Jailbreak: Examining School Criminalization and the Resiliency of African-American University Students

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This thesis titled

Jailbreak: Examining School Criminalization and the Resiliency of African-American University Students

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ABSTRACT

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**Jailbreak: Examining School Criminalization and the Resiliency of African-American University Students**

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School Criminalization has emerged in the education system of the United States as an issue that students, especially minority students and students with disabilities, are confronted with. The concept emerged as a result of violent crimes being committed across the nation’s schools. To combat the issue, schools adopted policies and methods to prevent further violent and criminal acts from occurring. Schools have increased reliance on law enforcement personnel, equipment, and policies to handle student misbehavior. The literature underlines the effects the shift has had on the handling of issues seen within the school environment. The shift has led to a change in the atmosphere of schools, emergence of racial disparities with school discipline, and a trend referred to as the “school to prison pipeline.” This study examines eight African-American university students’ experiences with school discipline as high school students. The purpose of the study is not to just depict how participants dealt with the issue at hand, but how they managed to demonstrate resilience and earn an opportunity to pursue a college education. In-depth interviews were conducted which gathered data on participants experiences with discipline, relationships, involvement in various activities, and their college experiences. What the data illustrates are how some participants managed to avoid school discipline through a variety of means, while others had more difficult journey to navigate. Despite
the differences, each participant graduated high school and earned the opportunity to pursue a college education. The factors that helped these individuals demonstrate resilience was found with the relationships they shared with important figures and their involvement in various activities. The findings of this study offer implications that indicate how vital relationships and involvement can help shape a student’s educational experience in high school.
DEDICATION

To my Mom and Dad, thank you for everything!
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To my Mom and Dad, first, I would like to express a huge thank you to you both. Without your love, support, and sacrifices throughout the years I would not be where I am today. The experiences and lessons you have provided have helped me in navigating and overcoming the various challenges life has brought on. Again, thank you both and I love you. To my brothers Marcus and Derrick, thanks a ton for the love and support you both have provided along the way. When things were tough and I needed a source of relief, you both were the two I knew I could always count on, and for that I thank you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Inequality experienced by African-Americans has been persistent within the various social institutions of American society since the country’s inception. Although the United States has taken actions to reform and combat inequality, the issue remains prevalent and takes on different forms throughout social institutions. The education system of the United States serves as a perfect example which depicts how inequality continues to be prevalent and have an effect on racial minorities.

Education inequality faced by racial minorities is experienced through a variety of means. The forms in which these means take shape occur through lack of funding for schools in underdeveloped communities, which translates into such schools having sub-standard facilities, limitations on personnel, and lack of resources for student learning and achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Education inequality, in a variety of ways, reflects the many disparities and obstacles racial minorities face in broader American society. One particular issue that shares a strong resemblance between society and the education system is punishment. Racial minorities, particularly African-Americans and Latinos, are disproportionality represented in our country’s criminal justice system (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015). What many have called attention to, is a similar issue that has emerged in the country’s education system where racial minorities are disproportionality represented when it comes to those being disciplined in school.

The purpose of this thesis is to further examine the concept of school criminalization, and the phrase often used to depict this phenomenon, the “school to prison pipeline.” This phenomenon refers to “the policies and practices that push school
children, especially those at-risk, out of the classroom and into the juvenile and criminal justice system” (ACLU, 2008). To further illustrate, schools have adopted policies and procedures to discipline students that have a detrimental effect on student learning experiences. Students who are pushed into the “pipeline” are affected in numerous ways ranging from being stigmatized, falling behind in course work, and the possibility of ending up jail (Brownstein, 2015).

African-American and Latino students are the primary minority groups challenged by this phenomenon. To shed light on the inequality that exists, in 2012, white students accounted for 51 percent of the population enrolled in public schools. African-Americans and Latino students combined made up 40 percent of the total population (NCES, 2015). According to the Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights report on school discipline (2011-12), whites accounted for 40 percent of in-school-suspensions, 36 percent of out-of-school suspensions, and 36 percent of expulsions. African-Americans and Latinos combined accounted for 54 percent of in-school-suspensions, 56 percent of out-of-school suspensions, and 56 percent of expulsions. Despite making up two-fifths of the total student population, African-American and Latinos account for over half of all discipline sanctions resulting in suspensions and expulsions. The racial disparities do not only lie with discipline, African-American and Latino students have lower graduation rates percentages, 68 and 75 percent, and the highest dropout rate percentages, 7 and 12 percent respectively (NCES, 2015). However, despite the disparities present within the primary and secondary levels of the U.S’s education system,
African-Americans and Latinos demonstrate resiliency and earn the opportunity to pursue a higher education.

This thesis examines the experiences of African-Americans enrolled at predominately white universities and explores their high school experiences with school discipline. With African-Americans facing numerous obstacles at the primary and secondary levels of the education system, the key question is: In what ways do African-Americans demonstrate resiliency in the face of school criminalization?

To help uncover answers, eight in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with African-American university students at two universities in a Midwest state. Prior to enrolling at their respective institutions, participants attended various types of high schools. Participants shared their experiences of secondary education, and spoke on a variety of matters ranging from discipline procedures, relationships with school personnel, and personal discipline experiences. A few participants shared that they had frequent discipline run-ins, while others had little to none. Despite obstacles, the participants demonstrated a sense of resiliency. According to Wang, Haertel, and Wahlberg (1993), educational resiliency is “success in school and other accomplishments, despite environmental adversities, which can be brought on by traits, conditions, or experiences” (p. 3). The interviews were used to discover factors that supported the participants in being resilient towards obstacles faced.

In Chapter two, further insight will be provided on the emergence of school criminalization and the “school to prison pipeline,” as well as the important factors and traits producing resilience in youth. The chapter examines previous literature to help
paint a historical analysis of how the concept of school criminalization has emerged as another obstacle faced by school children throughout the education system. The literature will also take a look at understanding the effects of school criminalization and student behavior through the labeling perspective. Finally, previous research and literature on resiliency will be shared in the chapter. Chapter three highlights the research design, data collection, sample background, and the data analysis process.

Chapters four and five present the findings of the study. The findings of chapter four shares the experiences of the participants while enrolled in high school. The experiences uncover the school and community environment, personal experiences with academics and discipline, and their take on policies and procedures. The findings presented in chapter five focus on the factors that produced resiliency amongst participants, highlights the struggles participants experienced while in college, and their future aspirations. To figure out how participants were resilient, the interviews explored the factors participants found vital to their success in high school, and earning the opportunity to attend college.

The goal of the research is not just to depict the criminalization issues faced by racial minorities, but to share the factors that generated resiliency with the participants. It is my hope that these factors can potentially be implemented or offered in the lives of current and future generations of school children faced with similar obstacles. The final chapter offers a discussion of the findings, limitations of the study, suggestions for future research, and policy implications.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following pages, the material provided will offer further explanation and understanding towards the issues at hand. Contained in this chapter is a review of the literature on school criminalization and the school to prison pipeline. The literature will explain the emergence of the phenomenon, and how it took form within the education system. The theoretical framework for this research will be centered on labeling theory which will provide context to understanding student behavior in the school environment. Finally, will offer literature that depicts the various ways in which resiliency is fostered and demonstrated within the education environment.

The Emergence of the School Criminalization

In Preparing for Prison (2008), Paul Hirschfield conceptualizes the term school criminalization. What Hirschfield brings to light in his article, is the shift in response and handling of school deviance. As a result of the shift, he elaborates on several dimensions that provide explanations on how school discipline has come to function more like the criminal justice system, which in turn has led to a series of unanticipated effects. The criminalization of school discipline has thus led to a noticeable trend of students landing up in the criminal justice system. The trend is often referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” The American Civil Liberties Union defines the pipeline as the “policies and practices that push our nation’s schoolchildren out of the classroom and into the juvenile and criminal justice system” (ACLU, 2008). What this section will reveal is the path the education system has traveled which has resulted in system making a “punitive turn” when it comes to school discipline.
One dimension Hirschfield puts forward is the shift in policies and methods used when it comes to handling school discipline issues. The shift he suggested, has taken more of a “punitive turn,” where the policies and methods utilized within the education system have resembled similar practices used by the various components of the criminal justice system (Hirschfield, 2008). The concept of the “punitive turn” derives from Amy Lerman’s *Modern Prison Paradox* (2013). In her book, Lerman examines the shift in American correctional facilities where the culture that had once been centered on rehabilitation has now become more punitive. This “punitive turn” has led to a series of drastic effects on the prison environment, where prisoner social support has declined, which in turn has shifted attitudes amongst the population, resulting in violence and other issues, as well as the increased likelihood of prisoners reoffending once released from prison (Lerman, 2013).

Lerman suggests that the change was brought on by American politics, where politicians began to campaign and urge reform in handling the various social issues plaguing American society during the mid-20th century. Michelle Alexander (2012) echoes a similar suggestion. For Alexander, the “war on drugs” was the period where the criminal justice system made the “punitive turn.” Just as Lerman suggested, Alexander also suggested that the turn was brought on by American politics. Politicians such as Barry Goldwater and other conservative politicians campaigned aggressively to “get tough on crime”, and utilize punitive measure to combat the issues at hand. These
messages were used as a tactic to mobilize supporters for political gain (Alexander, 2012; Lerman, 2013).

Presidential candidates such as Richard Nixon and George Wallace crafted the message of “law and order” as themes for their respective campaigns (Alexander, 2012). As president, Richard Nixon declared drug use in American society as “public enemy number one” (Alexander, 2012). This call led to a dramatic shift in drug policy, which was intensified with the election of Ronald Reagan. During his presidency, law enforcement agencies saw significant increases in their budgets, while agencies responsible for drug prevention, treatment, and education, saw their budgets reduced (Alexander, 2012). The judicial system saw reforms of its own, with the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984, which imposed Mandatory Minimum Sentencing laws that set strict guidelines in place to punish offenders. The act was established with the intent to deter individuals from committing drug and violent crimes and punish offenders (Caulkins, Rydell, Schwabe, Chiesa, 1997).

Not only has the punitive turn resulted in changes within each branch of the criminal justice system, but the policies and methods that guide the workings of the system have produced effects that have created disparities along racial lines. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, from 1980-2009, African Americans were arrested at higher rates for crimes such as drug possession, use, sale, and manufacturing (Bureau of Justice Statistics, Synder, 2011). Of the 1.4 million males incarcerated in state and federal prisons, over 800,000 are either African-American or Latino, compared to the 450,000 white inmates (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015). The “punitive turn” witnessed in the
criminal justice system has had a great effect in shaping how the institution responds to various crimes in American society through a more punitive manner. Although these policies and methods were intended to be race neutral, what has emerged are disparities along racial lines. The next section will demonstrate how the “punitive turn” occurred in the education system.

**Punitive Turn in Education**

In many ways, the “punitive turn” in the education system mirrors the manner in which the criminal justice system made its own shift. Just as changes within the criminal justice system was formed around serious drug and violent crimes, a similar situation occurred where crimes were being committed within the school environment that prompted officials to urge reforms. During the 1990’s, a “moral panic” had emerged in American society in response to a series of violent crimes (e.g. school shootings, youth gang violence) taking place within schools (Brooks et. al., 2000; Burns and Crawford, 1999; Rios, 2008). Events such as the Columbine school shooting in 1999, and the media coverage surrounding the event sparked much concern and hostility throughout the public, which contributed to escalating the “moral panic” in American society (Burns and Crawford, 1999; Brooks et. al., 2000; DeMitchell and Cobb, 2003; Hirschfield, 2008). Prior to the “moral panic” being experienced throughout American society, such issues were mostly known to have taken place in schools of inner-city and urban communities. With suburban and rural schools now facing such issues, the perceived belief that violent crimes were prevalent throughout the nation’s school systems pressed the need for reform (Hirschfield and Celinska, 2011).
Despite the series of violent crimes occurring within schools, there was a gap between the perceived belief of how serious the issue was and the reality of violent crimes in schools. Brooks et. al (2000) shared data on a series of reports conducted by government and education organizations that paint the reality of violent crimes committed in schools through the 1990’s. What the report highlights is the decline in violent crimes committed by youth. For example, during the 1992-1993 school year there were a total of 55 reported deaths, whereas at the end of the 1998-1999 school year, which included the Columbine school shooting, there were 26 student deaths (Brooks et. al., 2000: NSSC, 2010). With the total public education population standing at 52 million students in 1998-1999, the authors expressed that the probability of a student being killed in school stood at one in two million (Brooks, Schiraldi, Ziendenberg, 2000).

As a result of “moral panic,” a series of actions were taken throughout the decade in response to issues plaguing the school environment. Politics and the media played a crucial role in shaping the need for reform when dealing with school violence (Burns and Crawford, 1999). In 1994, Congress passed the Gun-Free Schools Act, which required all states receiving federal funds to have laws in effect that punished students who were determined to have brought weapons onto schools property. Violation of the law would require schools to refer individuals to the criminal justice system (U.S.C., 1994).

Schools too, began to adopt measures of their own to handle discipline issues within their respective environments. What a few point to is how these measures mirror the means and methods utilized by the criminal justice system. When it comes to deterrence policies, schools began adopting zero-tolerance policies, not only for weapons
offenses, but for drugs, tobacco, alcohol, and violent behavior (Hirschfield, 2008). Schools have become more reliant on law enforcement personnel and equipment to ensure safe schooling environments (Berger, 2002). Schools have also increased security measures through physical means by hiring police officers and security guards, and by deploying security equipment such as locks, surveillance cameras, and metal detectors (Berger, 2002).

The increased reliance on law enforcement officials and their methods has stripped the discretion and responsibility from maintaining control and order within the school environment away from teachers and administrators, and is now the responsibility of law enforcement personnel (Berger, 2002). Another result of the punitive turn that has raised concern are the effects these methods and policies have brought on the school environment. The concerns raised highlight the sanctions imposed on students (out of school suspension, expulsions, arrest), as well as the racial disparities that are prevalent. The next section will highlight the effects the “punitive turn” has had on the overall school atmosphere.

The Effects of School Criminalization

The previous section brought to light the shift in polices and methods the education system made towards school discipline. What has been alarming about the shift, are the issues within the school environment itself. The problems that have emerged, focus on various aspects of schools ranging from the atmosphere, effects policies and methods have on students, as well as the racial disparities that are prevalent.
The section begins by highlighting Megan Comfort’s concept of secondary prisonization, and how this idea takes form within the education system.

**Secondary Prisonization**

Comfort (2008) conducted a qualitative study which examined the relationships between families and their incarcerated members, and introduced the concept of “secondary prisonization,” which builds off of Clemmer’s (1958) term prisonization. Clemmer (1958) detailed the organization and routines of correctional facilities, social groups, relationships, and the controls enacted within the walls of the facility. He coined the term prisonization, which Comfort indicated as “the taking on in greater or less degree of folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary” (p. 14). By prisoners taking on the various cultural aspects of the prison environment, Clemmer and Comfort contend that this can lead to the acceptance of an inferior role, as well as the development of new behavioral habits.

Comfort (2008) applied these characteristics to her own study, where she suggested that the individuals she observed were subjected to “secondary prisonization.” When visiting their partners or family members at the San Quentin correctional facility, these individuals accepted their inferiority and conformed to prison policies. Personnel within the facility monitored and instructed their appearance and behavior. Prior to visits, visitors were confined to crowded waiting areas, and upon entry were thoroughly searched. If family members failed to conform to policies and procedures, they faced sanctions, which ranged from losing visiting privileges, the incarcerated family member losing their privileges, or possible arrest. With schools having taken a more punitive turn
towards school discipline, by becoming more reliant on law enforcement, are students subjected to a form of secondary prisonization?

School Resource Officers (SROs) have been utilized within the school environment to assist with providing a safe space for students and school personnel through a variety of tasks. These tasks include monitoring school property, handling and investigating student misconduct, providing programming that reduces student misbehavior, and making arrests when criminal acts are committed (Berger, 2002; Johnson 1999). To ensure that goals set by school districts are met, these officers have the capability to utilize several means to achieve such goals. These range from unannounced searches of student lockers and personal property, use of surveillance measures to monitor student activity and behavior, metal detectors, among other methods (Berger, 2002; Hirschfield, 2008). Therefore, just as family members were to conform to the rules of the prison environment, a similar expectation is required of students within the school environment. Students are expected to conform to their respective school’s discipline polices, and when students violate such policies, often times they are faced with different forms of sanctioning.

