AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Lisa L Schulz for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Counseling
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Title: The Experience of Alienation for Males Ages 16 – 19 from High School in the
Pacific Northwest: A Phenomenological Inquiry.

Abstract approved:

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Deborah J. Rubel

This qualitative study examined the experiences and perceptions of males aged

16 – 19 who did not complete a traditional high school diploma program because of

feeling alienated from the school system. Five participants described their school

experiences from elementary school through the point in high school when they

decided or were asked to leave. Participants engaged in three semi-structured

interviews and one perception check conducted over a six week period. Transcriptions

of the 15 interviews were the data used for this analysis. Analysis followed the

Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method (Moustakas, 1994), which includes pre-

reflective descriptions by the participants and interpretive reflections by the

researcher. The purpose of this study was to discover the implicit essence of alienation

from school setting. Descriptions by the five participants revealed common themes

throughout the structure of their school experience. These themes which repeated in

the substructures and were viewed in terms of movement along a continuum of school engagement were: (1) participant's need to achieve peer acceptance despite negative consequences, (2) participant's loss of trust in school and school adults, and (3) participant's fear of failure and fear of disappointing self and family. The invariant structure (essence) that emerged was the interrelationship among the constituents of peer acceptance, trust, and fear of failure and disappointment.

The Experience of Alienation for Males Ages 16 – 19 from High School in the Pacific
Northwest: A Phenomenological Inquiry.

by
Lisa L. Schulz

A DISSERTATION

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APPROVED:

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Dean of the College of Education

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Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of
Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my
dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Lisa L. Schulz, Author

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The time has come to find a bit of perspective and contemplate the journey I have undertaken. It has been a journey in the sense that it began from seeds of thought planted some years ago that grew to become an object that is somehow representative of an aspect of my personal and professional development these past twenty-five years. I value the journey, its process, the growth. I am a more complete person for having walked the path.

I also value those that accompanied me. There is my mother. She listened, sometimes pretended to listen, honored my process and did not judge me. It was she who planted the first seed.

There is Susan. She never left my side figuratively speaking. She is without a doubt the best friend any person could ever want. She did not judge me, but only offered support, wisdom, and shelter from the storms.

I must extend my gratitude toward Dr. Deborah J. Rubel, my chair, for the ideas, the meanings, the structure (and at times lack of structure), the grounding, and the consistent reminder of "it will happen the way it happens." It helped hearing that.

Dr. Michael A. Ingram planted a counseling seed. He took a thought that had been hidden in my mind and made it real. The day he said to me: "The program is here for you, and yes, you can," is the day I knew I would.

Others I encountered on my path: Dr. Beth Wasylow, Dr. Gene Eakin, Dr. Dale, Ilse, Bonnie, Amy, Annika, Rie, Erin, Michel. Very kind, special people.

I am glad. It is the end and it is the beginning.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This dissertation has examined the phenomenon of alienation from a public high school system as experienced by students who had left the setting as non-completers. This is a narrative of student's voices – the story of students who, having made an effort to complete what is considered an essential educational and social accomplishment, made the choice, either voluntarily or involuntarily, not to follow the traditional path to success and graduate from high school. Stories from students such as the two quoted below were investigated:

> I really had no idea that I wouldn't be able to graduate from high school until I was in the 9th grade, and then I realized that the teachers were never gonna give me a chance, so it was just easier to quit going (P., high school non-completer).

> School really sucked. I mean, all the same ol' people doing the same ol' thing everyday, and stupid stuff too. I mean, what was I ever gonna use that crap for? They never taught me anything I ever wanted to learn (B., GED graduate).

The participants in this study were asked to share their experiences, evaluate the meaning these experiences have had for them, and ponder the impact these meanings may have had on future choices. In these narratives, like stories in the science fiction genre where the normal rules are altered and, at times, suspended, the meanings have not always been palatable, the endings were not always predictable, and the memories were not always kind.

In order to comprehend the value of these stories, it is necessary to provide the reader with a framework of information gathered from foundational and current

literature regarding (1) the construct of adolescent alienation, (2) how schools may contribute to the process, (3) the potential results and outcomes of alienation, and (4) the role school counselors and counselor educators play in identifying and advocating for alienated students in schools.

The construct of adolescent alienation

Adolescence is at best a difficult, awkward period (Calabrese, 1987; Gullota, 2001). It's a time when children move toward adulthood in tentative and often faltering steps. It can be considered "a process of individuation and identity creation that necessarily implies discomfort, discontent, and bouts of real and imagined alienation and ostracism" (Sikkink, 1999, p.52). The tumultuous process of being an adolescent coincides with the feelings often associated with the process of becoming alienated (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Bronfenbrenner described alienation as the lack of a sense of belonging, feeling cut off from family, friends, or school. It is the inability of adolescents to connect meaningfully with other people. Brown, Higgins, Pierce, Hong, and Thoma (2003, p. 227) define adolescent alienation as "a feeling of aloneness, a feeling that no one likes them, and that they are not what others want them to be".

Adolescent alienation is a problem for some young people and may lead to behaviors such as vandalism, violence, and gang activity (Brown, Higgins, & Paulsen, 2003; Hawkins, Herrenkohl, Farrington, Brewer, Catalano, Harachi, and Cothern, 2000). Many variables can trigger an adolescent's feelings of isolation and disconnection such as changes in family circumstances, lack of social acceptance, and academic underachievement (Hawkins et al., 2000). Alienation can affect adolescents

in their home, social life, and future opportunities (Bronfenbrenner, 1986); however, this study was most concerned with non-completers' experiences of alienation from a high school setting.

Student alienation. As early as kindergarten, students report feelings of not connecting and being alienated from the school setting (Hawkins et al., 2000; Robson, 2003). Alienated students are described as those individuals who live on the borders of the school (Tyree Smith & Goc-Karp, 1994), the student who considers him or herself an outcast socially (Rodriguez, 1997) and academically, or "students who are reluctant to maintain the charade of acceptable behavior in school" (Carley, 1994, p. 221).

Adolescents spend a significant portion of their time in school, and "it is the role of the school to see that they are prepared for society and future employment" (Brown et al., 2003a, p. 3). Yet many students such as students from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and students with non-traditional family circumstances are disengaging from school or completely dropping out without being appropriately prepared socially or academically for future responsibilities (Brown et al., 2003a; Calabrese, 1987, 1990; Gullota, 2001; Mau, 1992; Oerlemans & Jenkins, 1998).

Drawing heavily from the work of the 1970s and 1980s, Mau (1992) identified four dimensions that guide the research of alienation in schools. They are: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social estrangement. With the identification and investigation of these dimensions, alienation is being viewed as having a direct relationship to the success or the lack of success within the school (Brown et al., 2003a).

An alienating school environment can produce negative and disruptive behaviors which may lead to non-completion. These behaviors include hostility, passivity, withdrawal, lack of sense of responsibility for learning and getting work done, poor quality work, disinterest, and lack of involvement and initiative (Williamson & Cullingford, 1998). Gullotta (2001) suggests certain stresses of adolescence such as hormonal changes, preoccupation with self, and peer relationships in combination with a school system which tends toward discriminatory, sexist, and elitist practices may contribute to the alienation of students.

Who are the alienated? When discussing the construct of alienation, it would be remiss not to discuss who these alienated students are. Hixon and Tinzmann (1990), as reported in Rodriguez (1997), wrote that historically students at risk of school failure are those "whose appearance, language, culture, values, communities, and family structures do not correspond to those of the dominant white culture that schools were designed to serve and support" (p.2). Not all students claiming a sense of alienation in schools are students of color or of poverty, however, in the case of student alienation these populations tend to be overrepresented (Davison Avilés et al., 1999; Goodwin, 2000; Kawakami, 1994; Rodriguez, 1997).

