY…actually…want to do something with their lives, I actually want to make a change I guess.

When Jorge was asked about his relationship with current or previous school counselors, he quickly focused on his relationships with the Anderson Behavioral Schools' campus administrator and two security personnel officials. The focus on these three individuals is unique and quite surprising as he may see them more as resources than his past and current school counselor. Sports is a large part of Jorge's identity and he holds high aspirations to play collegiate football for the local university or an out of state university in the southwest. He sees himself differently from the other students, and

believes he has a special relationship with the security guards and administrator. He discusses wanting to change his behavior, but early in the interviews he self-identified himself as a "behavioral kid" and has disciplinary issues progress since kindergarten. I did not notice Jorge receive any mentoring or special attention from administrators and security personnel during the school day or after lunch. But, I did see Jorge try to joke with them, but nothing special or unusual to signal a deep connection or relationship.

Returning to school counselors, Jorge did not share any outward negativity towards his school counselors, but simply shared a story about how he was scheduled to enroll in honors courses because of his past accelerated exam scores, but unfortunately earned all Fs in eighth grade, which prevented him from the advanced high school curriculum. He quips, "I was supposed to get my honors [courses] my freshman year, [and] the only reason I didn't is because I got all F's my 8$^{th}$ grade [year] because I was like a bad student, bad, you know…but I was smart." Although, Jorge prefers to be enrolled in the simpler classes because the lower expectations, he acknowledges he is "smart," but does not feel any additional sense of motivation or high expectations to challenge himself to pursue difficult courses. Throughout the data collection, he present himself as a smart young man and was beyond his age in thinking about his future. He talked about others being lost and a concern about them wasting their lives on drugs and alcohol. He admitted he smokes marijuana frequently to ease his anxiety and stress, but feels he is in control of his drug use. Jorge feels compelled to tell others to think about their futures as ponders his. He sees himself focusing on either business and construction majors in college, but feel an infinity to become a counselor to provide advice, encouragement, and support for others to make better decisions about their future and he provided multiple examples of helping fellow teenagers with their personal relationships and heartaches. Besides the previous interaction with his high school counselor, and he could not provide additional context or comments about relationships with the school counselor, but he did

not mention any examples of changing his high school courses, college advice, or casual conversations about the future. The lack of communication with his counselors lead to distrust and the limited exchange of social and cultural capital to prepare for postsecondary education (Holland, 2015; McDonough, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001), which will immediately impact Jorge for his future.

The common student response to whether they have learned or discussed postsecondary education information with a college counselor either at ABS or their previous comprehensive school is "no." It was difficult to extract a complete understanding of the student and counselor dynamics, but there is a lack of trust between the students, schools, and school personnel. The lack of trust could have developed a long-period of time and during the students' multiple disciplinary infractions which may have caused further marginalization between the students and their school personnel. Below, I highlight how Rafael has a restricted social network to discuss future educational opportunities.

> Adrian: Have you ever talked to like a teacher or a counselor about what you should do after high school?
>
> Rafael: No, I don't tell no one. My things [business] - I keep it to myself. I don't hang around with that much people. The only two people I hang around with, is my brother, my little brother, my next-door neighbors because like they grew up with me.
>
> Adrian: Has anyone shared any information with you about college?
>
> Rafael: No.
>
> Adrian: No? Teachers, counselors, friends?
>
> Rafael: No.
>
> Adrian: Do you have a relationship with the school counselor here?
>
> Rafael: Never talked to her.

Rafael is an example of an adolescent who is purposely closed off to counselors and other school personnel. He did not clearly explain why he distrusts counselors and other educators, but it may be related to his past comprehensive school, which expelled Rafael, but allowed the high achieving student who initiated the fight to remain in the school without a disciplinary referral. Rafael is also an active gang member, which may also contribute to a need to maintain a distance from school personnel (Calabrese & Noboa, 1995; Estep & Tellez, 1997). Rafael's academic experiences in school have been riddled with suspensions, expulsions, and struggles to earn high or passing grades. He attributes some of his academic struggles to being an English language learner, and still developing a mastery of English. His long-term goal is to enroll in college and study architecture or engineering. But without the support from his counselor or other teachers, he may be unable to learn any of the necessary strategies to prepare for a two or four-year college or university. Students similar to Rafael and other participants who are suspended or expelled suffer a disruption in the opportunity to build social capital with counselors and other educators about higher education pathways (Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Other times, students do not ask direct or follow up questions to their counselors about college (Holland, 2015), but simultaneously counselors expect students to be proactive with their college-seeking behaviors and conduct the necessary preparation to seek minimal support. The mismatch in counseling methods hurts low-income and first-generation students the most because they expect schools to provide all the necessary support to reach their college-going goals (McDonough, 1998). For example, Carlos comments below:

> Adrian: What about your counselor or at this school or last school would you ever talk to them about college stuff?
>
> Carlos: My counselor, yeah, my past school, she'll tell me, "Are you planning to go to college?," this and that, she will ask me questions, reviewing my credits and stuff and that's basically it.