Depending on the severity of the issue, thus determines the form of sanctioning imposed on the individual. When examining the exclusionary forms of sanctioning (in and out-of-school suspensions, expulsions) imposed by schools across the education system, what has been underscored are the racial disparities that exist. African-American and Latino student groups make up 40 percent of the total population in public schools (NCES, 2015). Yet, when considering that these groups make up just under half of the
student population combined, they account for just over half of exclusionary forms of sanctioning (Dept. of Ed., 2015).

These forms of sanctioning can have behavioral and academic impacts on students (Krezemien et. al., 2008; Wilson, 2013). By excluding students from the school atmosphere, what has emerged is a trend where students have fallen prey to the criminal justice system (Wilson, 2013). As mentioned earlier in the chapter, this phenomenon is often referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” Wilson (2013) highlights how school policies and personnel contribute to the exclusion of students, as well as the role they play in preventing the trend from continuing. He points out two potential pathways that push students into the pipeline. The first path focuses on school personnel referring youth to the criminal justice system for their misbehavior. He explains that zero-tolerance policies and the presence of SROs help with the leading of youth to the pathway. The second path involves the use of exclusionary practices. Wilson stresses that such practices increase students’ exposure to negative experiences, both in and out of the schooling environment, which then eliminates positive supportive resources for youth.

These policies and methods were established to deal with the violent and criminal acts taking place within schools. The Advancement Project (2010) draws attention to how these procedures have strayed from their original intent, and now aim to criminalize students for non-violent behaviors. The report cites several instances where students of different school districts were strictly handled due to non-violent offenses. These offenses ranged from using inappropriate language, young children bringing prohibited items to school by accident, writing on school property (desk), as well as other non-violent
offenses. The sanctions these offenses carried ranged from police citations, suspensions, expulsions, and even arrests.

The effects of school criminalization have produced some positive outcomes, yet when examining the other side of the issue, it has also caused serious problems that are detrimental to the educational experience of students. The problems highlighted in this section, depict the change of the environment seen throughout schools, the forms of sanctioning imposed on students, and how these sanctions are detrimental, as well as the racial disparities that are now prevalent when examining school discipline. What has yet to be focused on is understanding the behavior students’ display that may lead to their involvement with school discipline. To provide a context to understanding student misbehavior, the upcoming section will examine labeling theory which offers explanations of human behavior, and how it can shaped by the attitudes of others. What labeling theory also contends to is how people in positions of authority play a crucial role in developing society’s response to certain behavior and acts.

Theoretical Framework: Understanding Student Behavior

*Labeling Theory*

Labeling theory examines society’s response to crime and deviance committed by its members. The theory seeks to understand what happens to individuals after they are labeled as criminal or deviant (Plummer, 1979). Plummer examines the evolution of labeling theory and highlights the various aspects and concerns brought on by the theory. During the 1960s and into the 1970s, labeling theory had emerged as a dominant theoretical framework for sociology when examining crime and deviance.
Becker (1963) applied the labeling perspective towards marijuana use and its control in society, which was stirred up by a “moral panic” over drug use. He expressed how social groups who hold power, establish deviance by creating rules where violations result in deviance. The individuals who violate such rules are then labeled “outsiders.” Becker further adds to the construction of deviance by explaining that “deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an “offender”… deviant behavior is behavior that people so label” (p. 9).

Lermert’s (1967) contributions to labeling theory were made by developing the concepts of primary and secondary deviance, which distinguish the outcomes of being labeled deviant. Primary deviance arises when one may be perceived deviant, yet does not respond negatively to the society’s reaction. Whereas with secondary deviance one who is perceived deviant will respond negatively to the reaction of society. Dependent upon the societal reaction, thus has potential to alter one’s identity through how they behave, the roles they take on, and the manners in which they perceive themselves (Lermert, 1967; Plummer, 1979).

I would argue that the term secondary deviance builds off of concepts such as Robert Merton’s “self-fulfilling prophecy” (1948) and Charles Cooley’s “looking-glass-self” (1902). Both perspectives examine human behavior and how it is brought on by either perceptions, reactions, or labels. Individuals who are subjected to such reactions may internalize the perceptions of others or society, and alter their performance to fulfill such beliefs placed upon them.
Jenson (2012) reflects on her education experience and shares how she and other students of the schooling environment were marginalized by various actors within the school setting. By being marginalized, this led individuals to be resistant to the culture of their schooling environment which was tailored to fit the identities of certain groups of students. Jensen formulated the idea of student groups being either a subculture, counterculture, or the dominant group within the education system. She explained that when it came to education, students of various groups tended display identities that showed connections with students’ social group identities. Jensen tied these identities to social class, and values of each social class group when it comes to education. For upper and middle class backgrounds, education tends to be highly valued, whereas with working and lower class backgrounds, education for some, was not as highly valued.

These values spilled over into the school system, where Jensen pointed out how school personnel along with students perceived other students based off of such identities. Students of the various backgrounds internalized such perceptions which ultimately shaped their behavior within the school environment. Students of middle class backgrounds, “working class geeks,” “the Brothers,” and “goody goody’s,” were perceived as students who attained good grades, earned the teachers acceptance, and were involved in various organizations throughout school and community. Whereas other student groups that Jensen highlights (Hallway Hangers), were perceived as resistant and unwilling to conform to the education setting. Jensen shared instances of where she herself, displayed resistance in the form of misbehavior, as well as other students who displayed resistance through violating behavioral policies (Jensen, 2012).
Another example of resistance can be seen in a qualitative study of young women of a California high school (Bettie, 2002). Various groups of women within the school environment were observed (Preps, Cholas, Las Chicas, Smokers, Skaters), and were found to display their own respective identity which also demonstrated a connection with their social class backgrounds, gender, and race/ethnicity. When focusing on the school environment itself, Bettie discovered that the environment was tailored to fit the culture of the dominant group “the Preps.” The women who associated themselves with this particular group were majority white, and from middle and upper class family backgrounds. Their parents were typically college educated and held the more prestigious jobs of the local community.

The women of the other groups in the school environment expressed resentment towards the dominant group, and explained how the environment was less fitting for their respective groups. This was seen with the courses offered, who won awards at school ceremonies, and who dominated extra-curricular activities. With these groups being a subculture, Bettie observed the various ways in which the groups displayed resistance. When observing the Smokers for instance, these individuals would skip class and smoke at hidden locations on campus. With Las Chicas, these women either chose or were tracked into non-college prep courses. While enrolled in such courses they often displayed little interest in the curriculum and discovered other (undesired) ways to pass time. Both Bettie and Jensen expressed that school personnel perceptions towards these groups of students demonstrated little faith, lack of willingness to help, and little understanding of their respective experiences (Bettie, 2002).
The literature provided demonstrates the power perceptions have in how individuals may view themselves within their respective social environment. The observations and analysis of Jensen and Bettie’s work fit well with both Cooley’s “looking-glass-self” and Merton’s “self-fulfilling prophecy” concepts. Students of these respective school environments were perceived by their school personnel and peers based off of their group identities which were associated with either their race, class, or gender. The students whose identities who were more valued, were perceived in healthier manners. Whereas, students who had ties to less valued identities were perceived in a more negative manner. These negative perceptions produced effects that shaped the behavioral and academic outcomes of these individuals within the school setting.

The perceptions and attitudes that school personnel display towards students hold a great deal of power and influence. When it comes to placing labels upon individuals in society, it is often carried out by formal social control agents and organizations (Klein, 1986). When focusing on juvenile delinquency, social control is carried out by components of the juvenile justice system, social services, education systems, as well as various public and private agencies (Klein, 1986). When focusing on the education system, these environments typically utilize various social control agents within the school setting. These agents are usually school resource officers, school administrators, teachers, counselors or other behavioral health specialists.

*Labeled and Punished*

throughout his book to depict the experiences of minority youth being labeled and criminalized within their own schools. Jose shared his story of being criminalized from an early age. He had been arrested in the third grade for lighting a garbage can on fire. After his arrest, his family, peers, and school officials viewed him as the “kid who had been arrested,” which resulted in him being treated different. Jose ended up getting into trouble on a more consistent basis which often resulted in him being removed from the classroom setting and engaging in little to no education activity. Another youth highlighted, Spider, attended an alternative school for youth labeled deviant and delinquent by the Oakland school district as a result of being attacked by local gang members. What Rios observed with Spider’s experience, was the interaction between him and the personnel located within the school. Upon entry students were searched with hand held metal detectors by security guards. At the conclusion of the school day, once students departed the school environment, they were continuously surveyed by law enforcement (Rios, 2008).

Darius was one of the smartest students in his class. Despite being smart, Darius found himself getting into trouble for acting out in class. Often times when he acted out it was because he was being “dummy smart”. Rios defined this term as a “strategy to devise actions for fooling the system into believing what it expected of him, to break the law” (p. 112). By acting “dummy smart,” this resulted in Darius being suspended on a few occasions from school. His removal from school in one instance led him to being arrested and placed in the juvenile justice system. Rios explained that Darius played “deviant politics,” where he performed the role school personnel expected of African-American
men which was defiant and ignorant. However, Darius had the ability to “code switch” and take on a completely different role, one that demonstrated his intelligence (Rios, 2008).

The labeling theory offers a perspective which examines society’s reaction towards deviance and how those who are labeled respond. Rios (2008) captures the essence of labeling within the schooling environment. What he depicts is the ways in which minority youth are perceived by school personnel and their peers, and how these youth fulfill the beliefs of these individuals. By fulfilling these perceptions, the youth of Rios’ research displayed resistance in the form of misbehavior, which was also seen in Jensen and Bettie’s observations with women and working class students. The criminalization of youth through school policies and procedures led to labels being placed upon these youth, where they would then fall into a cycle of constant misbehavior and punishment. Despite instances as such, there is literature that depicts student experiences in overcoming such obstacles that resemble environments as Oakland. The following section will examine how resiliency is demonstrated within education as we as the various factors which may help produce resiliency with students.

Resiliency

Resiliency in education can be depicted as achieving success in school, as well as other accomplishments, despite facing adversity which can be created by environmental traits, conditions, or experiences (Wang, Haertel, Walberg, 1993). When focusing on African-American youth and resilience, inner-city and urban communities have often been one of the focal points for previous research to help uncover students’ abilities and
characteristics to overcome adversity (Brooms, 2015; Connor, 1997; Wang et. al. 1993; Winfield, 1991). Brooms (2015) examines the previous literature on what he calls “The Neighborhood Effect.” The concept was also featured in the work of Robert Sampson (2012), who focuses on the various social issues plaguing urban communities. These issues which range from poverty, crime, and instability across various social institutions, contribute to one’s lived experiences. These issues have been linked to the underdevelopment of African-American youth, which in turn has had a profound effect on their academic experiences (Brooms, 2015).

Brooms (2015) conducted interview with twenty African-American men, all whom were graduates of high school, and were enrolled in a higher education institution. The participants spoke on the various issues facing the community they were from. Despite being susceptible to a variety of dangerous situations, these individuals demonstrated resiliency. Brooms highlighted that the young men displayed a strong sense of self, had a strong support network, and their ability to overlook challenges allowed for them to make sense of their neighborhood situation. For several participants, being in school was not only a safe space from the neighborhood issues, but their “ticket out” (Brooms, 2015).

Resiliency can be brought on by a range of factors. Wang et. al (1993) point out that schools, family, and the community play a role in fostering resilience in inner-city communities. When examining schools, the authors point out that resilience is dependent upon the effectiveness of micro-level factors (classroom instruction, teacher-student relationships), which the macro-level factors (school environment) encompasses and is
dependent upon. Effectiveness is attained through innovating programs that seek to improve student learning outcomes, emphasize student involvement thus avoiding rejecting isolation and alienation, and promote a healthy and supportive environment for schools personnel and students (Benard, 1991; Wang et. al, 1993).

Benard (1991) explains that resiliency is formed around social competence, autonomy, problem-solving, and sense of purpose and future. She provides insight on the roles the family and community play in fostering resiliency. She focuses on the aspects of caring and support, high expectations, and promoting participation, all of which support the development of the traits of resilience. When examining family, this arena provides a child the constant care, support, and protection needed for development. Along with the care and support aspect, families set high expectations for their children which are established through discipline, rules, and structure.

Benard also explains the means by which the community provides and offers these same aspects but in a different manner. Communities provide care and support through social organizations that offer resources to the community members that ensure healthy human development. These resources exist in the form of health care, child care, housing, job training, employment, and recreation (Benard, 1991). High expectations are maintained through a steady expression of social norms, which reinforces desirable behavior within the community (Benard, 1991; Wang et. al., 1993).

Participation is facilitated by communities, which offer the opportunities for involvement. Both family and schools play a vital role in encouraging youth involvement, but as Benard explains, both are dependent upon the community to provide such
opportunities. Being involved creates a sense of belonging and attachment to the community and its institutions (Bernard, 1991). Youth involvement is associated with the development of enhanced self-esteem, moral development, and an ability to create and maintain relationships. Whereas lack of participation can result in psychological dependence, and is associated with disruptive and self-destructive behaviors (Kurth-Schai, 1988).

In sum, resiliency is produced by a variety factors, and can be displayed in various personal characteristics. The study I conduct aims to add additional insight to the literature and research focusing on school criminalization, labeling theory, and resiliency. The study examines the high school experiences pertaining to school discipline of African-American students enrolled in higher education. I focus on this particular group because of their ability to pursue the opportunity to receive a higher education. My study does not just aim to highlight how school criminalization continues to occur and affect the students of the education system, but ultimately provide an answer to my research question: In what ways do African-American university students demonstrate resiliency in the face of school criminalization? Additionally, I examine how these factors have helped them earn the opportunity to pursue a college education.

The literature has revealed how school criminalization has emerged as a form of inequality within the education system of the United States. This phenomenon has mirrored the shift undertaken by the criminal justice system in its attempt to combat violent crimes and drug crimes in American society. I make the argument that the education system has also made efforts of its own to combat the violent crimes that have
occurred over the past decades. Many of the policies and methods utilized have strayed away from their original intent of handling violent behavior, and now punish students for non-violent behaviors. Research has revealed a trend of students being punished and finding themselves on the path to prison. Despite this trend, the literature highlights that students are capable of demonstrating resiliency in environments that create hostility and that resiliency is produced through a variety of factors. This study seeks to show the ways in which this occurs in conjunction with school criminalization.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this research is to learn the stories of African-American university students and understand the ways in which they were resilient to the various forms of school criminalization they faced while in high school. By taking notice of such stories, I hope to develop factors that could potentially be implemented in the lives of current and future generations of school children. Therefore, the research is designed to allow African-American university students to share their experiences of school criminalization. These experiences illustrate the more recent undertakings of discipline in schools, how students are resilient, and highlights their experiences while enrolled at universities.

This study is patterned after Alan Grigsby’s thesis *Men on the Edge: A Qualitative Investigation of Marginality, Stress, and Social Support among Black Male Student-Athletes at a Predominantly White University* (2012). Grigsby utilized in depth interviews to understand the experiences of Black male student athletes being marginalized within academics, athletics, and their social lives. He examined their efforts to deal with stress, and their perceptions of social support within the university community. The following sections will highlight the data collection process, methods, and analysis.

Data Collection

In order to participate in the study, individuals would must have met the following criteria: must be a currently enrolled student, be 18 years of age or older, and self-identify as African-American or Black. The study recruited eight participants who all hail from
various high school backgrounds. In order to account for the variety of high schools, classifications were developed to simplify comparing and contrasting the different schooling environments.

The classifications developed were:

- **Majority White**: A school whose student body population is dominated by Caucasians (80 percent or more). Minority students make up a small percentage (20 percent or less) of the school population. Participants whose school fit this classification, typically resided in rural or suburban communities, or private institutions.

- **Diverse**: A school whose student population is either reflective of the demographics of the U.S., or, there is a close ratio between the dominant student group, and the minority student groups. Participants whose school fit this classification were located in urban or suburban communities, and a military community aboard.

- **Majority Minority**: A school whose student population is dominated by a minority group(s) (70 percent or more). Participants whose school fit this classification resided within urban or inner-city communities.