Alienated students whose eventual school outcome is academic failure and non-completion are especially high among the nations' underrepresented populations (Davison Avilés et al., 1999; Goodwin, 2000; Hixon & Tinzmann, 1990; Kawakami 1994; Rodriguez, 1997). The Education Trust's 2002 report "Achievement in America", clearly indicates that low income, African-American and Latino

populations are not achieving the same academic results as their White and Asian counterparts. The Greene and Winters report (2005), conducted on behalf of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, puts high school completion rates for Whites at 78%, the rate at 56% for African-American, 52% for Hispanic, 54% for Native American, and 70% for Asian students. With regard to the Pacific Northwest, specifically the states of Washington and Oregon, the overall completion rates were 72 and 71 percent respectively, with completion rates for students of color slightly above the national rates (Greene & Winters, 2005). According to the Educational Testing Service (2005), the national completion rate stands at 77.1% and at 71 and 72 percent for Washington and Oregon. Completion rates have remained relatively unchanged over the past decade, ranging from 69 – 73% since 1991 (Greene & Winters, 2005).

These most recent statistics indicate students of color both nationally and in the Pacific Northwest are three times more likely to become non-completers. It is also a fact that students of poverty and of color are disproportionately on the receiving end of school suspensions, expulsions, and disciplinary action (Davison Avilés et al., 1999; Kawakami, 1994; Rodriguez, 1997). Such research results appear to indicate underrepresented student populations are greatly impacted by the effects of individual teacher's attitudes, discriminatory school policies, and ineffective and unfair disciplinary practices. Viewing non-completion as a possible resultant behavior of school alienation may explain the high number of underrepresented youth who express feelings of non-attachment and lack of relevancy in public high school (Kawakami, 1994).

Contributing school factors and the impact of school climate

Researchers have consistently cited the school environment as a major cause of

adolescent alienation (Calabrese, 1987) and have identified factors which contribute to

the level of alienation experienced by students (Brown et al., 2003a). Some of the

school factors that have been linked with increased student alienation are:

1. A student's perception of a lack of control; a school's maintenance of high control

environments (Calabrese & Seldin, 1986);

2. The degree of social acceptance (Taylor, 1999) and peer to peer relationships

(Valverde, 1987);

3. Teacher expectations and value placed on school work (Kunkle, Thompson, &

McElhinney, 1973);

4. The perceived relevancy of the school curriculum (Kunkel et al, 1973);

5. School culture (Calabrese & Seldin, 1986; Calabrese & Noboa, 1995); and

6. Discriminatory practices based on race, ethnicity, linguistic difference,

socioeconomic status, ableness, intelligence, and gender (Brown et al., 2003b;

Calabrese, 1987, 1989; Calabrese & Raymond, 1989; DeSurra & Church, 1994;

Gullotta, 2001; Rodriguez, 1997; Sikkink, 1999; Wehlage, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter,

1986).

Feeling alienated from the school environment is a negative consequence of these

factors or combination of factors which exists in schools (Calabrese & Noboa, 1995;

Staples, 2000; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986) and will continue to "negatively affect the

self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-direction of some students" (Brown et al.,

2003a, p. 6).

     Behaviors which may indicate a student might feel alienated from the system

are numerous and varied. McMillan (1992) created the following list:

1. Behavior problems – "in trouble" in school or community,
   acting out behavior, disruptive in learning environment.
2. Potentiality to attempt or complete suicide.
3. Absenteeism.
4. Lack of respect for authority, feelings of alienation from
   school authorities.
5. Grade retention – especially in early grades.
6. Suspensions/expulsions.
7. Course failure, poor academic record.
8. Tracking/ability grouping.
9. Dissatisfaction and frustration with school.
10. Lack of available and adequate counseling opportunities.
11. Inadequate school services – mental health, social services
    and health services,
12. School climate hostile to students who do not "fit the norm" (p.11).

Students may select such behaviors based on the discord that may exist in their

personal worlds, however, our general understanding of the personal experiences of

alienated students such as Kip Kinkel, the young man who in 1998 killed both his

parents and then shot and killed two students and injured 25 others at Thurston High

School in Springfield, Oregon, indicate that schools did play a role in exacerbating the

individual's sense of alienation (Edwards & Mullis, 2001; Smokowski & Kapasz,

2005).

     Both teachers and administrators contribute to the creation and maintenance of

a school culture which may undermine the efforts of less privileged and already

reluctant learners (Goodwin, 2000; Wehlage, 1986). According to Clark and Peterson

(1986), the most important beliefs teachers have about students are those which deal

with the teacher's perceptions of the causes of student's behavior. A teacher's beliefs

about whom and how students are form quickly and suggest "failing students gain

information about the causes of their failure from the affective displays of teachers"

(Graham, 1990, p.18). The tremendous power a school staff has to shape the

perceptions and attitudes of a student body is awesome when used to promote school

success and criminal when applied poorly and without regard to consequences

(Graham).

School becomes a toxic environment for many students because it represents a

constant source "of failure and frustration at a time of development when they need a

sense of success and a positive image of themselves in relation to a complex world"

(Wehlage, 1986, p. 20). Using the High School and Beyond (HS&B) dataset, Wehlage

identified three variables which indicate how schools send out signals to youth that

they are "neither able or worthy enough to continue to graduation" (p.21). The three

indicators are as follows: (a) perceived teacher interest in students, (b) the

effectiveness of the school's discipline system, and (c) the fairness of the school's

discipline system. Wehlage explains his conclusions by stating:

> [T]hese student views are based on day to day school experiences
> with adults, the procedures of the bureaucracy and the way in which
> routine conflicts are handled. The perceptions of these youth must be
> taken seriously as indicators of the extent to which public schools are
> alienating institutions. Dropping out is the observable evidence of that
> alienation in which one recognizes that school has rejected the person
> and the person reciprocates by rejecting the school. (p.21)

In other words, alienated students, even decades after Wehlage's statement, continue to experience the realities of being powerless, perceiving no relevant meaning to class and school activities, not buying into authoritative norms, and feeling socially isolated. The focus on and value of these student experiences can contribute greatly to our general understanding of the relationship between student behavior and a school's climate.

Peer to peer relations. For many young people, the school experience is filled with ambiguity. School is a place that can be incredibly alienating, but at the same time, it can be an important place for social connection with peers, teachers, and administrators (Brown et al., 2003a). The school provides many adolescents with a common meeting place, and often times a refuge from family or community tension and potential harm. Nevertheless, school as a socializing place can be a negative experience for many indicating that something about school and how it functions is wrong (Calabrese, 1986).

Given the stage of social and emotional development of secondary students, peer relations have been shown to cause a discernable impact on a student's educational experience (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Hawkins et al., 2000). Peers who associate with other alienated students are recipients of negative peer pressure, have a lowered resistance to peer pressure, are considered high-risk adolescents, are likely to exhibit rebellious behaviors and attitudes, and be at risk for academic failure (Dryfoos, 1990).

The need to belong is powerful and when feeling rejected an adolescent is not likely to respond well to adult intervention, either at school or at home (Smokowski & Kapasz, 2005). In a hostile or toxic school culture, many students become victims of peer to peer abuse such as harassment, bullying, and relational aggression. Left unchecked or unobserved by adults, these students become isolated, untrusting, marginalized, and alienated (Smokowski & Kapasz).

The literature offers multiple interventions and strategies for eliminating peer based alienating school factors (Mau, 1992). However, there appears to be no clear-cut solution to or noticeable reduction of student alienation based on the research thus far. Nor is there research which may indicate the extent peer related abuse has on a student's decision to utilize behaviors of non-compliance or reject the system by not completing a diploma program.