> Adrian: What would she say?
>
> Carlos: She will be like, "Right now finish up high school." She wouldn't really give me information, she would just like talk to me, "Are you planning to go to college? That's what comes next after high school." Stuff like that.

Carlos is interested in attending community college, but is very confused about the necessary steps he has to take to prepare for institution. The other six participants, CJ, Frank, Hector, Gabe, Manny, Ronald, also shared similar marginal experiences with their school guidance and college counselors. When students were asked questions if their current or previous counselors provided any college information or had simple conversations with them about postsecondary education, they all responded with a variation of "No," "Nah," or "Never." The absence of college discussions between students and their counselors is detrimental for low-income students and limits the opportunity to build students' college knowledge, which at their academic stage is crucial to move forward and begin developing the necessary tools and behaviors to become college-ready and eligible (McDonough, 1997, 1998; McDonough & Calderone, 2006).

Recent research has documented the continuing narrative that school counselors expect students to become self-advocates to learn about college readiness (Holland, 2015; Martinez, 2014). Although these same counselors are astutely aware that low-income, first-generation, racial minority students need additional attention and support to learn the nuances of college preparation, counselors do not always feel responsible for advocating and assisting these students.

The gaps for counselors in supporting and their involvement with students shows that additional training and resources are required in urban and underresourced schools to support a larger college-going mission for different students (Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013). Various school districts have implemented college coaches and college cultures who are dedicated to supporting low-income and racial and ethnic minority students hopes of reaching postsecondary education (Castleman & Page, 2013; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013). But unfortunately, college messaging

remains an issue on how college counselors and coaches promote various postsecondary opportunities for students (Deli-Amen & Martinez, 2015). In the following examples, the participants highlight how the messages they received are counter to the values and goals of the students.

*Messages that are not tailored to students' needs*

Constant, accurate, and timely college messages and information from school counselors cannot be understated for low-income students of color (Bonous-Hammarth & Allen, 2005; Hill, 2012; Holland, 2015; Martinez, 2014; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). For the last twenty years, researchers have documented how low-income youth are at the mercy of high school counselors to provide access and information about how to prepare and apply to different colleges (McDonough, 1997). Sometimes, the counselors' personal biases shape the types of postsecondary institutions students should consider submitting applications and these recommendations counter the students' individual goals and ambitions (McDonough & Calderone, 2006). For the students in this study, college messages seemed out of reach or absent and this discovery is important not only to highlight the student experience, but also to challenge counselors to be attentive to their student audiences when sharing college information. What is difficult to determine is what the student and counselor context was during the college information exchange. Hill (2008) has published how school counseling models shift with student caseload, budget restrictions, and administrative changes can impact how counselors are able to engage students. Let's begin with Julio, who is in 11th grade and an active graffiti crew member.

> Adrian: Have you ever talked to a school counselor about what to do after high school or has anyone ever talked to you about "here's information about what you can do or should do"?
>
> Julio: Nope, mom. I talked to my mom and my dad. No one else.

> Adrian: Yeah?
>
> Julio: Yeah.
>
> Adrian: And they're just telling you to get a job?
>
> Julio: Like, yeah. That you can't do nothing in life without money.
>
> [….]
>
> Adrian: Have you ever talked to your counselor or anything about college?
>
> Julio: Oh, yeah. At Flatlands, we had this one meeting about college. They told us about all the colleges. But it was talking about all the out-of-state colleges. I don't feel like…If I were to go to college, it's high risk, but I would go to [local four-year university] or [local community college]. Like, one of the colleges in [town]. 'Cause I wanna stay right here. I ain't trying to leave.
>
> Adrian: Did they give you any advice on how to prepare for college or anything? Or what did they tell you?
>
> Julio: No. They're always talking about your scores, your test scores, so you can get to college and how you could get paid. It helps you in life and later in life and how you could pay for it, what classes you could pay for and stuff…that's all they told us.

He receives messages about "test scores" to help facilitate admission to different colleges, but he does not understand the nuanced college admission process. The Anderson Behavioral School teachers regularly tell Julio he will drop-out of school or will return to Anderson Behavioral School for another behavioral issue. Thus college counselors must provide tailored and specific information to students to meet their academic needs and goals. For students like Julio, who has a complicated relationship with schools, it is important to present multiple postsecondary education options within state. The tension between tracking into non-college pathways such as vocational school may be the regular reaction by counselors because of Julio's social and academic profile.

## Summary and Conclusion

A majority of the students in this study highlight unproductive and unsuccessful interactions with school counselors at Anderson Behavioral School and previous schools. Unfortunately, the students did not disclose powerful connections which raised high aspirations and expectations for a future in a selective college because that is not this student population. These kids are marginalized in the educational pipeline in every aspect of the term, and especially with their school guidance counselors and college counselors. The one exception is Oscar, who on his own accord built a relationship with his counselors to learn necessary college information about dates, applications, and recruiter visits. It is very easy to single out what counselors are and are not doing for students and especially for students who are constantly in the office for behavioral and discipline issues. These are the kids who push the envelope in the classroom, but they still need support to understand their opportunities are available in the future, and what pathways can be rewarding.