Not all African-American students share similar high school experiences. Therefore, when applying school criminalization to their respective environments, what may have been experienced could potentially be dependent upon the type of school they attended. For that reason, to achieve the goal of implementing factors in the lives of current and future generations, it is important to examine stories from all backgrounds,
and develop factors that will allow all African-American students to potentially receive some form of benefit.

The original intent for the study was to focus on the experiences of students who came from inner-city education systems. I quickly learned, however, through informal conversations with individuals outside of the initial criteria, that this is a phenomenon that seemed to be experienced throughout the education system, and cannot be pinpointed to one environment. Therefore, I decided to expand the criteria to include individuals who derive from all schooling environments.

The sample of this study (n=8) was primarily recruited through snowball sampling, direct recruitment, and through the use of recruitment flyers. In the beginning of the recruitment process, I asked individuals directly if they would be interested in participating. Of the individuals who were willing to participate, their involvement led to the recruitment of other participants. Their support served as an important tool in generating a snowball sample, a technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from their social networks (e.g. friends, colleagues). In addition, I created recruitment flyers (Appendix C) and posted them at several locations across Midwestern University. Flyers were also distributed amongst university personnel of several departments throughout campus, and the study was promoted the in a fellow sociology professor’s course on the comparative studies on family. Each recruitment method utilized throughout the process managed to generate some form of interest amongst the target population. However, gaining a commitment was an obstacle to getting more
interviews. It remains unclear as to why potential participants decided not to commit to the study.

In order to gain an understanding of the ways in which African-American students are resilient, in-depth face to face interviews were conducted. The interviews lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to over an hour and a half. To ensure confidentiality, interviews were carried out in private areas on campus, or within a participant’s home. Prior to conducting the interview, participants were handed an informed consent form (Appendix B). The form detailed the study, highlighted potential risks and discomforts, and provided necessary contact information. Each participant was given the opportunity to review the consent form prior to signing. Once all questions were answered and the forms signed and returned, I initiated the interviews and began recording.

Interviews were guided by an interview guide (Appendix A) which provided questions relating to certain areas I was interested in examining. These areas included:

- **Background Information**: Examined a participant’s current status at their respective university, as well as where they were from.

- **High school**: Questions sought to explore the characteristics and demographics of their schools, personal experiences, community, and the influence it had on the school environment.

- **Relationships**: Examined relationships participants shared with school personnel, family, peers, mentors, and other essential figures.

- **Policies**: Examined participants’ respective school policies and procedures on student misconduct. Questions sought to uncover the targets of such policies,
participants’ experiences with disciplinary policies, or their ability to avoid such policies.

- **Involvement:** Participants were asked about their involvement with extra-curricular activities, and the role involvement had in fostering resiliency or creating other opportunities.

- **College:** Questions sought to understand why participants wanted to continue their education, the obstacles they’ve encountered during their college careers, and learning about their aspirations once finished with their degree programs.

Upon completion of the interview, participants were asked to share the study information with individuals who fit the criteria.

**Sample**

The participants involved in the study were enrolled in two public universities located in a Midwest State. The individuals were all seniors at their respective institutions, with the exception of one individual who was completing his second master’s degree. The average age of the participants stood at 23, with the oldest participant being age 29, and four participants being age 22. Due to a small percentage of African-American students at Midwestern University and to ensure confidentiality of each participant, their academic majors have been replaced with their respective academic colleges. When focusing on school classifications, five participants attended a majority white school, three participants attended a diverse school, and two participants attended a majority minority school.
P.J.

P.J. is a senior at Midwestern University with an academic major within his institution’s College of Health Sciences. He classified his high school as majority minority with African-Americans representing roughly 80 percent of the school’s population, and Whites/others making up the other 20 percent. He is from a large Midwest City.

Janet

Janet is a senior at Midwestern University with her academic major being within the College of Communication. She attended a Majority White high school in a suburban community outside of a large Midwest City. The demographics of Janet’s school stood at 80 percent White, and 20 percent of students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Mello

Mello is a senior at The Midwestern State University with a major in his institution’s College of Arts and Sciences. Mello classified his high school as diverse. The school Mello attended was a government school located abroad. The school resided on a military installation, where he expressed that there were individuals of all cultural backgrounds within the community. The same could be expressed for the school itself, which he believed the school had a balanced population of students from different racial and ethnic groups.

Candace

Candace is a senior at Midwestern University with her academic major and minor being within the College of Arts and Sciences. Candace attended a public high school in a mid-size Midwest City. She expressed that her school was one of the better schools in the
public school system of the city, and classified her school as diverse population. She explained that her school had a balanced student population between African-American and White students, which she believes makes it diverse in that regards. She acknowledged that her school was not diverse in the sense of having students of several different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

*Charles*

Charles is a graduate student at Midwestern University working on his second master’s degree. Charles attended two high schools in a Pacific Northwest state. He classified his first high school as diverse population, where the demographics of the student were reflective of the demographics of the United States. Charles’ second school was a private institution with a majority white population.

*Alexis*

Alexis is a senior at Midwestern University with a major in the College of Arts and Sciences. She is from a suburban community outside of a large Midwest City. The school she attended is was classified as majority white.

*Karen*

Karen is a senior at Midwestern University with her academic major being in the College of Arts and Sciences. She attended a private institution located in an urban community. Despite the school being surrounded by minority neighborhoods, the student population was majority white.
Mike

Mike is a senior at Midwestern University with his academic major and minors being in the College of Arts and Sciences. Mike attended a majority minority high school, and a majority white high school of a large Midwestern city. His interview highlights the differences the school environment had on his academic, and personal development.

Table 1
Participant Background Information (n=8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Academic Standing</th>
<th>Academic College</th>
<th>High School Attended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
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<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>Majority White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candace</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>College of Communication</td>
<td>Majority White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>Majority White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>College of Education</td>
<td>Diverse/Majority White*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mello</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>Majority Minority/Majority White*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.J.</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>Majority Minority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Charles and Mike attended two different types of schools during their high school career.

Sample Biases

When focusing on participants’ academic year and academic colleges, it is important to highlight the potential biases that may reflected in the data. As mentioned, all participants were on the verge of completing their respective degree programs. Participants may have had the opportunity during their college career to enroll in
academic courses that educate and assist students in developing awareness on the various forms of inequality and injustices that exist throughout American society. By developing an awareness of such, thus may have allowed participants to better analyze their high school experiences and uncover the injustices they may have encountered. It is also important to note the degree program of a few participants, who were majoring in fields of the social sciences (political science, criminology, psychology). It is likely that these individuals are fully aware, and as it will be shown in chapter four, and more apt to speak on the inequality and injustices they experienced as students in high school as it relates to school discipline.

Data Analysis

Following the completion of an interview initiated the process of data analysis. This process consisted of several steps that ultimately produced the data that is presented in the following chapters. With the research design being qualitative and interviews being the primary method of data collection, the next step after completing the interviews was to transcribe each interview recording verbatim. This was a process that was completed on eight separate occasions throughout the data collection phase. Depending on the length of the interview, determined in most instances the time dedicated towards transcribing the interview. To help with transcribing, the app Voice Record was used. This app assisted with transcription by slowing down interview recordings, bookmarking stop points, and replaying missed interview quotes. To ensure confidentiality of participants, their names were replaced with pseudonyms.
After the transcription process was completed, each interview was then coded. This phase of data analysis assisted with discovering of the major themes of the data. Saldana (2009) defines the term code as “a word or short phrase that assigns an essence-capturing or attribute for a portion of language or visual data” (p. 3). To assist with this process, I utilized a qualitative software program called Dedoose to code each interview. The interview transcripts were uploaded to the site, and the program provided the tools to review the data, create and apply codes, and develop themes.

Throughout the review stage, I used a process of open and focus coding (see Charmaz, 2006). Open coding involves a line by line analysis of the interview transcripts. With each code that is developed, these codes are then grouped together into what are called focused codes. The focused codes serve as the major themes that emerged in the analysis. For example, one of the focused codes developed during the process was on “relationships”. Prior to this code emerging as a major theme, the open codes applied throughout the eight transcripts highlighted the various types of relationships participants shared. The words and phrases used for open codes depicted the relationships with parents, school personnel, mentors, siblings, as well as other influential figures. The open codes also examined whether relationships were either positive or negative, as well as the value in maintaining such relationships. For this study, the focused codes created called attention to a range of different issues and factors that will be presented in the following chapters.
CHAPTER FOUR: EXAMINING THE PATHS TRAVELED

Based upon the results of the qualitative interviews, this chapter interprets the findings of participants’ high school experiences. The chapter is comprised of four sections that examine participants’ schools, the response to school discipline issues, and both the positive and negative experiences of participants within their respective school setting. Experiences varied for each participant involved in the study. Some participants had numerous encounters with school personnel, and found themselves facing school sanctions. While others managed to avoid having such experiences through acceptance, relationships, and resisting the urge to challenge personnel or be disruptive. Each section will be discussed in the subsequent pages beginning with providing context of the schools and communities of participants.

Highlighting Participants’ High Schools and Communities

The participants of this study hailed from various schooling and community environments. In order to achieve the goal of discovering factors of resiliency that can potentially aid current and future school children, the sample needed to reflect the experiences faced by African-American students throughout the education system. To account for the variety when it comes to experiences, the study developed classifications for the high schools. These classifications not only simplified the grouping of various high schools, but attempted to examine how school criminalization occurs in different schooling environments. It is important to note that a few of the following subsections are able to illustrate similarities and distinguish the differences between the three school classifications (Majority White, Diverse, and Majority Minority). However, some
subsections may lack in solid data that points to differences, or may not provide any data that shows differences between the classifications. Nonetheless, the following subsections will share interview data provided by the participants which paint the background for each classification.

**Majority White**

Participants who attended majority white schools were usually located in suburban communities, with the exception of one participant who attended a private catholic school located in an urban community. The student population for this type of school was dominated by whites, with minorities making up a small percentage (less than 20 percent) of the student body. Participants noted that students of these schools usually came from middle to upper middle class families. For one participant, Karen, she explained how the parents of students who attended her private high school were prominent business owners of the surrounding community. Several participants expressed how the demographics played a role in shaping the school environment. Karen attended a private catholic high school located in the “heart of downtown” surrounded by an underdeveloped community. When asked how the school managed to keep the social issues plaguing the surrounding areas from affecting the school she expressed:

> It was kind of like in a way fenced off from the community. So literally on the same block, you’ll see a bunch of abandon buildings and they are under construction because our school is just buying the street basically… They started buying all these buildings and making them into athletic centers, centers for research, and things like that. So we can increase our radius around our high school to keep away everybody else with the inner city. So we kind of created a bubble within downtown.
Excluding Karen’s experience, based on the data collected from other participants who attended majority white schools, it suggests that these types of school faced little to no serious issues, both in the surrounding community and within the school environment itself. The issues that participants did speak on was of drug and alcohol use, occasional classroom misbehavior or violent offenses (fights, etc.), or administrative issues (teacher strike).

*Diverse*

Diverse schools consisted of a student population that had a solid mix of different racial and ethnic groups. Participants made interesting explanations for what they believed classified a school as diverse. For one participant, Candace, she explained that her school did not display diversity by having a variety of racial and ethnic groups. Instead, the diversity was displayed by the white and black student populations having similar percentages (60 percent white, 40 percent black).

Charles, on the other hand, expressed that his school’s [Perry Point] student demographics reflected the general American population, with whites making up the majority, but also a variety of minority groups attending his school.

For Perry Point, even though it was predominately white right—its student population reflected the general American population. In the sense that yeah sure it was 65 percent white, but so is America. So it’s kind of one of those things like yeah 65 percent but—it reflects reality. (Charles Interview, 2015)

Diversity for this study was defined as having a minority population that stood greater than 30 percent but no less than 70 percent. These populations either had a solid balance between whites and minorities, or displayed demographics that are reflective of the American population.
The communities that these schools resided in ranged from suburban and urban communities to a military community abroad. The issues described by the participants seem to resemble the issues seen with majority white schools. Drug and alcohol use, and classroom and non-violent misbehavior were the more common issues dealt with within these schools. Participants shared instances where violent and criminal offenses took place, but made note that it was not a common event. The communities of these schools, just like majority white, tended to be stable with very little major issues. One participant, Mello, attended school on a military installation overseas. When asked about community issues that had an effect on the school, he shared of students’ parents being deployed:

Mello: I mean other than parents getting deployed and stuff that was the only thing that really affected the entire community…
Q: How did deployments affect the students?
Mello: I mean it was kind of sad to see some students’ parents get deployed. Some kids—well it was an infantry base so like there was always the possibility that they might not come back. So that could be the last time you see them. So sometimes… I wouldn’t say it depressed everybody but like it lowered morale a little bit. People would just down, but eventually people would overcome it. You could definitely see a boost of morale when they knew that they were coming back within a month or so. (Mello Interview, 2015)

Majority Minority

Majority Minority schools have a population where groups who are considered a minority group in American society make up the majority (over 70 percent) of the student population. Two participants attended a majority minority school, with African-Americans making up the majority of the student body. Both schools were located in urban/inner-city communities. Mike and P.J. both spoke about the issues that were prevalent within their respective schools. Mike who attended both a majority minority school and later on a majority white school, noted the significant differences between the
two schools in term of quality of teachers, coursework, and culture. Along with the behavioral issues that were prevalent, and the manner in which they were handled.

P.J.’s school, like Mike’s, was majority African-American students, with whites making up 20 percent of the population. P.J. spoke on similar issues that Mike expressed pertaining to his experience at the majority minority school. When focusing on community issues, P.J. spoke about funding issues for transportation within his school district:

During my time there, we went through a couple of issues where we wouldn’t be able to get funding for transportation, like buses and what not after our [school] levee failed a couple of times, we struggled with that for about two years. My senior year—well after I graduated they got that funding back, but went through a lot [to get it back]. (P.J. Interview, 2015)

What P.J. would explain later on his interview is how this particular issue contributed to students being late to school. As a result, students would receive some form of sanctioning, which would accumulate over time and lead to other forms of sanctioning.

By developing classifications for the high schools, not only does it assist with the grouping of the various schools attended by participants, but in the case of this study it allows for one to gain a basic understanding of a particular environment and how that can have an effect on the students’ education experiences. As mentioned, African-American students do not all have the same education experience, therefore, it is important to account for the variety of schools in the country’s education system. Doing this allows for comparing and contrasting the issues seen in schools, the policies enacted to deal with such issues, and the experiences that the participants had while enrolled. The following
Response to Issues

The issues participants spoke on in their interviews ranged from minor issues such as classroom disruption or being late to school, to more serious issues, such as a student starting a fire in the bathroom and assaults on school personnel. Just as variety was expressed with issues, the same was emphasized when it came to examining the policies and procedures utilized to combat these issues. Participants expressed how schools utilized zero-tolerance policies when it came to serious offenses such as violent behavior and drug offenses. These offenses often times resulted in out of school suspensions, and at times expulsions. When offenses were less serious, warnings, detentions, and in-school suspensions were often imposed on violators. One common theme participants brought to light were the disparities they believed existed when it came to handling discipline issues. Most participants believed that African-American/Black students were the individuals targeted, or found in violation of school policies. The following subsections will provide participant data on the issues, policies, sanctions, and targets.

Issues within Schools

The discipline issues that existed in participants’ schools ranged from less serious offenses (talking back to the teacher, tardy, etc.), to more serious offenses (fighting, vandalism, etc.). The classifications of each school in some ways depicted the prevalence of each these issues. When focusing on majority minority and the participants who attended these respective schools (P.J. & Mike) Both expressed the severity of some of
the issues seen within their schools. Mike spoke on the various offenses he witnessed while enrolled at his school:

Fights were rampant at James [High School]. [They would occur] All the time… Faculty would get hit. Faculty would get cursed out. Security guards would get assaulted. Consistently though, it wasn’t a surprise. Often times it was a welcome spectacle. At the end of the day you would go outside and wait for something [to happen]. I’m not saying that happened every day, but frequent enough to where people were used to it.