Other contributing factors. The assumption that school structure and operating procedures are wholly accountable for the experience of alienation and at-risk behaviors of students is unfair. The human condition is complex, multi-faceted, and must be viewed in context. Equally unfair is any statement that attributes lack of school success and alienation entirely to the circumstances related to home and family. However, factors such as poverty, community disorganization, substance abuse, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, low level parental involvement, exposure to violence, and various forms of societal prejudice and discrimination contribute to student's feelings of low self-worth and rejection (Hawkins et al., 2000; Rodriguez,

1997; Staples, 2000; Wehlage, 1986), which, at school, may translate into reluctant and unmotivated learners.

The concern adults no longer provide young people with their basic needs has been legitimized by the high numbers of single-parent families, having both parents in the work force, and higher numbers of students working fifteen and more hours weekly (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Calabrese, 1987; Gullotta 2001). And while the family remains a powerful influence in the life of an adolescent, "it is no longer the primary influence" (Gullotta, 2001, p.152). Calabrese (1990) supports the concept by summarizing "social forces alienate the family and cause a high level of stress, which in turn has a negative impact on the children. These children often view the world, their parents, peers, and teachers with suspicion" (p.436.) Puttnam (2000) attributes the alienation of our youth to globalization. The rationale being proposed is that no longer can young people rely on finding safety and stability in the traditional arrangement of nuclear family and hometown values. Therefore, teachers and administrators daily face the challenges of disadvantaged, dislocated, and disheartened learners walking into the classrooms. School, then, has been assigned a dual role in United States society: to educate and prepare youth for adulthood according to the values and vision of those in power (Rodriguez, 1997), and to provide sanctuary or refuge for the dislocated (Puttnam, 2000) and disempowered.

Outcomes of student alienation

The general understanding of the school experiences of Kip Kinkel and Columbine High School shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold strongly suggest that

school environments exacerbate feelings of alienation (Edwards & Mullis, 2001; Smokowski & Kapasz, 2005). Bullying, teasing, and harassment are intentional behaviors often perpetrated at school and are considered precursors to teen suicides, homicides, and other acts of violence (Hazler & Denham, 2002). Moreover, adolescents who are alienated often become adults who are socially alienated, who live in poverty, and who are politically powerless (Oerlemans & Jenkins, 1998).

Such severe consequences as suicide and homicide are the less prevalent outcomes suggested in adolescent alienation research (Hawkins et al., 2000), though more prevalent than is acceptable. A more likely outcome is academic failure. The amount of literature and possible theories that attempt to explain why a third of our youth fail to obtain the expected minimal level of education is daunting (ETS, 2005). A myriad of studies quantify students' failure to complete high school in terms of race, gender, age, and socio-economic status (ETS, 2005). Additionally, studies and reports compare non-completion rates from county to county, state to state, and country to country. Other studies attempt to explain why students voluntarily leave school and others identify the factors that may contribute to a student's non-completion (Greene & Winters, 2005).

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2005), the primary reasons students left school before graduation was "school was not for me," poor grades, being offered a job, not getting along with teachers, and expulsion or suspension. These studies support the findings concerning the significance of school–related factors, stating that the most common explanation for leaving school is poor

academic performance (Calabrese, 1990; Mau, 1997; Rodriguez, 1997). Poor academic achievement is the single most common characteristic of potential non-completers, and misbehavior in school is another significant school-related factor in predicting who will drop out (Brown et al., 2003a; Brown et al., 2003b; Hawkins et al., 2000; NCES, 2005).

Consequences of academic failure, which are identified in the work of Arndt (1994) and Asche (1993) include the following:

1. As the pool of dropouts continues to grow, employment opportunities for them are more limited because today's economy requires of the labor force increased literacy, more education, enhanced technological skills, and lifelong learning.

2. The rate of engagement in high-risk behaviors such as premature sexual activity, early pregnancy, delinquency, crime, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide has been found to be significantly higher among non completers.

3. Non completers are more likely than other citizens to draw on welfare and other social programs throughout their lives.

4. Income differences between non completers and other citizens can be expected to widen as the economy evolves.

5. A growth of unskilled laborers in low-wage jobs will increase the trend toward developing a large American underclass which "some analysts argue...threatens the continuing existence of a democratic way of life" (Asche 1993, p. 13).

Leaving school early, regardless of the cause, presents a serious national, state, and local problem. There are economic and social repercussions for the society as a

whole, in addition to severe consequences to the well being of the individual (Dunn, Chambers, & Rabren, 2005). Understanding the relationship between academic failure, non-completion, and adolescent alienation appears to be a significant endeavor when considering that a third of our adolescents do not complete a diploma program (ETS, 2005).

Role of school counselors and counselor educators.

In an era of legislative initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2001), schools find themselves under significant public pressure to ensure all students achieve high academic standards and become functional, contributing citizens. Counseling in schools implies a set of competencies on the part of professional school counselors that will enable them to effectively address the personal, inter- and intrapersonal, and structural challenges that tend to stifle academic success for scores of young people (Hernández & Seem, 2004).

The professional school counselor is a certified/licensed educator trained in school counseling with unique qualifications and skills to address all students' academic, personal/social and career development needs (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2003). The charge of a professional school counselor is to implement a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student achievement. Their work is differentiated by attention to developmental stages of student growth, including the needs, tasks and student interests related to those stages (Bemak, 2000; Lee, 1998; Stone & Hanson, 2002).

Professional school counselors serve a vital role in maximizing student achievement. Incorporating leadership, advocacy and collaboration, professional school counselors promote equity and access to opportunities and rigorous educational experiences for all students (Gysbers & Henderson, 1998, 2002). Professional school counselors support a safe learning environment and work to safeguard the human rights of all members of the school community (Bemak, 2000; Lee, 1998; Stone & Hanson, 2002). This role as advocate incorporates the belief that, to fight injustices, individual and collective action that lead toward improving conditions for the benefit of both individuals and groups are necessary (House & Martin, 1998).

Many authors have encouraged school counselors and counselor educators to see themselves as student advocates, educational leaders and social change agents (ASCA, 2003; Clark & Stone, 2000; House & Martin, 1998; Stone & Clark, 2001). They have suggested that school counselors and counselor educators play a powerful role in (a) promoting student advocacy, (b) developing higher educational and career aspirations in students, (c) eradicating educational practices such as student tracking that inadvertently maintain inequities among disadvantaged student groups and stratify opportunities, and (d) using data to identify educational practices that may help or hinder student progress.

Counselors and counselor educators have tremendous power to shape and influence the school environment that will be interpreted by students as either inviting or oppressive. The literature indicates that school climate impacts a student's willingness to cooperate and participate in the school program. The literature also

indicates certain populations of students are more susceptible to a school's alienating

conditions (Calabrese & Seldin, 1986; Mau, 1989, 1992; Rafalides & Hoy, 1971;

Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). The relationship between these alienating factors and

student outcomes appears to be causal (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005), though little

qualitative data exists to verify such a theory. Providing students who have

experienced alienation in school the opportunity to express their attitudes and feelings

seems to be a critical step in the process of understanding the phenomenon itself.

Need for the study

Both anecdotally and theoretically, the literature portrays adolescence as a

stressful and critical time in terms of lifespan development (Calabrese, 1987; Gullota,

2001). The literature indicated academic failure is reaching epidemic proportions in

high schools and the consequences for non-completers and underachievers have

become increasingly serious (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Academic failure is especially

high among the nations' underrepresented populations (Davison Avilés et al., 1999;

Kawakami, 1994; Hixon & Tinzmann, 1990; Rodriguez, 1997; Suh & Satcher, 2005)

and researchers have found that the school environment often plays a critical role in a

student's decision to leave school before diploma completion (Eckert, 1989; Farmer &

Payne, 1992; Kronick & Harcis, 1998; Roderick, 1993; Wehlage, 1989).