Overwhelmingly, the students expressed in interesting in attending some form of postsecondary education institution. But, what is not clear is whether their counselors are aware, and if so, what steps can be taken to help the students become college-ready and knowledgeable to make the transition into higher education. The challenge is the counselors were providing college messages that did not align with the social or academic needs of these students. This is not to say they would fail in a four-year college or university, but would need support and guidance to matriculate into a community college for a one or two-year program. And additional steps need to be taken to help them be successful during the remainder of their K-12 experience. The schools and the counselors are aware of the various social and emotional needs of these students, but nothing is happening to help them be successful and avoid trouble.

## Chapter 6: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusions

### *Discussion*

This study highlighted how the impact of school disciplinary policies ultimately resulted in suspensions and expulsions from traditional schools resulting in their transfer to Anderson Behavioral School. Virtually, no previous research has highlighted the role and pressure of teachers and other school personnel taunting and provoking students to violating school disciplinary policies. These findings highlight a compelling student experiences in their schools, communities, and within their families, as it illuminates how and why students' react to school personnel not as the aggressors, but as young adults socially and emotionally pressured to "fight back." The resistance to school personnel severely impacts and damages any possible relationship between the student and future school personnel, as the school employees are able to review students' personal files to understand their pathway through the education system.

In this study, I have illuminated how students' access to various forms of social and cultural capital as well as their habitus shapes their schooling experiences, and how the social context shapes what is possible related to higher education for these students. Overall, the findings of this study shed light on the complexity of the college-choice and college-going processes for Latino males attending alternative schools especially for the young men who are gang embedded. This study helps clarify how some Latino males, who have been suspended from their regular middle and high schools, develop a limited understanding of their postsecondary opportunities. Although, 10 students have expressed interest in attending some form of postsecondary education, they only have pieces of the college-going puzzle, they do not have a full understanding of what is needed, and expected, and they have often rocky relationships with educators. These educators are supposed to facilitate access to valuable forms of social and cultural capital about higher education for the

students to understand the correct steps to get to college. For the students attending Anderson Behavioral School, the culmination of negative school experiences further pushes perceptions of marginalization in the K-12 system and may lessen their actual chances to learn about college and actually enroll in higher education. The ABS teachers and school personnel create an environment that is detrimental to the growth of the information or deep interest in attending college because the school lowers the expectations for a positive or constructive future.

An unexpected and impactful finding is the role of school suspension and expulsions in limiting opportunities to build college knowledge. The students' habitus, aspirations and expectations, is framed by their homes, schools, and communities and the messages received about college pathways are often mixed about how to easily move forward. As some students are told to "go to college" by their families, but then the schools do not provide the opportunity for students to develop and form the needed scaffolding to learn the nuanced college knowledge to prepare for their futures. Students' abilities to build needed support systems is truncated by school suspensions and expulsions and the regular movement from school to school because of district policy. The schools in which the students in this study attended are the kinds of schools that often are unable to deliver comprehensive college information to the students because of limited time, distrust, or large caseloads (Hill, 2008, 2012; Holland, 2015; McDonough, 1997, 1998).

As a result, ABS students, regardless of academic grade, did not have a thorough understanding of the various steps to build and understand their college choice processes, which influences how their college-going habitus is shaped. In this final chapter, I highlight the findings related to college and gang knowledge, social and cultural capital, as well as habitus, provide implications for policymakers and practitioners, and potential areas for future study.

As highlighted in chapter five, the students do not have a comprehensive understanding of college knowledge. Although Anderson Behavioral School has low student enrollment and the

opportunity to spend individual time counseling and advising students, the schools personnel do not make any efforts to mend their college information gaps nor other social or emotional needs for the students. Previous studies have documented the role of college-educated parents shaping and sharing the social and cultural capital with their children about how to prepare and pursue higher education (McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010; Perna & Titus, 2005), but none of the study participant parents' graduated from a two or four-year college, and few of the participants' siblings had positive experiences in local technical or two-year colleges, which also frame students' habiti about the college choice process.

Anderson Behavioral School is not a traditional comprehensive school with a vast number of teachers, counselors, electives, and course offerings. The school's academic and curricular structure limits students' ability to access the needed academic skills to prepare for postsecondary education (Perna, 2000). Due to the small class sizes, students from various mathematics courses are bundled together and thus pre-Algebra, Algebra I and Algebra II may share the same class session and limit opportunities for learning, much less college preparation. The course offerings will not contribute to the students' skills and the needed curricular rigor to build college knowledge or readiness as highlighted in Chapter Five in the college preparation section. Mehan and colleagues (1996) stated, "kids can't go to college if they don't take college prep classes" (pg. 97) and although this statement is twenty years old, it is still relevant to the students in Anderson Behavioral School as they are not provided differentiated learning opportunities to be challenged in the classroom. The culture of learning is forgotten. The students overwhelmingly shared they are not learning in the classes and the curriculum is months behind their previous schools. These experiences only further negatively impact the students learning and chances to be successful in school.