When further pressed on why he thought issues such as fights were so frequent within James, Mike expressed:

If a faculty member wasn’t around, which was frequent cause it was such a big school, like you just resolved it on your own. Which is why there were so many fights. Because there was not enough supervision. To be realistic you have hundreds of kids, walking around in places where there is no supervision. Some stuff is going to get said, somebody is going to get pushed, and they’re going to start fighting. (Mike Interview, 2015)

P.J. on the other hand spoke more about the less serious offenses he witnessed in his school. Truancy was a fairly big issue at his school. He explained that his school’s “tardy line” was always long, and attributed the long lines due to loss of funding for transportation he spoke about in the previous section. Another issue that was brought to light was classroom misbehavior. P.J. expressed that he had “a lot of clowns in [his] class” and this would create reason to send students to the office to be disciplined. Just as Mike did, P.J. placed emphasis on how frequent these offenses were within his schooling environment. The frequency in which offenses occurred within this school classification was something not expressed with participants who attended schools of other classifications.

The issues that participants of diverse schools (Mello, Charles, and Candace) spoke about tended to be less serious offenses. These issues ranged from being late to
school/class, verbal arguments, classroom misbehavior (talking back, cell phone use, etc.), and a range of other offenses. Each participated shared instances where they witnessed or experienced at least one serious offense within their schools. For Candace, she spoke of instances where she witnessed another student chewing tobacco during a class, and an act of vandalism, where a school bathroom was set on fire.

Mello expressed that issues such as drug and alcohol use, and fights were seen among the student population. Yet, individuals were either never caught, or conducted these activities at locations away from the school environment. Here is what he shared:

I ain’t ever seen nobody get in trouble for having drugs on them or something like that. [When it came to fighting in school] that was rare to begin with. Most of the time people would just go off base [installation] to fight. (Mello Interview, 2015)

Charles initially attended a diverse population school, and later on a majority white school. One particular issue he spoke on was his personal bout with racism from his peers while attending a private school (majority white). He expressed that this issue of racism was not really experienced during his time at the diverse population school. If there were issues present, Charles expressed that his school was big enough to where “you could avoid the people who you didn’t want in your life.”

The experience at his private school (majority white) was quite different to where he was one of a few African-American students enrolled at the school, and the issue of racism existed in more overt and blatant forms.

Charles: I mean you know the racialized stuff was more in—at the time I dint have the tools for it, it was more micro-aggressive behaviors, as far as faculty were concerned. And then outright racism on the part of my peers.

Q: Did staff or faculty ever recognize it?
Charles: No
Q: So they carried it out in more subtle ways?
Charles: Oh no! They would say it out loud. In class. In the locker room. On the football field [while school personnel were away]. (Charles Interview, 2015)

Several participants spoke on how they believed their racial identity played a role in their own experiences with school discipline, along with other African-American students. Charles was the only participant who shared any experience of facing personal racism within his school.

Participants who attended majority white schools (Janet, Alexis, Mike, Charles, Karen) spoke on many of the same less serious issues that participants of the previous school classification spoke on. Less serious offenses were more prevalent based on the interview data. A few participants did speak on more serious issues such as drug and alcohol use being an issue within their schools. Overall, the majority of the schools shared similarities with the types of issues witnessed by participants. What differed was the frequency in which these issues occurred, and the manner in which they were dealt with which will be touched on in the following sections.

Policies and Sanctions

To handle the issues experienced in the participants’ schools, a range of different policies and sanctions were implemented to combat and deter students from engaging in disruptive behavior. Several participants explained that zero tolerance policies were used to deter students from engaging in a number of disruptive behaviors. The most common offenses these type of policies were utilized were with fights, drug and alcohol use, and other violent and criminal offenses. The sanctions that were usually imposed for such violations were in-school suspensions (ISS), out of school suspensions, sent to an alternative school, and expulsion. Mike explained that when it came to certain offenses at
James High School (majority minority) some individuals would end up being arrested and taken to jail:

You go to jail. [chuckles] Yeah you go to jail. Because the gravity, and the violence of the fights were so—you know you’re used to it, but it looks like an assault…. And sometimes it doesn’t work out that way. Most of the time students would just get suspended. Like if it were female students fighting—female fights never escalated into [that high intensity]. Yeah females are fighting. But if you assaulted a faculty member though, then you were getting taken out by the police… But most of the times suspensions and expulsions.

When examining the minor offenses participants spoke about, the sanctions imposed usually resulted in students receiving warnings, detention, ISS, or Saturday school. Mike explained how his school utilized a “write up system,” and how students were not intimidated by the system:

They had a system of write ups, but people didn’t care about the write ups. That’s the thing people go—a common phrase used is 0 to 100 real quick. Nobody is going to be like “Oh God. I’m about to get written up.” I didn’t even care about getting written up and I was a really good kid… It’s not like they are going to call your house or anything. It’s like you accumulate so many write ups and you get like a Saturday school or something. Then after that you accumulate so many more write ups and you get a suspension… They would do write ups but they never really did anything. (Mike Interview, 2015)

A few participants stressed that when it came to discipline there were procedures carried out that were not viewed as traditional protocols or policies when handling student behavior. Karen (majority white) explained that at her private school the majority of African-American students were recruited and placed on scholarship for their athletic talent. She believed these scholarships placed these individuals under a microscope, and were treated more harshly.

You see these black kids, they have these scholarships they give them—they are here by exception. Is how they are kind of looked at, but they are treated more harshly, like it is because of the scholarship not because of the person. (Karen Interview, 2015)
When further pressed about what she had explained, she expressed that she believed her school had other means and methods to prevent students like herself from excelling within academics (e.g. not writing a letter of recommendation to enter an honors course), and preventing individuals of certain minority groups from attending the school. She shared that she believed these methods were “a form of discipline.” Which kept certain individuals in check and reminded them that they are not like the rest of the students.

When it came to analyzing the policies and procedures utilized by the participants’ schools. I was unable to determine if there were notable differences between the various school classifications on how they handled certain issues. Of the two participants highlighted in this section, one attended a majority minority school that seemed to utilize punitive measures to deal with certain acts of student misbehavior.

The other participant spoke on how her school used other methods to handle or deter students from engaging in misbehaving. With all of the participants having graduated high school, the time lapse could have potentially contributed to the inability to uncover the differences between the various types of schools. As students in high school, participants may have not been fully knowledgeable of the different policies and how their schools implemented such policies.

*Targets*

When it comes to the issues, policies, and sanctions, one major theme the participants emphasized in their interviews, was who they believed were the targets. The majority of the participants had no problem expressing that African-American students
were being treated different when it came to violation of school policies. Candace (diverse) had no problem expressing her opinion on the reality of this situation:

Ok – it depends on who you are, what color you are, and what you did. So first off, obviously what color you are. If you’re black you’re going to get a harsh punishment. Like that’s fact.

When further asked about issues and the individuals punished, she consistently expressed that it was the black students, and when asked whether white students were being punished she said:

No they weren’t white. You don’t have to don’t have to sugarcoat shit. Of course they weren’t white. It was the black kids… We had something called ISS [in-school suspensions]. I’m going to reiterate that this school was 60 percent white, 40 percent black or something along the lines of that. The only people that were in ISS were black students… Like don’t know white people be doing things? And it would be like ten black people in ISS, and there would one or two white people… I know there are white people doing bad stuff. (Candace Interview, 2015)

Mello (diverse) echoed similar concerns, in his case, he happened to be the individual treated differently by personnel within his school. Here is what he shared:

It’s hard to say that they would pick out one random group— well they definitely picked out a group of trouble makers. But you had very diverse trouble making groups. Like you had my group which consisted of minorities and one white kid—they never went after the white kid. But I would also say that he never put himself in a bad situation. We had other groups like Jimmy and Sid and they had their little group which mostly consisted of whites. They would get in trouble. So I wouldn’t say they were really like targeting us, but there were a few instances where you tell—I feel like the way they handled the situations were different. I don’t know, I felt as if they were way more disrespectful towards us [Mello and his group of friends]. When they would talk to Jimmy and them, they would put up with their shit. But they wouldn’t put up with ours. (Mello Interview, 2015)

Janet and Alexis (majority white) also pointed out that within their schools black students were the individuals frequently getting into trouble. When it came to certain offenses, such as students talking back to teachers, Alexis expressed that she thought it was the black students being punished more often. Janet believed that when it came to
black students their appearance made them easier to be targeted. Here is how she explained it:

They looked different. Because we had a dress code. You know there was the Sperry wearing, with khakis, polos tucked in. And then there was them, they had their Nikes, Jordan’s, and stuff like that. They sagged their pants... And they hung out together because they knew each other. You’d see a teacher come after them and say “Hey guys. You need to leave” And most of the time their like “okay”, but sometimes they made a ruckus, but eventually they leave. It was something that was looked down upon. (Janet Interview, 2015)

Participants voiced that they believed African-Americans tended to be the frequent targets who were treated in a different manner when it came to school discipline. Although a common theme, what varied amongst the participants was the means and methods in which targeting or treatment was carried out. Some explained that the disparities were shown with those who were receiving the more harsh sanctions the school imposed. Others expressed how appearance contributed to making individuals targets, and how school funding was a tool that kept certain individuals in check.

The following two sections will further examine the disparities, as well as the personal experiences of the participants. Some participants managed to have positive experiences and avoid run-ins with punishment. However, some participants found themselves dealing with discipline issues on more occasions.

“Cruising Thru”: Examining Participant Abilities to Avoid Discipline

This section focuses on the positive experiences of participants while in enrolled in high school. Despite all the participants managing to graduate high school and pursue a college education, some individuals had smoother rides than others, thus allowing them to cruise through with fewer obstacles. The section examines the experiences of Alexis, Charles, Janet, Mike (all majority white), and Candace (diverse) These individuals
attributed their ability to avoid punishment through a range of factors which will be highlighted and further discussed in chapter five when focusing on resiliency. The section begins with the sharing of participants’ responses on how their parents played a major role in deterring them engaging in any misbehavior activities.

*Avoiding Trouble: Parent Factor*

One theme that appeared to be common when it came to avoiding trouble in school was the parent factor. Several participants emphasized that one of the major reasons as to why they did not act out in school was the fear of upsetting or disappointing their parents. Janet (majority white) explained that the relationship she shared with her parents was a positive relationship, yet her parents were firm with their stance that their children would perform and behave well in all aspects of life. Here is what Janet expressed:

They weren’t like you better get this done or I’m going to take everything away. But if I did do something bad, they were disappointed, and when your parents are disappointed it is like the worst feeling in the world. So they were strict, but in a positive way. Ya know? They would definitely make you feel that you could do a lot better than you were doing, and they still do that to me. (Janet Interview, 2015)

Alexis (majority white) spoke about her father’s life journey, and how his success served as a factor in why she worked hard in school.

My dad is a doctor. He came to the U.S. from Nigeria 30 years ago. When he came to America, he had to work hard to get through high school, and put himself through college. I think because of that he really wants us to be successful in school and with our careers as well. (Alexis Interview, 2015)

Mike (majority minority/majority white) explained that if he were to ever get into trouble and the school notified his mother or grandparents, he expected them to “get on him” for his misbehavior. For Charles (diverse/majority white), he shared that his father’s
employment with the department of corrections served as the motivator for him to refrain from getting in trouble:

When I was going to Perry’s Point [high school]—by that time I had really figured out how not to get into trouble. And part of the reason as to why I didn’t get into trouble so regularly was—my father worked for the department of corrections. Still. Works in the prison. I was scared straight from an early age. So I really didn’t go to the principal’s office very much I think. (Charles Interview, 2015)

The parent factor served as strong motive to keep themselves from misbehaving within their respective schools.

*Avoiding Trouble: Who you know*

Another theme a few of the participants spoke on were their relationships with school personnel and how they helped avoid punishment. Candace (diverse) explained that her school had three assistant principals who were tasked with the responsibility of disciplining students. She viewed two of the assistant principals as more lenient, while the other was stricter when it came to students violating policies. Depending on who your assigned principal was, and your relationship with the individual, would determine the outcome of the situation. Here is how she explained it:

We had three assistant principals and then one [head] principal. Two of the assistant principals, were real cool and got along with the student—you could really tell that they loved their job, and were always pushing student to do well and better with themselves. Then you had the fucking one assistant principal who was just an ass. Like obviously she didn’t have a shit about her job—and who was like trying to act crazy and suspend people for no reason

When it came to personal encounters with the assistant principal, Candace spoke on two instances where she and her brother were in trouble. One instance was of where her brother had his cell phone out in class. The “strict” assistant principal attempted to suspend her brother for the offense, which made no sense to Candace. She also spoke of
another incident where her brother was suspended five days for throwing paper balls at another student. When it came to her personal experience with the assistant principal, the resolution for her situation turned out to be much different compared to her brother’s:

So I know I got into a verbal altercation multiple times. I mean I didn’t get suspended, and didn’t get into huge trouble. I knew the assistant principal, me and him were cool. I know the other assistant principal and she really liked me, and the teachers who caught us didn’t want us to get suspended. So she just set up some B.S. mediation meeting. . (Candace Interview, 2015)

Candace’s relationship with school personnel helped her avoid the possibility of receiving a punitive form of sanctioning. Mike reverberated similar comments when it came to knowing certain personnel:

You know I got familiar with the teachers and with those in power. That’s always step number one if you want to stay out of trouble. Be cool with the people who are in control.

Charles spoke on how maintaining solid relationships with school personnel at Life Academy (private majority white school) helped with teachers understanding personal issues he was enduring at the time with his family.

At Life Academy there were some additional factors going. My parents had been divorced—had just gotten divorced that immediate fall I started attending. And so I was like—in an uncomfortable space personally. I cried. I’d be moody. I would engage the teachers. And so—but I mean I didn’t end up getting sent to the principal’s office. I got sent to the guidance counselor, who interestingly enough was the wife of the pastor who my dad grew up across the street from. So—you know I just got spoken with. “What’s going on? How are you feeling?” (Charles Interview, 2015)

Through relationships with school personnel, this helped participants by ensuring that whenever they found themselves in predicaments the relationships they maintained would help create a positive resolution. This prevented some participants from potentially receiving a tough form of punishment, and in one case of one individual, the personnel
had an understanding of what was occurring in the life of this individual and offered their support.

*Avoiding Trouble: Behavior/Appearance*

Behavior and appearance were two other themes that a few participants in the study spoke about. Alexis explained that she did not enjoy confrontation, therefore, she did not speak much and did her best to avoid conflict whenever present. When asked about witnessing the disparities she believed existed when it came to students being punished, she expressed that there were a few instances where she felt that students were treated unfairly, yet refrained from becoming involved in the matter.

There were a few times where I thought a teacher might have treated a student unfairly. But I didn’t want to speak up about. I rarely did I think. Sometimes I would hear about things happening, but I would just try not to get involved. (Alexis Interview, 2015)

Refraining from conflict and challenging authority figures served as a tool which allowed for Alexis to remain under the radar. Janet on the other hand expressed that she believed appearance played a role in setting certain individuals up as targets. What Janet shared was how she believed there was a need to alter her appearance to prevent any unwanted attention from being directed at her and for acceptance among the dominate group within her school. Here is how she described the altering of her appearance:

Janet: I used to have locks [hairstyle]. They were so cool. I was so mad that I cut them off. They were like the best. It’s something you like regret. I used to have the best locks and they were so cute. But after going to school and seeing what other people’s hair looked like you know—and being asked “What are those?” and “How do you do those?” I cut them off and I got my hair straightened. And after I was like “Why did I do that?”

I: That’s interesting. Your hair— this is going back to appearance.
Janet: Yeah appearance, for sure. Especially in a white school. They probably have never seen those before. If they have they probably looked dirty, or like they
were seen as dirty in the media or something like that. I was cute. But I let them go-- [laughs] because I thought I wanted that. But mostly for the acceptance of others. Don’t do that. That’s something I learned. (Janet Interview, 2015)

Avoiding Trouble: Change of Environment

Mike attended both a majority minority and majority white school during his high school career. What Mike strongly emphasized in his interview was how his transfer to another school reshaped his trajectory when it came to his education. He pointed out that there were a range of differences between the two schools, ranging from quality of teachers, challenging coursework, support from counselors, athletic programs, and the culture of the school itself. When asked whether there was a difference between the schools Mike expressed:

Oh God! Are you kidding me dude? When I first went to Woodbridge—first off Woodbridge’s general education—was where I think James’ honors education was. When I went to Woodbridge, I started learning way more stuff—I was like “What are they teaching me?” They are teaching me all this new science and stuff. “Why are they making us read so much?” I was in the honors program at James and I was thoroughly unprepared I felt at first, for what they were teaching at Woodbridge. Which was what really blew my mind. [I thought] “I can’t do this.” But nah—the people, the faculty, and the students were just so chill. It’s like everything is going to plan. (Mike Interview, 2015)

When further asked about the quality of school personnel at Woodbridge, Mike explained that they often times went “out of their way” to do extra things for students. He spoke of instances where they brought treats to school, individuals to speak with students, and often found ways to relate to the students.