Whereas alienation from school is a relatively new construct in educational

literature, it has become quite a useful tool in understanding student behavior (Trusty

& Dooley-Dickey, 1993). Counselors working in schools or agencies have a

responsibility to understand the experiences of alienated students (Kaplan & Geoffroy,

1990; Sagor, 2002; Suh & Satcher, 2005). If counselors do not understand how

schools contribute to student's experiences of alienation, they will not be able to

identify and assist those students who are struggling. Suh and Satcher (2005)

described this need for a better understanding of student experiences when they stated:

> School counselors … should recognize that these students have
> unique needs. The failure of these youth in school seems to stem
> from hopelessness and helplessness. School counselor's attention
> to [these] youth's educational, personal, and occupational goals
> may infuse hope into their lives (p. 433).

A greater understanding of the experience of alienated and marginalized students and

the challenges they face is pivotal to the development of counseling programs that

address these concerns and take a preventive stance.

The movement toward the implementation of comprehensive school counseling

programs is based on promoting professional school counselors as educational leaders,

social justice advocates, and agents of systemic change (Education Trust, 2003).

Counselors can be in a position to target certain student populations and

developmental concerns at the earliest levels and occurrences enabling students to

learn and socialize in a safe, equitable environment.

Having knowledge of the experiences of alienated students in schools can only

be achieved through an increase in research. Counselor educators and counselors who

work with youth have a responsibility to learn about these experiences and identify

preventive measures based on those experiences. Smith (2000) calls for further

research in this fashion: "There is a relative dearth of critical interpretive research on

marginalized youth. There is significant need for research that furthers theoretical and

empirical understanding of how these youths experience school" (p. 293). Smith

elaborates:

> …the vast majority of current delinquency and education research,
> while providing important and relevant information, is limited to
> its adherence to the positivist paradigm and quantitative methods.
> I suggest that researchers must critically investigate the schooling
> objectives and processes to explore how the educational system may
> be implicated in reproducing marginalized youth's academic failure
> and delinquency (p. 294).

Qualitative research reveals or recounts the experiences of the students themselves or

enhances the knowledge of the student perspective with regard to alienation and

academic failure is quite limited (Finn, 1996; Smith, 2000). Also missing from the

available literature is student voice in regard to the alienating forces such as school

setting, language, gender, poverty, and ethnic prejudice (Finn, 1996). This study will

attempt to answer Smith's call to research the school experience of youth and address

the limitations of the existing research.

Theoretical framework

The charge of a qualitative researcher is to make sense of the experiences of

participants, to interpret their stories, and determine if there may be theories that

explain the behavioral phenomenon (Stein, 2004). An interpretivist framework

attempts to describe meanings, understand participants' definitions of the situation, and

examine how realities are produced (Gephart, 1999). Gephart continues:

> Interpretivists assume that knowledge and meaning are acts of
> interpretation hence there is no objective knowledge which is
> independent of thinking, reasoning humans. There are many
> interpretivist and constructionist genres but central to all of these
> has been a concern with subjective meanings -- how individuals
> or members of society apprehend, understand and make sense of

social events and settings (the idea of interpretation) and how
this sensemaking produces features of the very settings to which
sensemaking is responsive (1999, para. 34).

Research from an interpretivist paradigm seeks to explore or explain a phenomenon

and "the key task for interpretive research is to uncover how meanings and reality are

constructed by individuals" (Smith, 2000, p.304). Consequently, the key to

understanding the experience of the alienated student was to provide that student an

opportunity to share the meaning that he constructed of the school experience.

Toward this end, this study has utilized a humanistic/post modern paradigm

which recognizes reality as a human, social construction in which its truths or stories

are created in context. The humanistic understanding of the person considers each

individual within his or her intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural, spiritual, political,

economic, and historical contexts. The humanistic perspective emphasizes the

uniqueness of the individual and the subjectivity of how reality is perceived.

Humanistic theory centers on the belief that human nature is basically positive and

individuals possess the skills to direct their own behavior in a purposeful and

meaningful direction (Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Morgan, 1997). And since research

conducted within this framework exposes and releases a dimension to a phenomenon

that a quantitative, positivist frame does not (Sutton, 1993), this paradigm has

empowered the participants to focus on the reality or truth of their experience in

relation to the contexts in which it happened.

Fundamental philosophies in humanistic psychology are its recognition of and

focus on the significant role and function of subjectivity in people's lived experience

(Corey, 2001; Frankl, 1978; May and Yalom, 2000; Rogers, 1987). In the interest of

exposing the human element of a phenomenon, a multicultural lens was utilized to

allow the researcher to ground the research in the lived experiences of the participants

(Morrow, Rakhsha, & Castañeda, 2001). Lived experience has been defined as "the

stories and narratives that people share about themselves and their world" (Ingram,

2001). Utilizing a multicultural perspective has provided the researcher an opportunity

to "reveal unique socialization processes that nurture and legitimize different ways of

knowing" (Morrow et al., p. 576). In order to make a shift from a Eurocentric

"compass" that reflects the perspectives of White, middle-class males (Sue, 1999), this

multicultural researcher used the participants as the compass in that the participants

directed the nature and direction of the research journey, and "meanings [were] made

of the data from the ground up, that is, from the lived experiences of the individuals

and cultures under investigation" (Morrow et al., p. 576).

A humanistic, multicultural framework addressed issues of context, power, and

voice as core concerns, particularly related to marginalized peoples (Morrow et al.,

2001). Research in counseling, traditionally influenced by ethnocentric research

traditions, has neither been bias free nor inclusive (Stanfield, 1994). Scheurich and

Young (1997) stated traditional research paradigms have institutionalized

"epistemological racism" by creating the impression that the dominant research

paradigm is "universalistic, rather than pluralistic" (Stanfield, 1994, p. 177). Such

impressions result in rigid and narrow understandings (Espin, 1997; Morrow et al.,

2001) of both phenomena and marginalized people. Thus qualitative research in

counseling has benefited from a humanistic, multicultural paradigm in its attempts to

"address problems of external validity, everyday wisdom, culture and context,

privilege and power, and oppression" (Morrow et al., 2001, p. 577).

A humanistic, multicultural paradigm purposefully attended to the complex

contextual nuances of a lived experience. A recent study (Reisetter, 2004) indicated

that a qualitative framework is a "natural fit" for many counselors in that a successful

qualitative inquiry requires an appreciation of the complexities of the human

experience which is an essential quality for an effective counselor. Reisetter and

company (2004, p.11 & 12) state counselors possess validating skills such as

"observation, conversation, participation, and interpretation" and that these skills go

hand in hand with the "conceptualization, reasoning, and analyzing skills associated

with qualitative data analysis".

In addition to the natural fit between qualitative analysis and counselor skillset,

the above mentioned study clarified that a counselor's "personal characteristics such

as openness, reflexivity, and respect for client's unique experiences and meaning-

making" (Hoshmand, 1998, p. 22) are equally necessary in qualitative research. When

focusing on the lived experiences of marginalized people, Smith (2000) puts it this

way:

> Quite simply, researchers need to spend time with youths and
> examine their schools and experiences in a critical, interpretive
> framework. Without a critical and qualitative analysis, informed
> by critical pedagogy perspectives, one cannot expect to discover
> and analyze the possible significance of the school process for
> marginalized youths' school failure and alienation. Students would
> no longer be considered outcome statistics who simply "pass," "fail,"
> or "drop out of" school (p.305).

Smith (2000) postulates that it is of extreme importance to the educational community to "uncover how school experiences may help create youth's alienation from school" (p.299).