A majority of the Anderson Behavioral School study participants demonstrated a deep understanding of gang knowledge. Possessing and accumulating gang knowledge requires the

integration of social and cultural capital as well as habitus to build strong ties to friends, family, neighbors, and others within their social circles to learn the various nuances of gangs and graffiti crews. The students, who are embedded in gangs or graffiti crews, are savvy enough to not share their gang or graffiti crew status with educators in school, thus demonstrating an ability to recognize the importance of non-disclosure in different fields and spaces. However, the gang embedded students are able to activate their capitals and habitus if their gang affiliation is questioned by other peers. The youth understand the internal and external expectations of gang embeddedness and will fight or verbally challenge rival gang or graffiti crew members as this is a part of the skills learned within a crew to advance their reputation. The use of social and cultural capital allows students to foster strong ties with friends, family and peers fully demonstrate the skills to recruit and differentiate between a gang or graffiti crew, and the necessary skills to advance within a gang or graffiti crew. The personal connections to gangs and graffiti crews defines and modifies students' aspirations and expectations for the future. A majority of the youth are able to list friends and family members embedded in five or more gangs and graffiti crews, but are unable to identify individuals in their social circles who have attended and graduated from various colleges and universities. The social networks with positive forms of educational capital is absent, but needed to facilitate access to higher education or other constructive pathways for the students.

If we were to suspend judgment of students' social networks and replace the personal gang connections instead to the colleges attended by peers, one could see how there are barriers and disconnections to higher education. It is difficult for participants to identify successful pathways to college, if no one in their social network has achieved that status, but those same participants are able to identify gangs as their parents, siblings, and extended family members have participated and achieved status in gangs or graffiti crews. Students were quickly able to identity who in their family is/was actively involved in a gang or graffiti crew. They shared which family member was

incarcerated in a jail versus prison, and who is on probation. The close ties allow them to see potential role models who provide a tough demeanor, but also is appropriate within the community field context. If school personnel were to focus and build on the strengths of gang embedded youth instead of concentrating on the negatives classroom behaviors, students may gradually trust educators and modify their school habitus (Huerta & Rios-Aguilar, 2016). Gang involvement is a result of being pushed and pulled by families, schools, and communities. Latino male youth experience multiple levels of marginalization in difference spaces (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Rios, 2011; Vigil, 1988), and gangs provide the needed environment to thrive and accumulate gang knowledge to be successful.

As demonstrated, gang and college knowledge require access and the accumulation of social and cultural capital, as well as habitus to excel in each space and field. The student participants have aspirations to attend college but do not have the required forms of capital to build the needed pre-college skills for higher education, whereas most of the students have reliable access to gang or graffiti crew members with a parent, sibling, extended family member, or their childhood peers, who is readily available to share non-dominant cultural capital information. If the forms of gang and college knowledge were reversed, the students would be prepared to excel in higher education because the depth of networks and forms of capital would be abundant, but unfortunately that is not the student situation. Unfortunately, the students do not trust schools and school personnel because of their past suspensions and school behavior records, which cause a layer of friction and hesitation to be open with school personnel. Also community estimation of school trust worthiness. The students' behavioral records and affiliations cause a disruption in school social norms which causes the students to be ostracized and labeled as *troublemakers*, which further stigmatize this group of students from educational settings. Students with a school-troublemaker-record leads educators to discount the students experience and investment in education (Arcia, 2006; Huerta, McDonough, &

Allen, 2016; Huerta & Rios-Aguilar, 2016; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; Rios, 2011). These same marginalized students can easily and without judgment request and build gang knowledge without the fear of retribution from their peers. The troublemaker status may actually increase the students' status and courting in a group of students who share a distrust towards schools and education. Thus, how will these students use their social and cultural capital to make a decision about their postsecondary education plans? It is evident the students understand how to use their social and cultural capital, habitus in the correct fields, whether these students enroll in college will require the support of their families and high school personnel to facilitate the students' educational success. If the findings about the impact of counselors on these students is an indicator of future treatment, the students will not learn *how to* reach higher education, and can depend on the school counselors for a lack of support to build necessary social and cultural capital. The families support and want their sons to go to college, but do not have the valued social networks and information to advance their sons to the local public two or four-year institutions.

As revealed throughout this study, the students' needs and access for valued forms of social and cultural capital in preparing for college cannot be understated to reach and be successful in higher education. Without the intersections of various dominant forms of valued capitals with capitals from students' homes and schools, the students will experience multiple challenges to prepare to reach higher education. Moreover, recent research has stressed the importance of social trust and strong relationships between students and school counselors in order for students to receive support and information about higher education (Corwin, et al., 2004; Holland, 2015; McDonough, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). The need for favorable student and counselor relationships is not a new phenomenon in the college access literature (Espinoza, 2011; Hill, 2008, 2012; McDonough, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Low-income students with parents unfamiliar with the college-going process need additional support during the college application process. First-

generation college students can be confused and discouraged during the multi-step process of selecting, applying, searching and securing financial aid, and then matriculating to different colleges is burdensome and often frustrating because each step requires sub-steps and planning to avoid disruptions (Castleman & Page, 2013; Klasik, 2012). So, when students have access to counselors who are knowledgeable and able to assist in the various steps to support and share information about applying to and financing one's college education, the process can be relatively seamless for students.