The participants who managed to avoid being disciplined with their respective schools utilized a variety of means and methods. The most common mean that kept several participants in check was the parent factor. The fear of upsetting or disappointing
a parent remained fresh in the minds of these individual. Another factor that helped with ability to avoid getting into trouble was the relationships participants established with school personnel. By developing and maintaining a close relationship with “those in power” helped shape a more positive outcome or resolution when they found themselves in a predicament.

Other participants expressed that avoiding conflict and altering personal appearance aided with the ability to avoid being targeted or finding themselves in the wrong situation. Finally, a change of environment also proved helpful for one participant. The change in schools saw an array of opportunities being available for him, which ultimately prepared him for higher education. The next section will focus on the opposite, where several participants expressed facing numerous obstacles in terms of school discipline and treatment from school personnel.

“School of Hard Knocks”: Examining Participant Experiences with Discipline

As seen in the previous section, despite students facing a range of obstacles in terms of discipline, some of the participants managed to avoid having any serious experiences when it came to misbehavior by utilizing a variety of techniques and methods. The same cannot be expressed however for a few of the participants in the study. The individuals that this section focuses on examines their personal experiences with disciplinary issues, issues with friends and siblings, and refraining from engaging in misbehavior despite being a victim of serious discipline issues. In order to capture the uniqueness with each case, the following subsections will only focus on one participant.
and their experience. Some participant experiences offer more data than others when reflecting on the issues, and the effects it had on the participant.

*P.J.*

P.J.’s (majority minority) experience with discipline can be pinpointed to one experience which shaped his behavior during the rest of his high school career. During his interview, P.J. echoed similar comments expressed in the previous section on how having certain relationships can shape the outcome of your issue. Here is how he put it when asked about the punishment his principals imposed:

> It depends who it is. Because people who had relationships with the principal—well the more times people had seen him, you’d probably have a better relationship than the guy who did one thing wrong and then he goes to the office for that one thing, and they come at you hard [tough].

Participants in the previous section spoke about how having such relationships helped their cause when they found themselves in trouble. Though participants in the previous section were not offenders of school policies, they still managed to utilize the relationships to help their cause. The opposite seemed to be at play in the case of P.J.’s school, where he explained that frequent offenders managed to utilize relationships, while first time offenders were handled in a punitive manner. When asked whether he believed this was tool for deterrence he agreed and expressed:

> Yeah! I think that would really happen more because—I don’t know. I feel like it’s them trying to prove a point like “Hey, you can’t just act like that. That’s not you. This kid [referring to a kid who misbehaves frequently] we know how he is. But you, you’re just acting out of the ordinary.” I feel like it was like that.

P.J. believed this was the case when he was found in violation of his school’s discipline policies.
I mean that’s how I felt. Cause you know I’m not a bad kid. However, I got in trouble one time and it wasn’t the punishment I thought I deserved.

When asked what he did to receive his punishment, P.J. chose not to disclose the information pertaining to his offense. Therefore it is unclear to determine whether the punishment he received was just or unjust. However, what P.J. did express was how his offense had an impact on his involvement in extracurricular activities. He was a member of his school’s football team, and ended up being kicked off the team due to his behavior. It was at this moment P.J. explained that a change in his behavior had to be made. Here is how he explained it:

Yeah, you know I’m a pretty cool guy… I just tried to keep my hands clean… I didn’t want to do anything that would affect my athletic career. (P.J. Interview, 2015)

For P.J. athletics served as one of the factors that pushed him to continue his education at the next level. Despite altering his behavior to avoid any more disciplinary issues, what P.J. alluded to in his interview is the manner in which certain issues are dealt with were twisted. Where frequent offenders who have developed relationships with administrators, seemed to be handled in more lenient ways. Whereas with less frequent offenders were handled in manners that served as a form of deterrence to prevent these individuals from committing certain offenses again. In the case of P.J., it worked.

Mike

The previous section focused on how a change of environment served as tool to allow Mike (majority minority/majority white) to avoid trouble and excel in academics. What he pointed out in his interview was stories of friends who fell prey to the environment back at James High School. Mike spoke about several of his “boys” who
came from families that were dealing with internal issues. He believed that by these individuals having such issues contributed to them being more susceptible to the environment plagued by social issues. In a school environment where interaction with school personnel is strained, this only worsened their situations. Here is how he explained it in the interview:

What I was saying with my boys back at James, their families were torn apart. Especially if your family is torn apart and you don’t know which way you want to go. You are more susceptible to fall in line with anything. If you don’t have somebody who is trying to take you the right way, and telling you “you can be more than what you are right now. You just have to put in the work, and I’m going to teach you how to put in that work.” That changes your life. But at James you don’t have that. [Instead] you have people telling you “[Is to] get these clothes. Get this money. Get these girls. And get your clique. That’s what’s going to make you worth something in this world.” You fall into that because everybody around you is doing it, and you don’t even see that teacher student bond that could be built. You don’t see it.

Mike continued to build off this comment in his interview. He spoke of one his good friends named Lee, who had been adopted when he was young. During high school, Lee had been introduced to smoking marijuana. For Mike, not only was he shocked about Lee picking up the habit, he too became influenced and began smoking marijuana himself. As time went on, Mike expressed that Lee only became more dependent on his marijuana use.

As Lee went on and what not, I don’t know what happened. I didn’t see a lot of encouragement come his way, I didn’t see a lot of positivity surrounding his name, and felt as though he fell into the drug cycle. He became dependent on marijuana to feel good about himself, and because he wasn’t getting that reassurance from school, the only type of validation he was getting, or the only type of recognition he was getting was that negative reinforcement.

When asked to explain the type of negative reinforcement Lee was receiving Mike shared:
Getting yelled at, being placed around in different courses… Wasn’t really getting the special attention and special care he needed. I always thought Lee was intelligent, more so than me when it came down to a lot of things.

As a result of the negative reinforcement and lack of support Lee received, Mike believed that the potential his friend displayed was not recognized or valued. As a result Lee ended up gravitating toward the negative end of the spectrum that Mike applied to the situation. The spectrum Mike spoke about depicted how only the positive and negative sides of the environment were recognized and devoted the most attention. Individuals who did not fall on either end, occupied what he called the grey area. Here is the excerpt explaining the spectrum:

He [Lee] is in that grey area. Where you have your students who are way out here [extends arm to the left] dong the most, fighting, bringing weapons to school, all that type of bull crap, bringing drugs to school, having sex in the school. Then you have your students struggling in between. And then you have your A students [extends arm to the right]. It is both ends of the spectrum positive and negative that get the attention. Everybody in between is left to fend for themselves. I think that is really where you have a lot of problems. You have so much wasted potential in between because it is not shining outright. This is a common thing that happens in life. (Mike Interview, 2015)

Given the environment the students found themselves in, Mike believed that students were more prone to gravitate towards the negative end of the spectrum since it had been so dominant.

What is unique about Mike’s case displays how the social environment has the ability to shape ones trajectory. Though the section did not specifically focus on discipline, it does offer a first-hand account of how students are susceptible to the environment in which they find themselves residing in. Mike had the opportunity to change schooling environments, however, several of his friends did not have such an
opportunity. As a result, these individuals found themselves in the “grey area” where little support and positive reinforcement was offered. Given the dysfunction present within the school Mike spoke about, these individuals gravitated towards the negative end of the spectrum.

Charles

Charles (diverse/majority white) shared in the previous section on how his parents severed a major deterrent when it came to him misbehaving in school. Despite having the ability to refrain from engaging in disruptive and violent behavior, Charles expressed that while enrolled at Life Academy he was the target of racial abuse from his peers. Majority of the time these individuals were not caught in the act, or handled in a disciplinary manner. Charles expressed that moments as such made him very upset.

With Life Academy, there were so many people who made me mad. By that point in time, maybe I just had—I’m not going to say an innate sense of what the consequences were going to be. But I just knew if I messed up—if I got caught doing anything wrong—like shit would get real My parents would know, and that would completely torpedo what I had going on.

In the interview, Charles was asked what he believed could have happen if he decided to retaliate towards these individuals in a violent manner. He expressed:

If I were to take an educated guess—especially if I threw the first punch and cold cocked somebody, right. If I wouldn’t have gotten suspended, I’d—I would have believed that Life Academy would have expelled me. Even at the time I thought probably Life Academy was going to expel me.

Though faced with the obstacles of racism, and having the desire to retaliate, Charles realized the potential consequences that his actions could have on his education experience at Life Academy. He also shared that this was not an incident that occurred with just him. Charles spoke about the several other African-American students who
attended Life Academy but were driven away by their peers. When asked further questions as to why he thought drove those students off, he shared:

I think for so many of the other black male students—coming from black homes. Like fully black homes. You can only call [someone] nigger enough. You get called a monkey. You get called an Uncle Tom. These are all things my peers were calling me in high school. You get called these things often enough, for me it was Oreo. You get called these things often enough and you don’t want to deal with it. You just don’t. So you get out.

Faced with the racism and the lack of justice for Charles and other African-American students, I was very curious to understand how he managed to be resilient to this particular situation. Here is his response:

So—what I did—I would build it all up. Put it in the vault, and then football season would come around. Because all these assholes played football with me. (Charles Interview, 2015)

He would explain in the interview that football served as the venue which allowed him to release the energy built up towards the individuals responsible for the racist remarks. Football not only played a vital role in allowing Charles to get back at these individuals, but it also served as a factor in helping him maintain a strong relationship with his father, and helped him develop skills that would award him the opportunity to attend college. More about Charles’ involvement will be discussed in the chapter on resiliency.

Karen

Discipline for Karen (majority white) occurred in ways that seemed to be non-traditional or subtle. In the earlier section, she explained how the private school she attended, utilized methods such as scholarships to keep certain students “in check” and remind them of their opportunity, as if they were not supposed to be there to begin with.
In her interview Karen emphasized how she believed her racial identity played a role in a few of the disciplinary encounters she had while enrolled. She spoke of two instances where she believed she had been singled out by her headmaster and teacher. What made her believe she was singled out for these incidences was due to the fact that in one incident several other students were also in violation of the policy, and in the other she was not the individual behind the act. The following excerpt is her explaining one incident that occurred:

I wasn’t on scholarship or anything but I would be walking to class, and we had a really laid back environment. Really laid back environment at our school. We called it campus. It was very similar to college. There were all these people in the hallway, and I’ll never forget it because there were so many people there. The bell had just rang and I was just not in a hurry to get to class. So our headmaster [principal] was walking down the hall and passed all these kids who are goofing off and laughing, I was just walking with my books to class, I didn’t have anybody to talk to. I hadn’t made any friends yet. He was like “Where are you going? And I was like “Me?” and he was like “Yes. Where are you going?” I’m like “I’m headed to class.” And he said “Well you need to get there.” He keeps on passing all these students who were doing whatever, and I’m just literally—clearly on my way somewhere. But that was one of those first moments when I was like “Was I being targeted or what was that? What just happened?”

Karen explained that when this incident occurred she attempted to brush it off. She had mostly attended private schools throughout her education career, and had always been around white students. She did not want to conclude that she was being profiled in this particular incident, however, as she explained in the interview, this experience served as initial indicator that she was being targeted by school personnel. The second incident Karen spoke about in her interview was of a time in class when a teacher accused her of being disruptive. Karen explained that once she began to realize that she was being targeted by individuals of her school she became more apt to confront the issue. This is one of the incidents where she challenged the authority figure, her teacher:
There were definitely some times where I didn’t do some things right. One that comes to mind the most was—I got in trouble for talking in class. We’re in high school. First, I wasn’t talking. Someone was talking, but it wasn’t me. And the teacher was like “You need to be quiet!” and I said “Okay. But I’m not talking.” And she said “You know what get out!” That was just it. Where am I supposed to go? [The teacher asked] “Why are you talking back?”—I’m like I don’t talk back because I don’t like confrontation. But I got up and left, and missed hella notes… I just felt like that wasn’t right. She was so sure it was me and I wasn’t even talking. I swear. My mom didn’t believe me, but I swear… I tried to talk to my headmaster but he was like “Don’t talk in class.” He didn’t care. The teacher could never be wrong. It was just the stupidest thing to me on earth.

These two incidents were not the only issues Karris faced while enrolled at her private school. As mentioned previously, she believed that discipline took on a different form, where the school used different means to keep specific students in check when it comes to discipline and academics. A few other incidents Karen spoke about highlighted how she reached out to a teacher for a letter of recommendation for an honors class she was attempting to enter, but was refused. Karen explained that she performed well in this teacher’s class and was shocked to be turned down. When asked why the teacher refused, Karen was quoted as saying “She was like “There is no way you will get it.”” Another instance was where an essay Karen had wrote was considered a “model essay,” yet when using the same essay to enter a senior level honors class she ended up being rejected from the course. Karen believed that particular instances as such were methods deployed to prevent her from excelling within academics.

When Karen spoke of disparities that existed, the examples she provided seem to depict how race and class can potentially contribute to determining a disciplinary outcome. The offenses Karen had been caught for seemed relatively minor when compared to other instances of white students committing more serious offenses. The offenses that were being committed by these students ranged from serious drug and
alcohol problems to academic misconduct. When asked what the school did to handle such issues this is what Karen expressed:

> What is interesting was you know three strikes and you’re out? There was none [of that]. They did so much to protect those students that it went to a point where—you know you didn’t get detention, you didn’t get expelled. They didn’t want that on your record, they would just ask you to leave if you get a little too out of hand. But the criteria for that is extensive. (Karen Interview, 2015)

Despite the negative experience Karen spoke about in her interview, she managed to take full advantage of her opportunity at the private school. The factors that helped Karen overcome these obstacles and earn a college opportunity will be shared in the following chapter.

*Mello*

Of all the participants who faced obstacles pertaining to discipline, Mello’s experience depicted how powerful, and dangerous labeling students can be. For Mello (diverse) and his discipline problems, he explained that it did not become serious for him until his senior year of high school where he sensed a change in the school atmosphere.

> During high school the year I really enjoyed was my junior year. It was the first year we moved overseas. It was real cool. We got to meet new people, and hangout with them. It was a whole nother lifestyle, and then after that it just kinda sucked. Like constantly getting into trouble. There was just a lot of things going on my junior year year…everyone was just chill, and happy overall. I don’t know it just changed like over the summer.

When asked about the change in high school, Mello explained that his senior class attempted to replicate the same type of “vibe” that was experienced the year before. However, school personnel began to “crack down” and became stricter when it came to dealing with discipline issues. Mello shared that most of the students were not very receptive of the change, and that it affected everyone within the school environment from
students to teachers. At the start of the school year, Mello shared how the principal singled out certain individuals within his class and explained that their behavior would not be tolerated this year.

I remember my first day of senior year she brought [our class] in the [gym] and told us straight up “You all aren’t going to be acting the way y’all were last year.”… She kind of like tried to crack down on us, because most of my class was in jeopardy of not graduating. So I guess it would have fell back on her, so she tried to kick it to a whole nother level which affected the whole school. She definitely changed up her methods.

Mello had a couple of incidences the year prior where he received detention on a few occasions and was suspended for cursing out his school’s assistant principal. Mello emphasized in his interview that the principal kept her word on “cracking down” on behavior issues. He and several of his friends were the consistently singled out for their behavioral issues. It became so constant that Mello would often become frustrated with the situations he would find himself in and would only further challenge the authority.

Whenever they cracked down on us we were always pissed off. Like everybody would get heated… Whenever they came after me I would always be heated and just start cursing up a storm and stuff. I would just start going off on everybody… Which would make the situation worse when we would go off. Like it would be some petty stuff, and they were like “Oh you’re going to get a detention.” Then you start cursing them out and then you go to the principal’s office with a possible suspension.