The theoretical framework guiding this research has encompassed providing a voice to the alienated student and valuing the meaning those students have made of that experience. The questions to the participants, framed though a humanistic and multicultural lens, centered on what attitudes and perceptions these former students possessed and what meaning they gave to the experience of being alienated.

Rationale for the use of phenomenology

This research study utilized the phenomenological method of inquiry. A phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for a number of individuals about a particular concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenologists, according to Polkinghorne (1989), explore the structures of consciousness in human experiences. Coming from the Duquesne Studies in Phenomenology, the central tenets are

> …to determine what an experience means for the persons who have
> had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description
> of it. From the individual descriptions, general or universal meanings
> are derived, in other words, the essences of structures of the experience
> (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

A key tenet of the phenomological study would be to determine what an experience meant for the individuals who have had it (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenologist is concerned with understanding certain behaviors from that individual's or group's point of view. Phenomenological inquiry requires that researchers go through a series

of steps in which they try to eliminate their own assumptions and biases, examine the phenomenon without presuppositions, and describe the deep structure of the phenomenon based on internal themes that are discovered (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Moustakas, 1994).

A primary focus of a phenomenological study is to determine the meaning individuals make of an experience, the meaning individuals give to the data in narrative form. Research that employs self-report data fails to ascertain what school failure and lack of connectedness mean to the youth in question. In general, student voices are not well represented in most educational research (Arnett, 1996; Brown et al., 2003b; Smith, 2000) and youths have rarely been given the opportunity to express themselves in narrative form, and a positivist-quantitative framework simply does not present the voices/narratives of students (Smith, 2000). Therefore, this phenomenological study has facilitated an in-depth examination of the schooling processes and the significance of these processes on a student's academic progress and social connectedness. Important questions were realized by the gathering and interpretation of narrative data. Schools are institutions that are embedded within social structures and the ability to contextualize them through the lens of the alienated student has produced a critical understanding of the relationship between schools and these youth and thus might help to create a better educational experience (Smith, 2000).

Research question and purpose of the study

The general question of this study was: How do male students who leave school before diploma completion as a result of alienation perceive their school experience and how has that experience impacted their lives? The salient components of this question were "how," "perceive," "school experience," and "impacted". The word "how" indicated an openness to anything whatsoever that would emerge during the course of interviews with participants. The word "perceive" denoted the recognition of the individual nature of experience for the participants. The words "school experience" pointed to the fact comprehensive accounts were sought from the participants based on their experience of alienation in a school setting. The word "impacted" implied participants made self-constructed meaning from their experiences and that meaning might influence the future choices they make and options they have.

This study explored the experiences of alienated males from public high schools that were non-completers. Public schools in the state of Oregon were the designated setting from which participants were identified as these were the schools from which access was possible. Participants ranged in age from 16 – 19, and were initially identified by school personnel such as counselors and administrators as having left school before diploma completion because they indicated that they felt alienated by the school system. These former students were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Participants will be males between the ages of 16 and 19. Research indicates that

males have a higher probability of becoming non-completers than do females (Greene,

2001; ETS, 2005);

2. Participants will have either voluntarily or involuntarily left school in the past

eighteen months;

3. Participants will agree with the identification of "alienated" and be able to clearly

articulate their thoughts and feelings regarding their experience of alienation;

4. Participants will be available and agree to meet a minimum of four times for the

purpose of data collection and verification; and

5. Participants will identify either English or Spanish as their first language.

Although other criteria such as females, differing age groups, first language other than

English, students of color, and students of poverty would provide "information-rich"

and worthy data for study, by limiting this study to the above criteria, research results

are more narrowly focused and have provided a depth of understanding unique to this

population (Coyne, 1997).

This study reflects the impact the school culture and climate has had on these

participants as well as the attitudes they had regarding the worth and value of a high

school education and a high school experience. Utilizing a conversational format of

openness and flexibility, participants were afforded an opportunity to share the

experiences and perceptions of alienation. This study has provided an opportunity for

a greater understanding of the opinions and experiences of alienated former high

school students.

It was the goal of this study to further the understanding of how alienated youths experience school and to contribute a piece of critical interpretive research which has addressed this phenomenon. Through this research, the school counseling community will have gained a broader understanding of the experience of alienated students as they experienced public school. With this additional knowledge counselors will be able to create and implement appropriate and supportive interventions. For counselor educators, this study will provide information that is valuable as they train new school counselors working with this population.

An objective in carrying out this research was to obtain narrative data and provide rich descriptions of the experiences of alienation from students who failed to graduate from a public school in Oregon between the years 2004 and 2006.

Limitations of the Study

This was a qualitative study of the phenomenon of alienation as experienced by five young men, aged 16 – 19, who failed to earn a high school diploma in which I examined their understanding of their school experiences and the meanings they attached to these experiences. Participants were encouraged to reflect on and write about their own life circumstances.

Narrative and open-ended questioning techniques were used as the primary method for investigating the complex understandings these participants had about their school experiences. While survey and telephone methods with large numbers of respondents are useful for collecting data that are broad in scope, the narrative method is used more appropriately over an extended period of time with smaller numbers of

participants to elicit deeper and more complex understandings. This study focused on an in-depth examination of the understandings participants had about their school experiences and for this reason was limited to five participants.

This was a study of alienated male student's experiences. It was not a study of institutions, programs, curriculum or academic disciplines. The in-depth nature of the study and the small number of participants necessarily limited the degree to which the findings might be generalized to alienated students as a whole. The phenomenological method, in conjunction with a critical interpretive conceptual lens, was used to develop deeper understandings of participant's school experiences and the meanings they attached to these experiences. The findings that have emerged from this methodological approach will serve to enhance our understanding of the factors that influence student's meaning making in ways that would otherwise be impossible to discover using traditional survey techniques. One further comment with respect to the limitations of the findings is worthy to note: the findings in this study reflect the participant's recollections of their school experiences and therefore carry all the limitations of any self-reported data.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

The following literature review explores the conceptual areas that may be relevant to the study of alienation in the school setting. The conceptual areas include: the phenomenon of alienation and disconnectedness, academic failure in public high school, risk factors that contribute to youth alienation, specific school factors that contribute to youth alienation, failure of the school system to address student needs, and the role school counselors and counselor educators have in advocating for these students.

The Construct of Alienation

Throughout the 20th century, the concept of alienation has received substantial attention in the social sciences. Since its introduction by Hegel and Marx, this concept has been defined in a variety of ways that reflect the various disciplines and specific views of the researchers who study it (Lacourse, Villeneuve, & Claes, 2003; Williamson & Cullingford, 1997, 1998). Alienation research peaked during the 1970s and has received declining attention until recently. This concept has been criticized as being used too broadly to describe nearly any kind of aberrant behavior, "ranging from political manifestations to psychopathology" (Lacourse et al., 2003, p. 639). Nonetheless, there has been a recent upsurge of interest in applying the concept to adolescents' experiences, most specifically their scholastic experience (Arnett, 1996; Mau, 1989, 1992; Roberts, 1987; Williamson & Cullingford, 1997, 1998).

Alienation in school settings can best be described as a process (Carlson, 1995) or contextually relevant rather than a personality trait or a state of being (Dean, 1961). Alienation can be influenced by a variety of factors, including factors from the home and from within the adolescents themselves. What is alienating will also depend on the context and the circumstances, as it is not a static phenomenon (Cumming, 1996). While all adolescents experience potentially alienating contexts, there appears to be a threshold at which adolescents are no longer able to tolerate what is happening to them, and they exhibit behaviors commonly associated with alienation (Tripp, 1986).