It should be no surprise that students' counselors are unable to address their individual social and academic needs because of their virtual absence in the lives of the students. Counselors' caseloads are tangled with administrative demands, testing, discipline, various requests from parents, and other spontaneous orders push and pull them throughout the school (Hill, 2008, 2012; Huerta, 2015b; McDonough, 1994, 1997, 2005). This study further documents the marginal impact school guidance and college counselors have on students especially Latino male youth in middle and high school grades. Whether the students were shunned because of their past behavioral records is not clear, but if the teachers and administrators' negative comments are any indicators of the shared attitudes towards the Anderson Behavioral School students – the students were purposefully ignored and may not have been given an equal opportunity to forge a relationship with their school counselors at Anderson Behavioral School or anywhere else.

Most counselors and administrators are unaware of the urgent social and academic conditions for Latino boys and young men in the U.S. (Clark, et al., 2013). School guidance and college counselors have professional duties to maintain, but the reality is most counselors are overworked, underpaid, and not professionally prepared to meet the multiple student demands presented by the Anderson Behavioral School students. Realistically the students probably would not trust the counselors with their stories of pain, trauma, death, and violence, as most students have

been scorned by other school educators and leaders because of the overuse or interpretation of discipline policies. So, although counselors are important in helping students prepare and learn about college, most counselors will probably continue to ignore these marginalized students.

## Implications

The academic experiences of Latino males attending behavioral and continuation schools call for additional attention and action from policymakers and practitioners to remedy the current inferior conditions. These substandard school settings are met with an increased number of Latino boys and other young males of color who are suspended and expelled, or subsequently transferred to alternative schools (Brown, 2007). It is well documented the academic standards, learning, and experiences for students who attend alternative schools diminish, which contributes to why students disengage from school (Brown, 2007; Brown & Beckett, 2007, Kelly, 1993; Muñoz, 2005). Thus, it is important for policymakers and practitioners to understand what the current needs of their students and communities are in order to move forward to provide more equitable educational opportunities. I begin with discussing the implications for policymakers and then K-16 practitioners.

### *Implications for policymakers*

Commonly, many policymakers question how and why are certain schools and neighborhoods are in such dire conditions. People blame ethnic segregation, the role of culture traits, low educational credential attainment, and poverty as central forces for urban decay (Kozol, 2006; Vigil, 1988; 1999), but often we do not readily question why state policymakers, city councils, and school boards have not invested more resources and programs into poor communities to produce alternative social and economic results. Lin (2000) identifies the power of systems and organizations (i.e. school boards) in determining funding allocations that structure "unequal opportunities" that contribute to social reproduction (pg. 787).

Policymakers must grapple with the emotional stigma of gang embedded youth. For most policymakers their constituents expect gang members to be prosecuted to the full-extent of the law because of the label of domestic or street terrorist, and the fear caused in various low-income communities. However, if programs and services are not targeted and tailored to the most vulnerable populations, the cycles of gang membership will not diminish, but only gradually increase and continue to the violence, graffiti, and later incarceration into adult prisons. *State policymakers*

State policymakers should move forward with creating wraparound services for high-need schools. These wraparound services should provide physical and mental health clinics, student mentoring, and food banks. High-need schools are often located in low-income communities where residents do not have readily available physical and mental health care centers, or healthy food. The implementation of these services could also address youth who may want to join gangs, as young students in vulnerable communities may need physical and mental health services and the support from mentors to provide positive role models. To decrease costs associated with labor, policymakers may consider partnering with local two and four-year colleges to hire work-study eligible students to serve as mentors. Traditionally, work-study eligible students are from low-income backgrounds, which may help in building credibility to work with the students in the program.The relationship to high-need schools is connected to gang embeddedness, which is also associated with poverty, racial segregation, educational credentials, fragmented households, and urban areas. We know which communities have the most need, so lawmakers need to allocate community development grants that include education, criminal justice, and health systems to jointly develop programs and services to address the needs of selective populations. Gangs and tagging crews are concentrated in low-income communities with few effective support systems to help youth. This must change in order to help kids stay and graduate from high schools, and have options when considering their postsecondary opportunities.

*School and District Leaders*

School boards must hold district leaders accountable for in-and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. Too often Black, Latino, and Native American males are overrepresented in disciplinary actions (Losen, 2015), although they often represent a smaller percentage of the school enrollment. Whether the school district uses an equity model to annually assess which schools over-discipline certain student populations and how school administrators move forward to working with parents and students requires additional attention. In conjunction to the school and district leaders' efforts, local four-year universities must also invest in the accountability process as they are responsible for training the next generation of school leaders to consider the impact of discipline on youth. The relationships between colleges and universities, local K-12, and school and district leaders is an on-going process because of the natural evolution of student experiences and new practices. Schools must be accountable to districts to ensure students are in class learning and not segregated since suspensions negatively impact students' ability to build college knowledge and preparation.