Earlier in the chapter, an excerpt was used from Mello that depicted how his group of friends were treated differently when it came to handling certain discipline issues. There were several other individuals within Mello’s school who were also violating school policies. Mello spoke of one group of Caucasian students who were also considered “trouble makers”. Despite the label, their group was often handled in a different manner than Mello’s group. Here is an excerpt portraying the differences:
I just felt like they would always be hard on us, and say things to get under your skin. They would say stuff that they wouldn’t say to Jimmy and them. Like one time they said to Daniel, my brother, they called him a hood rat. Cause he tore up his detention slip and threw it in the hallway. Ms. Kennedy, the principal, called him a hood rat. It’s like you wouldn’t call Jimmy or Sid that, so why the hell would she say that to us? One time she told Jacob [white friend who hung with Mello] that he hung out with a bunch of thugs and shit. But you know she never called Jimmy and them thugs.

Mello was further pressed with questions about the differences between his group of friends and the Caucasian group he mentioned.

Q: Were Jimmy and them just as bad as you all were?
Mello: If not bad, a little worse. They would always be into some shit. But I mean they kind of took shit to a whole nother level. But I mean I would say that we were right underneath them… I would say they were kind of secretive about their shit. Like they’d do something and I would know what was going on, but nobody else knew what was up. With my group, I would say that were more open about it. We kind of had that like “we didn’t give a shit” mentality. We just went ahead and did it anyway. We were just going to act a fool or something, we just didn’t care what the consequences were.

Mello spoke on several occasions about the behavior he displayed within his school. What seemed troubling was how he expressed that he was accepting of his image as a trouble maker in school. Although he recognized his behavior was not always acceptable, he explained that being the individual making the scene in the hallways, being late to class, and cursing up a storm was “fun”. In the interview, a question was posed to Mello asking if he believed that he was labeled, and if he felt that he conformed to label and ran along with it.

Yeah, definitely. As soon as I got labeled with it [being a trouble maker], I was just like fuck it. If that’s the way people are going to look at us then I guess that’s the way it’s going to be. We just ran with it. People called us bad, so we were like “Okay. I guess we’re bad. Whatever.” It sucked because when you tried to do something serious everyone took it as a joke. (Mello Interview, 2015)
The excerpt suggests that by Mello being labeled in a negative manner, he along with his group of friends conformed to the label, and “ran with it.” For him, the label proved to be detrimental when attempting to take things more serious within the school environment. Despite the serious obstacles faced, Mello’s journey to college was encouraged by a teacher that was considered an ally. The relationship Mello shared with this particular teacher proved vital in inspiring him to continue his education at the next level.

The participants of this section either dealt with the obstacles of school discipline personally or had a friend dealing with the issue. The obstacles depicted in this section demonstrated the ways in which students are handled when it comes to violating school policies. When examining this particular obstacle, the ways in which participants were handled varied. For one participant, despite being a non-frequent offender, the punishment he received served more as a deterrent to prevent him from engaging in any other misbehavior activities. Another participant was the victim of racism, yet, little was done by personnel to handle the issue. Though the participant was angered by the situations, he recognized any violent action taken could result in his dismissal from school. The other participants emphasized the disparities in how certain individuals, particularly of different racial groups, are handled when it comes to misbehavior.

Another obstacle illuminated in the section, is how the environment can shape or influence the behavior of an individual. Mike spoke about his friend Lee, who ended up traveling down a different path. Although Mike managed to change his environment, Lee did not have that opportunity. Being in an environment where only two sides of the
spectrum are recognized, those who fall in between must find their own way. As Mike explained, whatever happens to be dominate in any particular environment, an individual will likely gravitate towards it. The next chapter will examine the factors that helped these participants demonstrate resiliency in the face of such obstacles. The chapter will also briefly highlight participants’ college experiences.
CHAPTER FIVE: RESILIENCE “2” COLLEGE

The issues brought on by school discipline served as a hurdle for the participants of the study. For some, the height of the hurdle was taken on with relative ease, while others had a more difficult experience taking on their respective height. Despite the hurdles, all the participants managed to make the jump, and cross the finish line when it came to high school. For all the participants, the journey did not end there. All participants are university students, with several on the verge of completing or already having completed their undergraduate degree programs. This chapter will examine the factors that helped these participants overcome the hurdles brought on by school discipline, and pushed them to further their education. The chapter will consist of four sections which focus on how relationships and involvement produced resiliency among participants, as well as the struggles and aspirations of participants while enrolled in college.

Resiliency: Power Behind Relationships

Many of the participants in the study stressed how vital relationships served in not looking past the obstacles faced within their respective schools, but with looking forward when it came to their futures. The relationships participants spoke about ranged from family members, teachers, coaches, mentors, and for one participant women he dated. These relationships were credited with molding these individuals into who they are today, inspiring them to continue their education at the next level, and providing them with the necessary resources to strive for excellence in their journey. The following sub-sections
will examine the various types of relationships formed by participants which they believed helped them along the way.

*Relationships with Family*

When it came to the relationships participants shared with their families, they proved essential through influencing individuals to pursue the college opportunity, funding their education, providing the constant reminders of being an African-American, as well as love and support. Mello and Karen both expressed that when it came towards their relationships with their parents, they played a vital role in providing financial support when it came towards their education opportunities. With Karen attending a private catholic school, she pointed out that tuition to attend the school was costly. The majority of African-American students who did attend the school were awarded a scholarship, usually related to athletics or some form of talent the school recognized. Karen was not awarded a scholarship, therefore her family provided the necessary funding for her to attend her school: “I was there because my family put together—my entire family grandparents, aunts, aunts, uncles, put together the money to make up my tuition.”

Mello echoed similar comments in his interview as to how his parents were willing to fund his education opportunity in college. He explained that they were willing to do it to provide an alternative route instead of joining the military, which Mello intended on pursuing if college was not an option:
My dad was like in a mentality—cause he was just so fed up with the way were acting. He was like “I don’t care what you do. You’re just not staying here.” He was like “I’ll pay for you school, or you can join the military like the rest of your friends.” We had to pick one or the other. My mom didn’t want us to join the military. And I feel like my dad had the same mentality—like don’t join the military, because you have the opportunity to go to school. (Mello Interview, 2015)

Both of Mello’s parents entered the military coming out of high school; they always expressed how they wanted their children to have a different path than the one they had to choose coming out of high school. For Mello, the factor that pushed him to seek out the college path will be discussed in the following section on relationships with teachers.

P.J. and Mike spoke on how advice and support were the primary tools their families supplied them with. P.J.’s expressed that the relationship he shared with his parents were the most important relationships he shared with anyone. When asked what makes the relationship important, he explained how his parents constantly provided him with life advice and reminders:

You know [they tell me]—be the best you can be. Keep on working hard. Sometimes they play the [race] card. I don’t like playing the card because of who I am. But they say “You know as black man things are always going to be harder on you.” [They] Always repeat that every time. (P.J. Interview, 2015)

The advice P.J.’s parents provided was not only of support but of the realities that African-American men face in American society. For Mike, his family provided him with a similar type of encouragement and support. His father did not have a major role in his life, so he attributes most of his family support coming from his mother and grandparents. The way in which his family served him is they provide “real life support.”
So family for me, I think was there for that real life support. Like spiritual support, love, providing, and—because I had peculiar predicament because I lived with my grandparents, and they are really grounded into church. So when my mom wasn’t there, I had my grandparents. And they were always—that’s why I could never fall in with the wrong crowd... I had my grandfather, and grandmother drilling me about the word of God, ethics, right and wrong, and me being the decider of who I become. (Mike Interview, 2015)

With Mike’s mother working night shifts for her job, his grandparents stepped up and pushed Mike to develop values that would help him along his journey. Mike stressed that these are values he continues to live by to this day.

A few of the participants expressed, that when it came to higher education it was their parents, and one’s grandparent, expectation to continue their education at the next level. Janet spoke how both of her parents received their degrees, with her mom earning her masters. With her family being successful, she wanted to continue the success seen with her family. She also explained that she was not ready for “adult life,” and felt as if college would provide the opportunity to figure out what she wanted to do in life. Candace on the other hand expressed that for her, it wasn’t a matter of being inspired to go to college, she was “told” that she had to attend college. Both her parents attended college, so she explained that when it came to talking to her parents about college it wasn’t a matter of “if” she was going, but “where” she was going. Charles echoed similar comments about being expected to attend college. His grandma Gigi wanted all of her children and grandchildren to get their education, and he explained that to her that was “non-negotiable.” With Charles’ generation of his family, these individuals not only continued the tradition of receiving their bachelors’ degrees, but several of his cousins
received their masters and Ph.D.’s. Charles is currently finishing up his second master’s degree.

Relationships with Teachers

As depicted in the previous chapter, the relationships participants shared with school personnel swung in both directions. For some the relationships were vital in providing positive outcomes, while others saw strains in their relationships. Mello was one participant who had a great deal of strains when it came to the relationships he shared with his school’s personnel. There was one particular teacher Mello shared a relationship with that looked past the labels placed upon him and inspired him to pursue the opportunity to go to college. Here is Mello explaining the relationship:

I feel that my English teacher Mr. Hall really inspired me. Cause for some reason he never saw us as the bad kids that everybody labeled us as. We had our moments where he would see us do dumb shit, but he saw that as us being kids, immature kids. So he never really looked at us as bad kids. I think it was the fact that he was an African-American male, so he definitely connected with me and my group a lot… I want to say that like 50 percent of it [going to college] was him inspiring me. He just sat me down and told me “You know you have the opportunity of a lifetime to continue to do something. I was talking to your dad and he said he would pay it [college]. So definitely go to school. It doesn’t matter where you start, it’s where you finish.” So I just ran with that. (Mello Interview, 2015)

When asked if he shared any other positive relationships with other school personnel, Mello simply stated “Not really.”

When it came to relationships with school personnel, Mike explained in the previous chapter that relationships are vital for a student’s development. While attending James high school, Mike believed that he did not have that interaction with his teachers and felt that his teachers were “miles away”. When he transferred to Woodbridge, he began to form those bonds with school personnel which he believes helped in him in
variety of manners ranging from academics to personal matters. Here is what he shared in the interview:

I’m grateful for Woodbridge for putting me in that mentality that I need to go meet up and talk with the teachers if something is rubbing me the wrong way, or if I feel like I need help. Before Woodbridge, I didn’t feel that way. I felt like I would figure it out on my own.

In addition, Mike expressed how he believed teachers are crucial role models in the lives of their students:

I think quality of teachers, and interaction with teachers is everything. Because you’re trying to figure out who you are, and who you want to be your role model. This is somebody you’re going to see every day. Sometimes it depends upon the way in which you live, [can be a bigger role model] more so than your parents. So if I’m seeing someone five days a week, eight hours a day, and they are reaching out to me, and trying to guide me. I’m going to fall in line with what they are trying to say. (Mike Interview, 2015)

Once again, the change of environment helped Mike not only escape the negative atmosphere experienced at James. By transferring to Woodbridge, Mike had the opportunity to experience a whole different side of education where teachers made themselves available to their students, and provided assistance and guidance for Mike throughout his journey.

Relationships with school personnel for Alexis and Candace were crucial in the sense of academic success. Both participants spoke about how the relationships they shared with their teachers helped them perform well in their classes, and in some ways made certain subjects very appealing and easy to comprehend. Alexis explained in her interview that her teachers encouraged her to go the extra mile by providing her additional material to enhance her understanding of the material:
They always gave me practice work for a specific subject we were studying. If we did poor when they have exams on those [subjects], they would just keep having us practice on those things until we got better with them… I think other students complained they gave us a lot of work. But it helped me understand things better. (Alexis Interview, 2015)

Alexis reiterated how encouraging her teachers were towards her. She explained how they always took the time to assist her, and constantly took the time to hear her express concerns or issues she was having. If she did not have this type of encouragement Alexis expressed: “I think I wouldn’t have worked as hard if some of the people who taught me, had not motivated me.”

Candace shared similar remarks when it came to the relationships she had with her teachers. For her, teachers made it easy for her to grasp course material, and also played a role in motivating her to pursue a career in the medical field. Here are a few of the statements she made in regards to her teachers:

First off, I had some really good teachers. I remember I had a teacher name Mr. Stephens. He was so great…. He was just a damn good teacher and he pushed me… He made me feel like I can actually do the stuff [in an honors course]. Sophomore and junior year I had the same math teacher. Her name was Ms. Samuels. She was really loving, [she] pushed me, she was the one who told me I should take Calculus, and Physics. That kind of solidified me going into the medical field. She was like “Oh my god. You are so good in math. This stuff comes so easy to you.” And looking back—I’m not even good in math, she was just that good of a teacher. (Candace Interview, 2015)

The relationships formed by participants with their teachers, aided them in a variety of ways which helped them overcome obstacles, and motivated them to pursue their dreams.

*Relationships with Others*

There were a number of other individuals that participants shared relationships with that served vital in some capacity. These individuals ranged from a city official,
church members, coaches, and for one participant the females he dated. In her interview, Karen spoke about the relationship she shared with the mayor of the city she lived in. She managed to form the relationship through her service as vice president on the youth advisory board of the community. As a member, she along with the other members of the board and city officials, traveled around to inner city schools and explained to students how the local government worked and served the community. They also educated individuals on the process of how to suggest change if they were unreceptive to what was going on in the school. Karen expressed that being a part of the board is what helped her get into college:

The mayor wrote a letter of recommendation for me. My own teacher who I saw every day [did not write me a letter]—I worked with the mayor about once a month. He spoke on my character and that is the reason I got to come to college. (Karen Interview, 2015)

With the majority of her relationships within the school being of poor quality, Karen had to utilize the relationships outside of her school setting to help further her education. Janet too, utilized the relationships she managed to form outside her school environment. The relationships were found with fellow church members. She explained that several members of her church were teachers, where they consistently stressed the importance behind education.

My church for sure. A lot of them are pretty successful. A lot of them are even teachers. So they brought up education a lot, and how it was important to stay on track, and figure out where you want to go and things like that.

To point out how serious the members were about education, Janet said this about weekly bible study groups:
We would have study groups sometimes throughout the week. If we had bible study, they would make kids go into a different room and work on their homework. Things like that. They kept it real about education. (Janet Interview, 2015)

The other types of relationships formed by participants were with individuals who had close ties with the school environment. P.J. talked about his coaches and how they served as a huge motivation to work hard with his athletic events, and apply that work ethic to his daily life.

The coaches I had really propelled me to be the best at whatever I do. Like I know most of the time they are talking about sports. However, sometimes when they try and motivate you, they are motivating you to take what you learned on the field, or the mats, or wherever and apply that to life. And if you can apply that to life then you can be the greatest. (P.J. Interview, 2015)

When asking if there was a particular coach he shared a special relationship with, P.J. spoke of his wrestling coach. This coach was a “big part” in helping P.J. attend college. The ways in which he helped him were from motivating him to get the grades and test scores needed to attend college, as well as devoting the necessary time and work to become a wrestler at the collegiate level. The personal advice his coach offered was something P.J. strove to apply to his life every day, both “on and off the mats.”

For Mike, another form of relationships he gave credit towards were the girls he dated. He expressed that girls were “monumental” in shaping who he is as an individual. When it comes to girls, he believed that a girlfriend “witnesses” a side of you that no one else may have the opportunity to see. Therefore, he explained that he strives to always portray a good image for the girls in his life. The image he portrays takes up after his grandfather and other men in his life that demonstrate respect and “handle their business.”
When I see the way they interact with their wives, and how they talk, and operate, it automatically compels me to be a better man. In college when I hang with girls, I make sure my room is clean… I am way more attentive to females in the way that I talk, and interact with my friends… I want to make sure that it is a safe space around me. Those are the type of things that really help keep my head on straight. (Mike Interview, 2015)

Mike expressed that with his lack of involvement in sports and church nowadays, the two factors that also played a crucial role in his development, his relationships with females allow for him to consistently ensure the image he portrays is socially fitting.

The relationships focused on in this section highlight the various individuals, and ways in which these relationships have helped participants either be resilient in terms of discipline, academics, or with their personal lives. These relationships also provided encouragement, expectations, financial assistance, family support, and role models that individuals took up after. The following section will continue to focus on resiliency in the form of involvement.

Resiliency: Involvement

Another important factor that contributed to the resiliency and motivation to attend college was seen in the form of involvement. All the participants who took part in the study were involved in some form of activity or organization within their schools or in their communities. Involvement ranged from participating in athletics, marching band, student organizations, church, and community programs. Participants shared that their involvement helped with personal and professional development, strengthening leadership skills, earning financial assistance to attend college, life lessons, and feeling a
sense of accomplishment. The following sections will examine participant involvement within the school setting and outside of the school setting.