Alienation among adolescents has been primarily attributed to school organization (Rafalides & Hoy, 1971) and the adolescent's home environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1986). Bronfenbrenner (1986) described alienation as a lack of a sense of belonging, and feeling cut off from family, friends, or school; it is the inability to connect meaningfully with other people. For adolescents and for purposes of this proposal, "*alienation* signifies a separation or distance among two or more entities and involves a sense of anguish or loss, resulting in a student viewing life and school as fragmentary and incomplete" (Brown et al., 2003a, p, 4, italics in original text). And while many discussions in the literature explain various strategies for decreasing adolescent alienation in schools (Brown et al., 2003a), there is little discussion regarding how the alienated students themselves experience and make meaning of the process of becoming and being alienated.

Student alienation. Whereas alienation from school is a relatively new construct in educational literature, it has become quite a useful tool in understanding student

behavior (Trusty & Dooley-Dickey, 1993). School becomes an undesirable place for many youth because "…it represents failure and frustration at a time when they need a sense of success and a positive image of themselves in relation to a complex world" (Wehlage, 1986, p. 20). Students are at risk of alienation when their circumstances place them at a disadvantage in the classroom and in the hallways. For many individuals, the decision to leave school or to remain as an alienated student stems from an accumulated sense of alienation that develops from an interaction of family background and school experiences (Wehlage, 1986). Drawing heavily from the work of the 1970's and adapting it to adolescents, Mau (1992) identified four dimensions that have guided the research of alienation in schools. They are: (a) powerlessness, the inability to control the forces that surround one's life, (b) meaninglessness, the inability to see purpose in one's life or work, (c) normlessness, the refusal to accept life's societal restrictions, and (d) social estrangement, the separation from significant others. All of these dimensions relate to common problems in school such as absenteeism, low commitment to school work, and academic underachievement (Calabrese, 1990).

Powerlessness manifests when a student places value on a goal, but at the same time has low expectations of realizing that goal (Mau, 1992). Teachers and administrators have all the power to indicate whether or not a student is successful, and students become increasingly more critical and less tolerant of this authority (Rafalides & Hoy, 1971). According to Brown et al. (2003a, p. 4), "when students believe that there is little they can personally do to influence their future in school,

they disengage from the process." These students learn that their complaints and concerns go unheard and eventually rebellious behaviors such as skipping class, not doing or turning in homework, and thwarting school norms and rules replace efforts to learn (Mau, 1992).

Meaninglessness refers to the issue of relevancy and significance. Students may perceive a limited relationship between the present expectations of school work and the future requirements of job and adulthood (Mau, 1992). One can look to the continuing conflicts arising from Oregon's School to Work movement as well as the No Child Left Behind legislation to understand how meaningful working for an intangible future outcome (or a CIM certificate) is to modern students, and especially those with already limited aspirations. Students, who do not feel important or significant in positive ways, will often look for importance in negative (Edwards & Mullis, 2001).

Normlessness refers to the belief on the part of students that socially disapproved of behavior is necessary in order to achieve school goals (Mau, 1992). Brown et al. (2003a) provide examples such as cheating on a test in order to get a good grade, praise from an adult, or believing that a D is an acceptable grade. The insight that Mau offers in describing this behavior is as follows:

> Organizational practices of meritorious grading and curriculum grouping (tracking) as well as teacher expectations not only create different learning environments, but accentuate academic differences among students (McPartland & McDill, 1982). Through social comparison processes, students in marginal positions are not integrated into the normative school structure (p.732).

Social estrangement is the result of a student's inability or unwillingness to integrate into the school's social existing network (Brown et al., 2003a). A student who feels estranged typically doesn't accept the goals and values of a school and tends to reject school and all that it stands for (Rafalides & Hoy, 1971.) Brown et al. (2003a) describe socially isolated students as those who cannot name anyone at school that they trust or can confide in, and that often there is no one to turn to for support, either at school or at home.

Alienating factors in schools. When applying the four dimensions of adolescent alienation to a school setting, Rodriguez (1997) used the term "outcast" when referring to alienated students. He describes the phenomenon as being "a combination of student behavioral factors ranging from how often a student does not arrive prepared for school to occurrences of suspensions and arrests" (p.1). The student becomes a casualty of a struggle for dominance where the rules of engagement are not quite clear to them. Rodriguez explains: "Some students are casualties because like soldiers in war they confront unknown enemies and perils. Students become casualties when they are unprepared for the demands of an alien and sometimes hostile environment" (p.1). Schools have become for many students "alien environments" (p.1) where the relevancy regarding learning is lost. Students eventually "lose trust, lose interest, feel defeated, act out violently, or passively submit . . ." (p.1). It is at this point that the learner will fail and is lost to the school system.

Studies indicate that increasing numbers of students are feeling subjugated by an oppressive educational system where they find little value and relevance to their

own needs (Swaminathan, 2003). They behave in ways that both define them and alienate them from their schools and their families. The irony is not lost that school, once thought to be the safest place for a student other than home, has become enemy territory. Alienation for some may be explained as a "giving in" to the rigid structures of a school, a capitulation to authority. The authoritarian and hierarchical structure of the system inhibits students' opportunities for creativity and individualized learning and, instead, reinforces compliance by promoting "rigid seating arrangements, an overemphasis on being quiet and attentive and therefore non-participatory, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate amount and culturally insensitive teaching materials, and finally, suspensions [which] contribute to a sense of alienation and helplessness" (Rodriguez, 1997, p.3). Many students no longer thrive in school systems which emphasize obedience and conformity in lieu of curiosity and discovery (Swaminathan, 2003). Wehlage's (1989) foundational work provides examples of how school norms and rules constrict rather than facilitate connections for students, and in particular, for those at risk of non-completion.

Alienation is further created by a discrepancy that exists between what is expected by students as a "reasonable educational outcome" (Rodriguez, 1997, p.3) and the reality of what actually happens at the end of the schooling process. This discrepancy leads directly to student feelings of alienation, powerlessness, disappointment, and anger. Learning becomes routine and burdensome as students find ways to act out against an institution whose goals are standardization and certification (Gibson, 2003).

Students from underrepresented groups are particularly vulnerable to alienation as they attempt to navigate a system that seems to impede self-expression and meaningful goals (Gibson, 2003). They are alienated because the school system is ill-prepared to consider their perspectives and unique life circumstances. Increasing evidence shows that when students feel cared for by people at their school and feel part of their school, they are less likely to use substances, engage in violence, or initiate sexual activity at an early age (McNeely et al., 2002; Vasquez, 2000). Being alienated from school can be described as "a feeling of not fitting in," "not being the same as the rest of the school," or "not understanding what I'm supposed to be like" (voices from students, 2005).

The literature identifies specific domains that impact a student's ability to bond to a school and attain academic success. Recent studies have also indicated that many failing students feel as though they are outcast from the school environment (Carley, 1994; Rodriguez, 1997; Staples, 2000), and in particular, underrepresented and other marginalized students feel a greater sense of alienation from the traditional schooling process (Gullotta, 2001; Humphrey, Charlton, & Newton, 2004). Consequently, alienation appears to be a significant factor in a student's academic achievement and social connection to schools, however, little literature addresses how these students perceive and experience alienation in school.

Low Bonding and Disconnection from School

Research generally supports the hypothesis that low bonding, defined as a low commitment to school, low educational aspirations, and little connection to either

academic or extracurricular programming, is a predictive factor of lower academic

performance, alienation, and eventual non-completion (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996).