## Implications for Practitioners

College and universities must actively recruit and share information with students attending alternative and continuation schools. These students are the most neglected by traditional colleges and universities, and need special attention to build new forms of social and cultural capital about higher education.

*Colleges and universities*

Currently, colleges and universities are unable to provide regular outreach to all public schools, so college-access non-profits must focus their efforts to build students college knowledge. Most outreach is conducted by college admission recruiters who often neglect alternative and

continuation schools. When college recruiters do visit alternative and continuation schools are the messages tailored to this student population? Most often not, so college recruiters must be mindful in building messages that can resonate with students. For example, local community colleges must stress the low tuition cost, certificate, associate, and transfer programs for students. In addition, recruiters must discuss the importance of campus support services to aid first-generation and low-income students to be successful in postsecondary education.

Public colleges and universities must partner with local college-access non-profits to develop cohort models in alternative schools to promote community college enrollment, or technical or vocational education, these students need the opportunity to build chances for social mobility. Too often, educators in K-12 and higher education do not focus on the long-term life and educational trajectories of students in alternative schools and naively believe "they'll make it." But where are they going to make it too? Most careers require some form of postsecondary education credential for entry into high paying positions, so non-profits have an opportunity to help develop the workforce based on the "low-hanging" fruit, and can be achieved with academic and certificate programs that meet the immediate needs of students.

*Non-Profits*

Non-profits can partner with local businesses to offer entry-level workforce development opportunities through internship experiences for students attending alternative school. These internships can provide students an opportunity to learn about professional careers, but also build their networks with professionals in those fields. Too often students struggle with selecting majors in college, so an internship in high school can provide real-world application of different career pathways. The internship opportunities must be inclusive of various professional tracks including business, education, human and social services, and science and engineering. The broad scope of

programs can help students understand the unique opportunity to learn in new fields, but also expand their understanding of the various college course requirements.

### *Teachers*

Teachers learn the fundamentals of classroom management during their undergraduate or graduate school training. Too often, little is mentioned to prepare educators to work with youth in alternative schools especially those who are gang embedded. Teachers must work toward disengaging from their personal biases and negative perceptions of gang youth and instead ask themselves, "Why do youth join gangs?" Understanding family and social context, the role of multiple marginalization, and how and why gangs are concentrated in certain communities can help teachers build empathy. Teachers need professional development that incorporates the voices and experiences of students who have mixed reactions with educators in traditional and alternative schools. These learning opportunities are important to give teachers a chance to understand and recognize their own biases towards youth in the educational margins. The students' social and cultural capital related to gangs, can be gently introduced into the classroom pedagogy, students demonstrate a high-level of sophistication related to their gang knowledge, and educators must find a respectful, yet effective method to engage students in the classroom. Too often the student is disengaged from the curriculum because they do not see their experiences or culture in schools.

### *School Counselors*

School guidance and college counselors must receive specialized training to work with youth involved in gangs or tagging crews. Most counselors are unable to understand what factors cause gang membership for urban youth, so counselors must be trained to pick up the subtle cues of their students to provide structured interventions. If counselors become aware, they must reach out to parents to inquire about their son's potential gang embeddedness. Sometimes parents or other

family members are also involved in gangs, so the next steps may become delicate as the counselor does not want to disrespect the parent or family's lifestyle, but also must determine how to better support their student. This is not to say counselors are solely responsible for students, but counselors may be aware before parents or guardians are, so a team approach may be used to help youth before the young man is too deeply embedded in the gang or tagging crew. Additionally, school districts must work to provide current community programs or services that work to curtail gang membership, and so that counselors are able to work with parents to ensure students aren't lost to the streets. Often peer or adult mentors may suffice to help students refocus their energy and provide a space for students to vent their frustrations or troubles. To repeat the previous calls from others, counselors must be provided quarterly training on how to prepare students for college, and this information must be shared with students before their junior and senior years of high school, ideally in elementary school to begin to forge social and cultural capital as well as habitus about college knowledge and going.

*School and district leaders*

School and district leaders must be trained to support interventions to stop the increase in gang and tagging crew involvement. The gang intervention item adds to the long-list of responsibilities, testing, and other local or state agenda items to be fulfilled, and equally important. Whether the principal delegates the task to vice or assistant principals to focus the efforts. Teachers and counselors will fail or be handicapped by unsupportive school and district leaders. People in positions of power and resources must allocate funds to either increase the numbers of counselors or create new positions of school coaches who can work with youth on the margins, which almost resembles the efforts of Stephan and Rosenbaum (2013), where the district hired college coaches to work with youth in public schools to learn about college, but these coaches in the future would focus on gang prevention and college knowledge building. School and district leaders help shape the

culture and priority areas for schools, so they can dictate if gang prevention will be an area of concern and how resources will be used to help prevent long-term social problems related to gangs and tagging crews.