Involvement within the School

Participants were involved in a range of different extracurricular activities offered in their respective schools. One of the common forms of involvement seen amongst participants was in athletics. Candace, Mello, P.J. Alexis, Charles, and Mike were all involved in athletics at one point during their high school career. The sports they were involved in included football, basketball, volleyball, soccer, track & field, and wrestling. Being involved in athletics often times served as an opportunity to learn life lessons through their coaches, or through challenges brought on by athletic participation. Alexis shared in her interview that her involvement in basketball and track taught her the need to strive for improvement in areas where she may be lacking in. She explained that this takeaway is something she continues to apply in her life today, especially being in college and facing the challenges of her coursework. Mello expressed similar comments about his basketball coach, who used the game of basketball to teach him and his teammates “life lessons.”

Being involved in athletics also provided the opportunity and motivation to attend college. In the previous chapter, P.J. experienced a moment during his high school experience where he was found in violation of a school policy, and as a result was removed from the football team. That particular moment for P.J. was a turning point when it came to his behavior. As he explained in the previous chapter, after that moment he did not want to jeopardize his athletic career, therefore, he “kept his head down.” In his interview when
asked a hypothetical question of “where do you think you would be at if you weren’t involved in wrestling?” He shared this:

Well if I didn’t wrestle I wouldn’t be at this college right now. I don’t know what college I’d be at. I just know that I wouldn’t be here. Cause I came here for wrestling. I know that. As far as the college part—I don’t know if I would be in college. I don’t know if I would be at an Ivy League [school]. I don’t know if I would be in a community college. But sports propelled me here. That’s what I know. (P.J. Interview, 2015)

For Charles, football played a vital role in his life for a variety of reasons. The firstLeague [school]. I don’t know if I would be in a community college. But sports propelled me here. That’s what I know. (P.J. Interview, 2015)

For Charles, football played a vital role in his life for a variety of reasons. The first

being a setting that allowed for him to retaliate against the individuals who were
responsible for the racism Charles experienced. Charles pointed out that there were two
particular individuals who he often sought after on the football field. Not only would
Charles punish these individuals through the game of football, but he would also out work
them in the weight room, conditioning sessions, and in the classroom. Charles explained
that these individuals continued to belittle him, however continued to “punish” them on the
football field. Retaliating through football, allowed Charles to release the built up
frustrations brought on by these individuals.

The second reason Charles spoke of, was how football allowed him to maintain a
close relationship with his father. With his parents being divorced, and him living with his
mother, it was through football which allowed his father to continue to be a part of his life.
Charles’ father served as a coach for him during the offseason, helping him with
weightlifting and conditioning, and even served as coach for his team one season at Life
Academy. Despite facing a range of issues within his school, Charles believed that it was
important to remain at Life Academy to keep his father in his life.
If I stopped going to Life Academy, would he still have still have time to do those things [serve as coach], and to be those things. My parents matter a great deal—I was living with my mom. Mom is not going anywhere. So in so many ways—just trying to keep both my parents in my life, was a major impact to stay. (Charles Interview, 2015)

Finally, football not only provided Charles with the chance for retaliation, and the ability to maintain a close relationship with his father, but also provided him skills that helped him earn a full ride scholarship for academics and leadership. During his senior season, Charles was ineligible to play football due to his age (19). During the offseason Charles explained how hard he had been working for the upcoming season, however found out prior to the start of the season that he would be ineligible to participate. Despite not being able to play, his teammates recognized his hard work and leadership, which led to him being voted as a team captain. Although ineligible to play, he was able to practice and travel with the team throughout the season, and it was during moments as such where he demonstrated his leadership capabilities. This proved vital when Charles was invited to be interviewed for the Axe 7 Leadership Initiative Scholarship. In his interview for the scholarship, one of the questions asked was “tell us about a time when you showed leadership.” Charles used this moment to speak on the dilemma faced with his football eligibility. Despite putting in a great deal of preparation for the season, and having been ruled ineligible, he turned this particular moment into positive experience, where he found ways to continue contributing as a teammate, and as a leader of the team. The resiliency demonstrated by Charles in this particular moment is what earned him the full ride scholarship for academics.

For a few participants (Janet, Candace), their involvement within the school settings was seen with activities in the fine arts (marching band, theater, choir) and student
organizations. Janet was involved with several fine arts activities. For her these activities provided a setting where she experienced diversity, where diversity for her means experiencing individuals who have different “lifestyles.” Janet explained that she believes her participation in such activities made her a notable candidate for the schools she applied to.

Candace on the other hand, shared her experiences with the student organizations she was involved with in her school. One particular organization, Falcon Friends, helped her develop personal and professional skills through working with 8th graders at surrounding middle schools in her school district. Some of the skills she spoke about were public speaking, working with a variety of individuals, and mentorship.

Involvement for Candace was also seen with her auditioning for her school’s musical. She spoke about how she auditioned for Sweeny Todd. Initially, this was something Candace did not have strong interest in participating in, however, the director persuaded her to audition. She explained that she was not very enthusiastic about the play compared to her other friends involved in the audition process. However, she practiced her role, auditioned, and received a call back. What transpired next with her the audition process was shocking. Here is Candace explaining it.

When the callbacks came in… my friend who really wanted one of the main roles, and was really practicing for the audition… didn’t get a callback. She was so salty [upset]. With that callback [she received], I felt like shit, because here I am, I didn’t even really want to do that and I took somebody’s spot who really wanted to do it… And I was like “why would I do this when there is somebody who really wants to do this.” So when we actually auditioned for that [role], I didn’t try, and I didn’t act… I just didn’t try, and I obviously didn’t get a callback. (Candace Interview, 2015)
Despite not giving her full effort, what Candace took away from the experience was the mindset that she could achieve anything she put her mind and heart to. By acknowledging her lack of interest in participating in the play, Candace made the sacrifice to give up the role, and allow a fellow friend to earn the part instead.

Involvement within schools allowed participants to develop a variety of skills and lessons that they continue to utilize and apply to their lives today. Involvement for some participants served as an avenue to further their education, and to maintain close relationships with a family member. The following section will examine involvement outside of the school setting.

\textit{Involvement outside the School}

Involvement that took place outside of the school environment with participants was mostly seen through being involved with their church, and for one participant, being heavily engaged in community programs. When examining involvement with the Church, several participants expressed how their relationship with Christ played a huge factor in their personal lives. They credited him with the “blessings” and “lessons” they had experienced throughout their high school career.

When it came to Mike’s involvement in the church, the time spent in this setting continued to depict how the change of environment really helped him “stay focused.” Along with participating in athletics, there were some evenings after practice had concluded, where he and his mother would spend the evening at church. Here is how he explained the routine:
My mom had me in church, Tuesdays, and Thursdays 7-10. And Sundays 8-3. So church was also like—when I was playing, I would go to practice, leave, my mom picked me up from practice, [and we went] straight to church. So you are talking about wake up, school till 3, practice from 4-6, hanging with my homies [friends] 6-7, and my mom picked me up and we went to church. I would do my homework at church, go back home, and go to sleep. No time for nothing else, except for church, sports, and school. (Mike Interview, 2015)

Church for Mike allowed for him to remain engaged in constructive activities that kept him away from engaging in things he had trouble avoiding at his previous school.

Of all the participants who engaged in involvement outside the school setting, Karen was the one who was the most engaged. She was a member of her community’s youth advisory board, where she traveled around to inner city schools and explained to the youth how government worked, and how they could go about expressing their concerns. Despite having several negative relationships with her school’s personnel, she served as a recruiter, with the hopes of attracting more minority students to her school.

When asked if it was her school who reached out to get her involved she expressed:

Oh God no! But they couldn’t tell me no, because it was a volunteer thing. So I gave up my Saturdays, and the days when we didn’t have school, and I would show up early, and talk to every black family. I would say things [along the lines of] “Look we need you here. Regardless of how you feel, we need you here.” And they would ask for my honest opinion of what I experienced while I was there. I would be honest, but I would also explain “This is why we need you here.”

Even though she had negative experiences, Karen recognized and acknowledged that the quality of education her school provided, was much better than the previous schools she had attended early on in her life. She wanted other minority students to have a similar opportunity.

Along with her involvement, she also created an organization called House to Homes. The organization supplied women, who were victims of domestic violence
residing in a temporary shelter, the basic household necessities (kitchenware, cleaning supplies, bedroom supplies, etc.) once they were able to depart the shelter and placed in temporary housing. In her interview, she spoke about how she reached out to local businesses and organizations through letters asking for donations to help supply the women with the necessary materials. With the contributions and donations received, Karen would put together five gift boxes a month, containing the various supplies and materials for the women.

Although the women were not allowed to know that Karen was responsible for putting the together the boxes, many women found out anyway. Here is how Karen explained how the women were affected by her actions:

I’ve actually had people who had gone through the ceremony, where they receive the stuff, and come back and found me. And they are just like—crying and saying what a difference it makes for them. A lot of these women have kids, the kids are sleeping in sleeping bags. We provided them with comforters, sheets, pots, and pans. And it just makes a world of difference [for these women]. (Karen Interview, 2015)

By being involved in such activities, Karen expressed that this motivated her to complete her academic work. With her parents were strict when it came to her academics, she had to complete her homework prior to engaging in any activity involved in. She also credited her involvement with helping her maintain a high GPA. A few of the organizations she participated in had certain GPA requirements that were to be met by participants. Overall, involvement for Karen was the most important factor in helping her be resilient to the negative experiences with her schooling. It is important to share that Karen managed to earn over 600 hours of community service throughout her high school career. It was through experiences as such that not only helped with her quest to attend
college, but also shaped who she is as an individual. Involvement for Karen a part of her identity.

When it comes to participant involvement, there were a variety of ways in which these individuals were involved both in their respective schools, as well as in their communities. Athletics, fine arts, church, and community programs, all played a role in either producing resiliency, developing essential skills, giving back, or motivating participants to attend college. Although not touched on in the section, several participants spoke about how their involvement in these activities became a part of their identity, and if they had not had the opportunity they would not know where they would be today. The following section will briefly highlight participant experiences while enrolled at college.

**Struggles of College Life**

The purpose of this section is to highlight some of the difficulties the participants dealt with during their college careers. Data was collected on what participants believed they were lacking in terms of college readiness when they first enrolled at their institution, and what struggles they faced along their journey with college itself. By sharing these highlights, the goal is to not only bring awareness to the issues themselves, but potentially motivate individuals, educators, or other figures to further help students with preparing for and navigating through college.

When examining college readiness, several participants stressed certain skills that they lacked upon entering college. Janet spoke about study skills and how vital they are in college. In high school she explained, that when it came to studying she often placed it on the “back burner” and dedicated very little time. Throughout college, she learned that
study skills are crucial when it comes to the coursework. She wished her school would have offered more resources to help her enhance her skills. Mello also expressed that his study skills were underdeveloped, but for him the major struggle he continues to deal with is time management. Although he has improved with this particular skill over the years, he stressed “it is something I still struggle with.”

Karen and Candace made comments on how guidance provided in college has affected their financial situations, and determining an academic path. Karen opened up by highlighting her experience with her academic advisors, who failed to provide the necessary guidance to help her determine her academic route. Karen changed her major six times before she finally settled on psychology. She explained that the relationships she shared with her advisors were not helpful in helping her discover what she wanted to do in life. She spent a lot of time exploring a variety of courses to find what she loved. With the courses she took, she expressed concern about the atmosphere and the designs of the courses themselves. She believed that these courses require a great deal of “time” and “attentiveness,” and even with those devotions, she believed that she was never guaranteed success.

Candace spoke about an instance where she had been dealing with a financial situation where she owed $1300. If she was unable to pay the dues, this would have resulted in her being kicked out of the dorms and being dis-enrolled from her courses. She managed to get the problem resolved. Despite resolving the issue, Candace stressed the poor guidance and advertisement of financial assistance provided by the university. She spoke about the several trips she made to the financial aid office at her institution and
the negative experiences she had, as well as the lack of knowledge she had on scholarship opportunities offered by her university.

They don’t tell you about that stuff. When I first got here, I didn’t even know anything about scholarships, or how to apply for anything. You literally have to go out and seek that stuff [out]. Which kind of makes sense, but it’s just like—I have never received one scholarship. It’s not because I suck [unqualified]. No it’s because I didn’t know about them. That’s a problem. (Candace Interview, 2015)

When it came to Mike attending college he shared that his family serves as a big motivator for why he is striving for success, but also remains a huge concern for him. He noted that a lot individuals of his family are struggling in life, and shared that several individuals who are struggling, are close in age to him. He believed that by attending college and being successful he could hold his family together. Here is what he shared:

When I look at my family struggle, and I see that, there isn’t really one person who is holding the family together. Right now my family is crumbling. The concern for my family, is what’s driving me to try and be excellent, and successful. Really my concern for other people. Cause if I was just concerned about the money, I don’t think I would be on the path I’m on right now. I don’t know—I would be doing a lot more to get money… It is really the family to tell you the truth. (Mike Interview, 2015)

The struggles of family were concerning to Mike, and at times affected his performance in school. However, despite the issues, he remains committed to being successful with his education, and hopes to provide more stability with his family through his successes.

Struggles for participants ranged from lack of essential skills (studying, and time management) which they believed are vital to one’s success in college. Others spoke on the financial struggles they had encountered, and how stressful such situations had on them. While others spoke on their investment with education, and pointed out the lack of
guidance and support they received, in terms of financial assistance and opportunities, as well as helping discover a career path.

Post College

For all the participants of the study, with the exception of Charles (graduate student), they were either seniors preparing to graduate, or have graduated. When it comes to their future aspirations, several participants planned on continuing their education by attending graduate school, or medical school. Other participants were seeking or had earned employment opportunities with the federal government and other organizations.

Employment with the military and the federal government were the aspirations for two participants involved in the study. For an individual who was predicted to not fare well after high school, Mello is wrapping up his final semester of his undergraduate career. Once graduated, he is aspiring to become an officer in one of the branches of the United States armed services. P.J. too, has sought out a similar route, but has managed to earn his commission as a second lieutenant. Along with participating in collegiate wrestling, P.J. was also a cadet in his institution’s ROTC program. His involvement is what allowed him to earn his commission as an officer.

Alexis, Candace, Janet, and Mike all plan on furthering their education by attending schools in their respective fields of study. Alexis plans on attending graduate school for psychology. She hopes that once her schooling is completed, that she will earn employment as a social worker, or work within a hospital setting. Candace shared similar aspirations where she too, sees herself working in a hospital setting. Once finished with
her degree, Candace plans on attending Physicians Assistant School. This will require two more years of schooling, but once finished, she will have fulfilled her dream of earning the opportunity to work in the medical field.

Janet will be attending graduate school for public health. She is unsure about what she plans on doing in her future, however, she knows that she wants to make an impact when it comes to community health. Mike explained that he holds a strong passion for the law, he currently serves as an intern at a community courthouse. At the time of the study, he was finishing up applications to attend law school. He is hopeful that he will have the opportunity to pursue a career in the field of law.

Finally, Karen and Charles, were seeking employment opportunities with other organizations. Upon graduating from college, Karen accepted an employment opportunity with a large department store. As an employee, she will be assessing and changing policies within the company, with the goal of increasing employee productivity. She also stated that she had a strong desire to start her organization House to Homes in the city she will be relocating to. Involvement for Karen, will continue to be a major piece of her life. When it comes to the future of Charles, he shared that his future will be in higher education, for him it is “what I love.” At the time of his interview, he had recently interviewed for a position in student affairs at an institution located close to home. Charles’ future will continue to see him serve in the education system.

This chapter examined the two major factors participants believed helped create resiliency within themselves to deal with the obstacles faced while in high school. The relationships participants shared with a variety of individuals, aided them by providing
resources to attend school, empowered them to overcome various challenges, and helped lay the foundation and support for the development of themselves. Involvement within and outside of the school environment also served as a major factor in helping the participants overcome obstacles. For some participants, their involvement provided them a pathway to develop and showcase their skills, which eventually opened doorways to further their education. Involvement for others, served as a venue where personal and professional development skills were developed and applied to a variety of tasks. In other ways, involvement served as the gateway in forming the vital relationships that helped participants demonstrate resiliency.