By studying common activities associated with disconnection, Susman (1996) has

found that those students disconnected three years or longer were:

1. 50 percent less likely to have participated in high school athletics or   related

activities;

2. Much more likely to have had difficulties at school: 56 % versus 18% among men,

36% versus 8% among women;

3. More likely to be imprisoned. Nearly one-third of the men disconnected for more

than three years spent time in a correctional facility compared to 5% of men who were

not disconnected; and

4. Both sexes more likely to report earlier first sexual activities.

McNamara (1998) describes low bonding as "disaffection" and defines it as: "… an

integrated set of negative attitudes, beliefs and behaviors with respect to the demands

of school life" (p.4). Given that today's youth face a myriad of social issues that are

unique to this current generation, including teen pregnancy, substance abuse, the threat

of unprecedented violence, the loss of a care-free childhood, and the invasiveness of

the media into daily living, academic success is one victim to the mind-boggling array

of issues clouding a teenager's mind (Gibson, 2003; McNamara, 1998; Susman, 1996;

Rodriguez, 1997).

        Racial and ethnic youth are particularly at risk for academic difficulties as a

result of low bonding to a school system (Erickson et al., 1996). Erickson reports that

in Fresno County, "Despite the fact that racial and ethnic students make up 66% of the total enrollment, dropout rates are two to three times higher for these students than for White students" (p.1). They continue: "Others have found racial and ethnic students' dropout rates, suspension rates, and placements in mentally or emotionally retarded classes to be disproportionately high" (p.1). Many migrant and underrepresented students fall academically behind as they progress through school (Gibson, 2003). Gibson states that these children are among the most disadvantaged in the United States due to the combined effects of poverty, poor nutrition, high absenteeism from school, family mobility and lack of family cohesiveness. But when explaining the academic success of the migrant and underrepresented students in her study, Gibson (2003) listed the following as some of the contributing factors: constant academic guidance to assure students, after school tutoring, ongoing advocacy and mentoring, and connections to other resources. Of the eight factors Gibson identifies as contributory, four relate to human connections or continuing development of a sense of belonging. She further states that "creating a sense of belonging and community … is essential to creating a sense of school membership" (in Valenzuela, 1997, p.237). According to Gibson then, a sense of belonging may be especially important for migrant and underrepresented students "due to the status differences that exist between them and members of the dominant society" (p.5). Interestingly, school connectedness is "relatively high in racially or ethnically segregated schools and lowest in integrated schools" (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002, p.10).

Given the positive correlation of school connectedness to academic success, especially for underrepresented populations, school systems should be compelled to expend energy and resources in building connections for underrepresented parents as well. In their study, Erickson et al. (1996) hypothesize that racially and ethnically diverse parents also feel a greater sense of alienation manifested in behaviors and attitudes such as shyness, cultural tendencies not to express opinions, feeling unwelcome, language differences and not knowing what to expect. Although results of this study did not support the hypothesis that White parents are more satisfied with their interactions and those of their children at school, the researchers were not satisfied that their research methods evidenced the "real" attitudes of underrepresented parents. They recommended more comprehensive methods to access parent involvement and "teacher connectedness" (p.12) in order to reduce student alienation and further facilitate student belonging to the school program.

Human social development also dictates the value of positive connections of students to the school program. Of critical importance among adolescents is "…learning how to make and keep friends, to become connected to peers, [which has] appeared to be a major preoccupation among the participants to the extent that many of them talked of school principally as a social center rather than as a learning environment" (Dryden, Johnson, & Howard, 1998, p. 13). Robson (2003) found that peer rejection and peer alienation were key determinants of an individuals' willingness to participate in the school and school related activities. Those adolescents with a low

bond to school, whether related to aspects of peer alienation or school alienation, will have lasting negative personal and professional implications.

Research findings suggest a link between greater feelings of connectedness to one's own [peer] group and differentiation of self to others result in stronger relationships with family, significant others and institutions (Skowron, 2004). To extrapolate those findings, it could then be said that a greater sense of belonging to one's own peer group could contribute to more positive attitudes toward school and school programs. If the adage of "it takes a village to raise a child" is to be accepted, then it would behoove any society to cultivate strong connections between individuals at all levels of human interaction, especially with regard to family and school (Robson, 2003). The ability to create a "sense of place" at school appears to have significant impact on student success both academically and socially, which bolsters the most tangible goal of school systems: the earning of a diploma.

Academic Failure

The alienation of adolescents in schools has variously been described in behavioral terms such as students exhibiting poor attendance, feeling a lack of control over their own situation, being unable to keep class or school rules, not having a sense of belonging, or a combination of any of these (Carlson, 1995; Mau, 1992). Alienation has been associated with disruptive behavior (Zubric et al., 1997), absenteeism (Reid, 1981), and the possible result of these persistent behaviors, dropping out (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). The most prevalent resultant behavior associated with alienation in school is poor academic performance and academic failure (Croninger & Lee, 2001;

Fager & Richen, 1999; National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2002;

Whelage & Rutter, 1986).

The literature indicated that academic failure is hitting epidemic proportions in high schools and the consequences for student non-completers and underachievers have become increasingly serious (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Simply defined, academic failure is the inability of a student "to meet current academic standards" (p.6) as determined by federal and state policy and individual school districts (Fager & Richen, 1999). Low performing students experience higher unemployment rates, lower lifelong earnings, higher incidence of criminal activity, and a greater likelihood of health problems than students who complete high school (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Education Testing Service [ETS], 2005; NCES, 2002; Rumberger, 1987). In addition, non-completing students are more likely to receive public assistance than high school graduates who do not go to college (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2003). About one-third of the nation's students are leaving high school without a diploma (ETS, 2005) and the completion rate continues to fall. Though completion rates vary from research study to research study and state to state, recent estimates put the national rate at between 66.1% to 71.0%. Data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (2002) indicated that nearly six percent of students dropout in the first two years of high school and 11% dropout between the 10th and 12th years. One does not have to think too deeply to appreciate the prospects of a society in which a full third of its population do not meet minimum educational standards.

Academic failure and underrepresented youth. Academic failure is especially high among the nations' underrepresented populations (Davison Avilés, Guerrero, Barajas Howarth, & Thomas, 1999; Hixon & Tinzman, 1990; Kawakami, 1994; Rodriguez, 1997). Since 1972, status dropout rates for Whites and African-Americans ages 16–24 have declined, yet rates for Hispanics have not decreased and remain higher than those for other racial/ethnic groups (USDOE, 2003). Chicano/Latinos are the most undereducated ethnic group in the United States (Davison Avilés et al., 1999). Members of this group have a higher non-completion rate and spend less time in school than Asian-Americans, Whites and African-Americans (De La Rosa & Maw, 1990). The U.S. Department of Education Statistical Report (2003) offers this account:

> Racial/ethnic differences exist in the status dropout rates and in the changes in the rates overtime. Each year between 1972 and 2001, the status dropout rate was lowest for Whites and highest for Hispanics. Between 1972 and 2001, the status dropout rates for White and Black young adults declined, while the rate for Hispanics remained relatively constant. The gap between Blacks and Whites narrowed during the 1970s and 1980s, but not in the period since then. Greater dropout rates among Hispanic immigrants partly account for the persistently high dropout rates for all Hispanic young adults (p.12).

Nationally only about 68 percent of students who enter ninth grade graduate four years later with a regular diploma (ETS, 2005). According to a May 2005 report by The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University and the Washington, D.C. based Urban Institute, the graduation rate for White students is 75 percent, while only about half of Black, Latino and Native American students graduate on time. High school

graduation rates are even worse for minority males and for students in the South,

where the majority of the Black population (55 percent) resides (ETS, 2005).

The U.S. Department of Education Statistical Report (2003) states that

Hispanic youth are more likely to be high school non-completers than their peers of

other race and ethnicities. Though non-completion rates have decreased for all

subgroups with the exception of the Chicano/Latinos in the last 50 years, it is still

apparent that students of color and students affected by poverty encompass the largest

percentages of academic underachievers and potential dropouts. The literature clearly

documents the completion rates of all the nation's student populations by category

including race, gender, and income. It cannot be denied that a significant percentage of

our high school aged youth is not meeting societal educational goals and many of the

behaviors associated with their early departure align with those of alienated youth.