The combination of efforts between teachers, counselors, non-profits, school leaders, and local colleges and universities are important in fighting back against the continued growth and evolution of gangs and tagging crews. Gangs have been a staple in urban Mexican and Latino communities for almost a century, but real efforts have not resulted in the suspension of these groups, but instead an increase in numbers and gradual migration to new communities. The suggestions listed above are some of the multiple steps necessary to help combat gang and tagging crew issues for schools located in urban areas that serve large numbers of students of color.

## Potential Areas for Future Study

This study sheds light on how alternative schools contribute to the social reproduction of low-income Latino male students enrolled daily. More questions evolved as data was analyzed and written than could be answered in this single dissertation, which is invigorating from a research standpoint, but distressing as educator. I organize the future areas of study around five populations of interest. 1) Students, 2) Teachers, 3) Counselors, 4) School leaders, and 5) Alternative schools.

### *Students*

The central focus of this study was students and their gang and college knowledge. What emerged was teachers behaving poorly with students, so future research should examine how students respond to educators who provoke them into violence and the future educational experiences after that incident. Other studies should examine the the college choice processes for students with multiple school suspensions and expulsions to understand how and who provides them support to learn about colleges and universities in their communities.

*Teachers*

The focus on pedagogy and professional development is necessary to understand how and if teachers modify their pedagogy to meet the social and academic needs of students. As highlighted in Chapter Five, the students commented about the lack of rigor and the easy disengagement from course materials. We should ask, how or when did teachers make the decision to use a particular teaching style with alternative school students? From the organizational level, how do district-wide professional development sessions prepare teachers to teach, mentor, and engage students who are often the most vulnerable and marginalized? Most often teachers are not prepared in their undergraduate, graduate, or credential programs to engage students in alternative school as they commonly represent a small fraction of the total school enrollment. These areas are important to understand how to further support teachers and keep them meaningfully engaged with their students.

*Counselors*

The impact of counselors is important as documented through the literature and this study, so how are school counselors trained to engage alternative school students? Most school counselors receive training to recognize the mental and cognitive needs of students, but are the counselors knowledgeable about how to manage trauma? The students in this study experienced various levels of emotional and physical trauma due to their parents, families, and peers, but how do counselors make bigger efforts to support different demands? Future studies should examine the role of counselors supporting male and female gang members, and what pathways are promoted for these students after high school?

*School Leaders*

School leaders are important in supporting students, teachers, counselors, and others in alternative schools. So a line of inquiry should focus on how do school leaders create and develop the school culture in alternative schools in urban and low-income communities? What messages are sent to the teachers, counselors and other support staff about their value and impact on the students and their life trajectories? These questions must be investigated to understand how school leaders in this educational space impact students, but also the school culture when youth have long histories of discipline and behavioral issues, and also gang involvement.

These questions and populations are important to understand their interactions with each other, but also the tensions that evolve in schools with limited resources. Students want to be respected, so how do teachers negotiate working with youth on the margins. I hope that the questions I posed help other researchers and students push to immerse themselves to answer these important questions.

## Conclusion

Rock County School District is home to one of the largest student enrollments in the United States and has the potential to serve as a model for other districts on how to create and support educational opportunities for Latino male and other students of color. Unfortunately, for Latino male students in Rock County School District, they experience unprecedented educational inequities throughout school pipeline, from middle to college high school completion rates, college enrollment and completion throughout the state. These issues are not new, but require more attention to create real interventions to support these students goals of social mobility.

The case for why Latino males in K-12 need support is well documented, and now schools must act to solve the organizational problems. The young men in this study want support and investment from others, and they are joining gangs to fill that void. Thus, education and other

helping professionals must work together to solve these issues, if not, the inequities will continue to rise and damage another generation of youth. A majority of the problems experienced by the students in this study are related to poverty, and it remains a social problem in urban communities that help propel youth into gangs as they seek to to feel welcome, supported, and nurtured.

This study sought to understand Latino males' gang and college knowledge, and uncovered the detrimental role of school discipline policies impacting the ability to form college knowledge. A majority of the students possess more gang knowledge than college knowledge though they want to attend college, moreover they are not getting accurate and timely information from anymore to prepare for higher education. But, these students are gaining regular access to gang knowledge through their communities, peers, and in schools because of their social networks. These students are not connected to positive social networks to help them gain the necessary information from counselors or other staff, except for Oscar, who forged his own pathway to higher education.

Previous research has documented the importance of social and cultural capital as well as habitus in the college-going process for high school students (Huerta, McDonough, & Allen, 2016; McDonough, 1997). Gang literature has stressed the importance of social capital and networks in helping older gang members foster community with younger members (Pyrooz, Moule, Decker, & Pyrooz, 2013). This study contributes to the literature about Latino males, gangs, and education, as no previous studies in education, sociology, or criminology has identified gang knowledge as a form of cultural capital. The focus on gang knowledge as a form of cultural capital highlights the information that is an asset for youth to navigate their communities and schools, and although most educators would discount gang knowledge as a benefit – youth need this information to survive in urban gang communities. Gang knowledge is a necessity to avoid physical and verbal harassment from gang embedded peers, but also knowing how to use appropriate language and behavior when being confronted by gang embedded individuals, which if gang knowledge is not used correctly can

result in violence. Most educators are reluctant to incorporate students' violent home and community experiences into schools as teachers believe schools should be "safe zones" for students (Zipin, 2009). Even though Zipin's work focuses on "dark" funds of knowledge in an international perspective, it is relevant to understand how schools and educators determine what forms and types of knowledge is valued in educational spaces.