When it comes to their college experiences, there were various actors and reasons as to why participants wanted to continue to further their education. Though all of the participants are destined to graduate, their journey through college was not free of challenges. This chapter highlighted a few of the issues many of the participants had common troubles with. In the end, all of the participants have a strong desire to pursue certain occupations which would require further schooling, specific training, or the right interview.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This study reflects on the experiences of African-American university students with school discipline as high school students. Although this is an exploratory study, the data produced provides a great deal of insight and knowledge on the issue at hand. The findings revealed that African-Americans, while enrolled as high school students, faced a variety of obstacles with school discipline. Of the participants involved in the study, such obstacles were either minor, or in some cases more serious. What is unique about each individual involved is their story on navigating through issues of school discipline and earning the opportunity to pursue a higher education.

The issue this study highlights is the concept of school criminalization, which Paul Hirschfield (2008) depicts as schools adopting measures that take form after actions utilized by the criminal justice system to handle school discipline. The “punitive turn” the education system made occurred in the 1980’s and 1990’s, which had been the result of a “moral panic” across American society that reacted to the violent crimes being committed within the school environment. As a result, schools began to make changes in policies to handle student misbehavior, and adopted measures that would ensure safe schooling environments. The measures adopted saw increased reliance on law enforcement personnel, equipment, and policies which are utilized by the criminal justice system.

The literature provided depicts a range of effects the “punitive turn” has had on the school environment. These effects range from the school environment displaying prison-like characteristics, which shapes and restricts students’ behavior in variety of manners. Additionally, the methods utilized by schools were initially intended to handle
violent and criminal acts committed within the school environment. What several scholars have alluded to, are how these procedures are now used to deal non-violent student behavior. Policies such as zero-tolerance, and exclusionary forms of sanctions are at the forefront of this particular issue. The findings discussed in chapter four shined light on how punitive forms of punishment were utilized in participant schools to handle the various forms of discipline issues. For two participants, P.J. and Mello, both of these individuals were subjected to punitive forms of punishment within their respective schools as a result of their disciplinary issues.

Another effect that has been seen a great deal of attention when it comes to school criminalization are the racial disparities at play when examining school discipline. African-American and Latino students make up the majority of students who are disciplined using exclusionary forms of sanctions. Several participants of the study, stressed their beliefs that the minority students within their schools tended to be the targets of disciplinary action. With two participants having attended a majority minority school, it was no surprise that African-Americans students made up the majority of those disciplined. However, participants who attended the other school classifications believed that African-Americans, despite making up a smaller percentage of the population, were the individuals sought after when it came to discipline issues. Disparities existed in how school officials treated African-American students, and the form of sanctioning these individuals received compared to other student groups.

The theoretical framework used for this study focused on labeling theory, along with the additional perspectives of “looking-glass self” (1902), and the “self-fulfilling
prophecy” (1948). Each perspective offers a lens that allows one to comprehend how perceptions and labels can shape individual behavior. Jensen (2012) and Bettie (2002), demonstrated how the identities of student groups play a role in how they are perceived within the school environment. The literature illustrated how school environments are tailored to fit the identities of certain groups of students, which were considered to be the dominant culture of the school. Groups of students who were not associated with the identities of the dominant culture were often perceived in different manners. The perceptions were formed based on the group’s social group identities (race, class, gender). By being perceived different, this led these groups of students to display various forms of resistance, which was often times was carried out through misbehavior or other forms of undesired behavior. The perceptions also held the power to alter students’ attitudes towards their academics.

The actors who hold the responsibility for producing the attitudes, perceptions, and labels, are those who hold positions of authority. Klein (1986) explained that labels are constructed by formal social control agents and organizations. When examining the school environment, authority figures range from administrators, teachers, counselors, law enforcement officials, and other actors within the school environment. Victor Rios (2008) captured the process of labeling with his observations of youth in the Oakland education system. The youth he observed were punished by school personnel for various reasons, which at times seemed unwarranted. Due to the fact that the youth were punished, as Becker (1963) indicated they were now deemed as “outsiders.” With the youth punished, they became marked by the school system, law enforcement, their
teachers, families, peers, and other community figures. The labels placed upon these youth would stick with them everywhere they traveled. Often times, at the first sign of trouble, this warranted authority figures to respond and handle the youth in punitive manners.

The one participant who I believe fell prey to the labeling process was Mello. He himself, acknowledged that he felt that he was labeled as a trouble maker, and was perceived that way by the various actors within his school environment. Mello’s response to the label fits Lermert’s (1967) concept of secondary deviance, where an individual labeled by society will react negatively to that label. When Mello was challenged or accused by school personnel, he explained that he would often become frustrated and would demonstrate resistance by confronting school personnel. These actions led Mello to being punished on frequent occasions, usually through detentions, and a suspension on one occasion.

When examining the school Mello attended (diverse), an interesting question to consider: how would his experience be different if this behavior was carried out in a school environment such as Mike’s and P.J.’s (majority minority)? Would the response to his behavior be more punitive, meaning expulsion or possible arrest? Would he have been able to form the crucial relationship with his teacher that pushed him to attend college?

Though there are several obstacles students face in terms of school discipline and education in general, Derrick Brooms (2015) directs attention towards the resilience of African-Americans in education. Brooms highlights the experiences of 20 African-American males who graduated high school from a Chicago neighborhood plagued with
social issues. Despite coming from a neighborhood with a variety of troubles, these men were able navigate their way through these situations and eventually earned their opportunity to pursue a higher education. One venue the participants credited with their resiliency were the schools they attended. Benard (1991) and Wang et. al. (1993) explained that the school plays a crucial role in fostering resiliency in students. This can be obtained through positive relationships developed between students and teachers, along with other school personnel. The overall atmosphere of the school itself plays a role in providing students a positive education experience. The family and community too, play a central role in fostering resilience within students. Families provide the constant support children need, as well setting high expectations for their children. Communities on the other hand, provide the opportunities for healthy youth development, and also set and reinforce the norms for desirable behavior.

For the participants of this study, several managed to avoid having run-ins with school discipline. There were several aspects that played a role in preventing student misconduct, three of these aspects relate to what Benard and Wang et. al. highlight in the literature. The parent factor served as a major deterrent for a few participants. Alexis, Charles, and Janet all shared how they were fearful of disappointing their parents. Their parents held high expectations for their performances with academics as well as with their behavior. Another aspect focused on the relationships participants shared with school personnel. They credited these relationships with helping them get out of situations that could have potentially resulted in them being disciplined. Finally, the change of environment for one participant, Mike, helped him demonstrate resiliency
through entering an environment that not only recognized, but allowed him to display his full potential as student.

Resiliency demonstrated by participants was also fostered through their relationships and involvement. The findings presented in chapter five focused on the various types of relationships participants shared with individuals they considered to be influential. These relationships were seen with parents, relatives, teachers, coaches, and community members. The relationships proved vital for a variety of reasons ranging from providing financial assistance to attend school, looking past labels, recognizing potential, athletic development, setting expectations, offering advice, and assisting with the process to attend college. Participants credited these relationships with helping them overcome the obstacles faced within the school environment whether it was with school discipline, school activities, or with their academics.

Involvement was the other major aspect that participants believed helped them demonstrate resilience towards the obstacles faced. Involvement was seen within the school environment with activities such as athletics, fine arts, and student organizations. Involvement was also seen outside of the school environment, where a few participants highlighted how their respective churches supported their development. For one participant, Karen, she was heavily involved in community programs that educated youth and provided assistance to battered women of her community. Involvement was credited with helping participants develop both professional and personal skills, maintaining close ties to family members, providing an environment to retaliate against racial abuse, giving back to the community, and offering a pathway to attend college.
The intent of this study was to further add to the existing literature and research on school criminalization by illustrating student experiences with school discipline while enrolled in high school. By focusing on African-American university students, the goal was to not only depict the experiences of these individuals, but depict them in a manner that demonstrates how they were resilient to the issue at hand. Although I believe the goal I set out to achieve out has been met, it is important to highlight the limitations of this study, offer my suggestions on how this study can be replicated in future research, and how research community should go about further examining the issue of school criminalization and resilience.

One of the biggest limitations of this study is the sample size. The data collected from the eight participants involved provided valuable data on experiences with school discipline and resilience. I speculate that if I would have recruited more participants, the insight provided potentially could have further supported and enriched the literature that already highlights the effects of criminalization. The additional data may have also uncovered other ways school criminalization takes shape, and reinforce the experiences of current participants. Another limitation that builds off of the sample, is the reliance on a convenience sample. The sample was primarily recruited from a pool of students located at one university, with one participant enrolled at another state university. By expanding the potential sample pool this could benefit future research.

The last limitation focuses on the attempt to compare and contrast the school classifications developed, and their procedures towards handling school discipline. The study, I believe laid the foundation for grouping and examining schools in the education
system based on racial demographics. What the research was unable to depict are how these school classifications vary when it comes to school policies and the methods they use to handle student misbehavior. Some participant data showed that discipline can be carried out in different forms with certain school classifications. However, future research could potentially uncover and highlight the differences or disparities that exist when examining the policies and procedures used by the different school classifications.

Future studies should continue to examine student experiences with school discipline throughout their education experience. Such experiences can further support the literature already in existence, and uncover the new effects school criminalization is having on the youth of the education system. Furthermore, future studies should continue to focus on student’s abilities to demonstrate resiliency towards school discipline issues. By focusing on resilience, future research may uncover additional factors that play a crucial role in helping individuals overcome labels, establish relationships, or earn an opportunity to pursue a healthier lifestyle.

Students enrolled in higher education serve as pool of individuals that have achieved success in the education system. If these individuals were faced with school discipline obstacles, how did they manage to overcome them? Higher education is not the only institution that attention should be placed upon, the military and labor market also offer opportunities for citizens to provide for themselves and work towards success. What are their stories? And how have these individuals demonstrated resilience? In addition to future research continuing to examine student experiences and resiliency, future research should also expand beyond the Midwest. As mentioned earlier, not all students share the
same education experience. It would be interesting to see how geographic regions compare and differ when it comes to student experiences with discipline and factors that foster resilience.

My goal for this study was to uncover factors that produce resiliency, which then could be introduced in the lives of current and future generations of school children. Based off what has emerged from the data, I want stress how crucial relationships and involvement are in shaping one’s educational experience. Each participant involved in the study pointed to one of these factors helping them overcome an obstacle faced while as a student in high school. Just as African-Americans are faced with numerous hindrances throughout broader society, the education system in many ways mirrors these social issues and forces African-American youth to encounter them at a young age. For some youth, these obstacles may place on a pathway which will never allow for them to recognize and reach their full potential. As the study highlights, school discipline serves as one of the many hurdles African-American students must jump.

The policy implications I believe this study offers education officials, policy makers, parents, and other individuals involved with the education system, is to provide funding and opportunities for the development of programs that place emphasis on positive youth relationships, and helping youth get involved with what they find passion for. I am aware that schools across the country, various organizations, and government agencies have already taken the initiative to establish programs as such. I believe this research in several ways depicts how potential programs or initiatives that focus on
relationships and involvement can aid students along their educational journey. Which is why these actors should continue to invest in programs as such.

In sum, this research is important because it offers in what I see as a new approach to viewing the issue of school criminalization. By highlighting the experiences of African-American university students with school discipline, this depicts how this issue has affected these individuals. Yet what is unique, is the resilience these individuals displayed when confronting issues as such. Resilience for these individuals was fostered through the relationships they formed with various figures of their lives and their involvement in various activities. These factors not only helped them overcome their respective situations, but ultimately pushed them to pursue a higher education.
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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Background Information
- Can you give me your first name, academic year, and major?
- Where are you from?

High School
- Can you briefly explain the characteristics, and demographics of your high school?
- Can you talk about the experiences you had at your high school?
- Can you explain the surrounding community that your high school resided in?
- In what ways was your high school affected by the community?
  - How did this affect students within the school?

Relationships
- What were your relationships like with school faculty and administrators?
- What type of relationships did you share with your parents when it came towards education?
- Were there any other key figures that you shared a relationship with when it came to your education?

Policies
- What were school policies when it came to student misconduct?
- What type of disciplinary sanctions were imposed on students when they were found in violation of those school policies?
- What type of behavior did students display when they were punished?
- Who tended to be the targets of these policies?
- Were you ever found to be in violation of school policies?
  - If so, what did you do?
- Did you feel that you were a target of school discipline policies?
  - If so, what did you do to avoid being a target?
- Did you, or do you feel when other students were found in violation of school policies, that you or other students were labeled in a negative manner?
  - Did that negative label affect your or the other student’s performance within the school setting?

Involvement
- What were you involved in? Either inside or outside the school setting.
- In what ways did your involvement in those activities assist you in getting where you are today?
- If you weren’t involved in such activities do you think you would still be here, or would there may be a different outcome?
College

- What/Who inspired you to continue your education?
- Why do you want a college education?
- When reflecting on your college experience, what were some of the essential skills you lacked that you find vital to succeeding in college?
- If you weren’t in college what would you be doing?
- What are your plans once you receive your college education?
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Ohio University Adult Consent Form With Signature

Title of Research: Examining School Criminalization and the Resiliency of Currently Enrolled University Students

Researchers: Benjamin Grice, Charlie Morgan

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

EXPLANATION OF STUDY
This study is being done because I am interested in discovering the factors that have aided currently enrolled university students in pursuing higher education who come from schools that are faced with high rates of criminalization. Schools have adopted similar methods utilized by the criminal justice system to combat issues that occur within the school environment. These policies have aided in creating a more punitive approach to dealing with student misconduct. Students who are found in violation are sanctioned in harsh manners ranging from school suspensions, expulsions, and sometimes criminal charges. Minority students (particularly Blacks/Latinos) represent the majority of students who are sanctioned, and criminalized within the school environment.

My goal is to examine school criminalization or what some refer to as the “School to Prison Pipeline” and understand its history and its effects. By focusing on currently enrolled university student who come from these environments, I want to hear your story and discover the factors that have aided you. With these factors, it may help a range of social agents in aiding other children affected by school criminalization with providing them with such factors.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to disclose information pertaining to your experience in high school. The information that is being sought will focus on characteristics of your high school, school policies on student misconduct, your experience with such policies, educational and personal relationships, involvement, and your college experience.
You should not participate in this study if you will be uncomfortable disclosing any personal information regarding your experience with your past education experiences.

Your participation in the study will last no more than 1 hour.

**Risks and Discomforts**

Risks or discomforts that you might experience are reflecting on previous experiences that may have affected you in a negative manner (abuse, criminal activity, school violations). Know that you have the right to not disclose any information that will make you feel discomfort, or incriminate yourself.

**Benefits**

This study is important to science/society because the factors discovered will display the resiliency of currently enrolled college students who come from schools faced with criminalization. These factors may aid students, social agents, or other interested audiences in providing these factors to youth who continue to be affected by the phenomenon of school criminalization.

**Confidentiality and Records**

Your study information will be kept confidential by storing it on a password protected computer, where only I possess the password to access any material stored on it. The only identifier that will collected will be your first name. All data transcribed, coded, and mentioned in the thesis will be replaced with pseudonyms. All audio recordings will be destroyed by April 1st, 2016 or upon completion of the study.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Recordings may be given to law enforcement if subpoenaed.
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;
* My graduate committee chair Dr. Charlie Morgan, Professor of Sociology, email: morganc3@ohio.edu.

**Compensation**

No compensation will be provided for you involvement.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the investigator
Benjamin Grice, bg346010@ohio.edu, 740-777-82841 or the advisor Dr. Charlie Morgan, morganc3@ohio.edu, 740-593-1371

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664 or hayhow@ohio.edu.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered;
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction;
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study;
- you are 18 years of age or older;
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary;
- you may leave the study at any time; if you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature__________________________________________ Date________

Printed Name__________________________________________

Version Date: [06/18/15]
APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT FLYER

What Is Your Story?

Resiliency

Determination

Seeking Currently Enrolled African-American Students to be Interview Participants in a Research Study on “Resiliency” in Education.

Research Participants:

- Currently enrolled student.
- At least 18 years or older.
- Identify as Black/African-American

If Interested:

- Contact Benjamin Grice, Sociology Graduate Student at 740-777-8481 or at bg346010@ohio.edu