# Appendices

## APPENDIX A: Observation Guide

Date / Time of Observation:

School Site:

Participants (Students, Counselors, Teachers, Staff, or Principals):

- What are the dynamics of their interactions?

- Were professional staff members talking about students?

Location (Classroom, Cafeteria, Hallway, Parking Lot):

Do the students and school staff interact informally?

What is the type and tone of language between students and staff?

What are my internal and external reactions and behaviors to my observations?

**[How do these interactions relate to college knowledge, gang knowledge, college-going culture, or perceptions of delinquency?]**

## APPENDIX B: Script for Student Letter

**Script:**

Thanks for allowing me to interview you for my study on Latino male students and how they get information.

Now, I would like to ask you if you are open to writing a letter to a male sibling, cousin, or friend about what information they should know for their future. The letter, if you choose to do it, can be any length. I am not checking spelling, grammar, punctuation, I just want to know what advise you would want to give someone about how to prepare for their future.

Thanks you

## APPENDIX C: Document Analysis Form

(Adapted from Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013)

Date Collected:

School Site (Pseudonym):

Document name:

Date Published:

Format (electronic/hard copy)

Source (school/district/researcher/other):

Document location

Document summary / description:

Significance of the document for this study:

- College-going culture
- Gang knowledge
- College knowledge
- Perceptions of delinquency
- Perceptions of families' needs (income, mental health, etc.)

## APPENDIX D: Coding Book

| Concept Code | Sub-Codes |
|---|---|
| First Learned About College | Elementary School<br>Middle School<br>High School |
| Personnel Connections to Higher Education | Non-Family Members<br>Parents Attended College<br>No One in Family Attended College<br>Cousins / Extended Family<br>Siblings<br>Educators |
| Methods to Pay For College (College Costs) | State Merit Scholarship<br>Doesn't know / hasn't thought about it<br>Financial Aid (used the words)<br>Grants<br>Military<br>Being a Minority<br>Parent / Family Resources<br>Scholarships<br>Student Loans<br>Working and Paying for College |
| Perceptions / Attitudes Towards College (Pre-College) | Limited Information About College<br>College<br>College is an Individual Responsibility<br>College is Not a Good Financial Investment<br>Fear About College Outcomes<br>Student Believes He is Not College Material |
| College Messages (Matriculated Into College) | College Will Make You Reach For More<br>Opportunities<br>College is Hard<br>College is Too Expensive<br>College Professors Are Not Friendly<br>Need Complete and Full Subject Mastery<br>Limited Parent and Family Involvement in<br>Supporting College |

| | |
|---|---|
| Benefits / Outcomes of Going to College | To Become Successful<br>Career and Vocational Training<br>Learn to Write and Communicate Better<br>Teaches People to Build Community<br>Make the World a Better Place |
| College Admission Requirements | High School Diploma / GED<br>College Exam<br>Good Grades<br>Good Credit Score<br>School Behavior<br>Letters of Recommendation<br>School Attendance<br>Good Community Citizen (No Arrest Record) |
| College and University Types | Private Two-Year Schools<br>Transfer Plan<br>Public Two-Year Schools<br>Public Four-Year College or University<br>Unaware of Any Local Two or Four-Year Colleges |
| Personal Connections to Gangs or Graffiti Crews | Non-Family Members<br>Parents<br>No One in Family Was Ever in a Gang or Crew<br>Cousins / Extended Family<br>Siblings<br>Educators Talked about Gang Involvement<br>O.G.s in the Neighborhood |
| First Learned about Gangs or Graffiti Crews | Elementary School<br>Middle School<br>High School |
| Number of Gangs | 0 – Not Familiar With Any Local Gangs or Crews<br>1 – 3 – Gangs and Graffiti Crews<br>4 – 6 - Gangs and Graffiti Crews<br>7+ - Gangs and Graffiti Crews |

| | |
|---|---|
| Connections to Juvenile Hall and Prison | Personal Interactions with Legal System<br>Friends, Siblings, or Extended Family Incarcerated<br>Parent / Guardian or Incarcerated |
| Reasons Individual Joins Gang or Graffiti Crew | Feel A part of Something (Family / Community)<br>No Reason (Something to do)<br>To Get Respect From Others<br>Financial Support<br>For the Love of Art (Graffiti)<br>To Hang Out with Friends |
| Requirements to Join Gangs | Family Connections<br>Missions<br>Have to Be Down<br>Jumped Into Gang or Graffiti Crew<br>Recruited to Gang or Graffiti Crew |

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