Characteristics of non-completers. Many factors have been shown to be related to

students' non-completion of high school such as basic demographic characteristics,

family and personal background, a student's academic history, and characteristics of

the student's school and that "dropping out is a long-term process of disengagement

that occurs over time and begins in the earliest grades" (ETS, 2005, p. 14). All may

influence whether or not a student will stay in school. NCES and other private

research organizations have identified two types of factors, those associated with

families and those related to an individual's experience in school, that are related to

non-completion (ETS, 2005). For example, students from lower income, single parent,

and less educated families often enter school less prepared than children from more

affluent, more highly educated families, and therefore, leave school at a much higher

rate than other students.

According to the report from the National Center for Education Statistics

(NCES, 2002), 66.1% of high school non-completers come from middle income

status. Students tend to drop out of school between the ages of 16 and 18; in fact,

58.6% voluntarily stop attending school during the last two years of high school. Of

the four regions of the United States identified in the study, the South had the highest

non-completion rate, accounting for 45.1% of the non-completers nationwide. Males

are more likely than females to drop out, 57.4 percent to 42.6 percent. The NCES

report also indicates that males drop out sooner than females, with 72.7% of males

dropping out before the 10th grade as opposed to 27.3% for females. Boys cited the

reason "I went to school because I had nothing better to do" which indicates

disengagement, more often than females, 35% to 30%.

Race and ethnicity comprise one set of indicators of underrepresented youth,

gender another. The American Institute for Research (2003) identifies other indicators

which show an increasing number of students are: (a) growing up in single-parent and

otherwise nontraditional family structures, (b) more children living in poverty, and (c)

more children entering school with a primary language other than English and/or with

limited English proficiency. There is some evidence that underrepresented youth may

have different learning styles, which can have a considerable effect on their success in

traditional learning environments (see Gardner, 1983). Overall, the literature appears

to indicate that students with more highly diverse, less privileged backgrounds are

more prone to exhibit alienating behaviors that result in academic non-completion and underachievement.

Boy's voices of non-completion. Gender is consistently used as an identifier in high school at-risk and non-completion statistics. Considerable attention has been given to the problems of in-school discipline and the early leaving of boys in general, and African-American and Hispanic boys specifically (Boyd & Tashakkari, 1994; Monroe, 2005; Vallardes, 2002). It is the gender disparity in discipline and non-completion statistics that has focused this attention on boys (Harrington, 2002). Although this author does not wish to suggest that such statistics and attention regarding girls is not as important an issue, it is still the case that boy's education is being curtailed to an extent that is a justifiable cause for concern (Harrington, 2002).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2005) has provided focus for boys' increasing disengagement from academics. The statistics about boys and their educational experience are evidence of the difference in perceptions and meanings they will provide as opposed to girls. These recent statistics show boys are more likely to repeat a grade, to require special education services, or to be diagnosed with either attention-deficit disorder or hyperactivity. Eighth-grade boys are 50 percent more likely to be held back a grade than girls. By high school, 67 percent of all special-education students are boys. Boys receive 71 percent of all school suspensions and are up to 10 times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with attention-deficit disorder (Pollock).

A 2004 report, *Boy's academic achievement: Putting the findings into perspective,* identifies four factors that highlight the possible reasons boy's may experience schools differently than girls. They are: 1) the influence of socioeconomic background, 2) different attitudes and behaviors with respect to school and learning, 3) the effects of stereotypes, and 4) the influence of peer groups. Exploring the factors that make boy's experiences differ has been the subject of multiple studies that conclude that gender is one of the leading characteristics that tends to differentiate among individual learning styles (Dunn, Thies, & Honigsfeld, 2001; Honigsfeld, 2000.) Honigsfeld and Dunn (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of gender differences in learning styles and concluded that boys and girls often had "distinct environmental, emotional, sociological, physiological, and perceptual learning style attributes" (p. 195). Even Gilligan (1982) has enriched the understanding of this field by pointing out that females process and interpret information distinctly.

Before ultimately failing and leaving the system, students, and in particular boys, exhibit alienating behaviors such as poor attendance and truancy, feeling a lack of control over their own situation, being unable to keep class or school rules, not having a sense of belonging, or a combination of these and other behaviors. Academic failure is the natural resulting behavior of an alienated student finding little or no value in the school program. The literature indicates that students who are subjected to discriminatory and alienating practices in any form are more likely candidates for academic failure and non-completion. Consequently, statistics reveal that underrepresented youth, students from families with lower levels of education and

income are more likely to exhibit alienating behaviors in school, receive disciplinary consequences, and leave school without benefit of a diploma.

Risk Factors for Academic Failure

In order to become aware more specifically of what happens to students as they experience alienation, it is necessary to identify and understand the risk factors that contribute to the process. The increasing numbers of students classified as "at-risk" is said to be one of education's greatest concerns today (Richman, Rosenfeld, & Bowen, 1998). An enormous amount of information exists in educational literature regarding students at risk of school failure. At-risk students are broadly defined as those who are in danger of not graduating from school (Rodriguez, 1997). These potential non-completers can be characterized by a number of factors and behaviors that that lead to educational underachievement (Jordan, 2001; McMillan, 1992; Rodriguez, 1997).

Researchers have suggested that adolescents from broken homes, low socioeconomic environments and from culturally underrepresented environments are prone to become alienated and feel marginalized (Calabrese & Raymond, 1989). These themes have underscored much of the research on adolescent alienation and the risk of academic failure.

Hixon and Tinzman (1990) defined at-risk students as primarily minorities who were poor and considered economically and educationally disadvantaged. Historically, at-risk students were those whose "appearance, language, culture, values, communities, and family structures" did not correspond to those of the dominant culture (Hixon & Tinzman, 1990, p. 47). This traditional view places the burden and

responsibility of school failure wholly on the student and the student's life

circumstances without considering the effect and impact of the school climate or

school processes (Rodriguez, 1997).

The earlier emphasis of identifying at-risk behaviors was on "studying the

correlates to dropouts – to focus on social decay as both the cause of alienation and the

barrier preventing school success in dealing with dropouts" (Kawakami, 1994, p.2).

Kawakami continues:

> Institutions rationalized their plight something like this: it is not
> the school's fault that some students come from poor homes and
> community environments, and lack the motivation and academic
> talent to succeed; the schools are unable to solve these socioeconomic
> determinants and are therefore not responsible for the fact that a
> sizable portion of their clients find good reasons to leave before
> graduation (p.2).

In contrast to the old view, Rodriguez (1997) purported that our schools are

microcosms representative of the socioeconomic dynamics of our society and that the

causalities of school failure are multidimensional.

This multidimensionality is revealed by Hawkins, Herrenkohl, Farrington,

Brewer, Catalano, Harachi, and Cothern's (2000) meta-analysis which discusses five

different domains contributing to academic underachievement, youth alienation, and

youth violence. Individual factors related to alienation included physical traits and

characteristics as well as beliefs and attitudes. Clearly, individual factors are beyond

the schools' or caring adults' ability to modify. Sadly for many students, the same can

be said about family factors. Family factors include (but are not limited to) parent

criminality, poor family management practices, poor family bonding, and family

conflict and parent-child separation. Peer-related factors such as delinquent siblings, delinquent peers and gang membership are contributors to the lack of belonging to a school system. Community and neighborhood factors such as poverty, community disorganization, the availability to drugs, the exposure to crime and all forms of discrimination also combine to alienate a youth from the potentially protective and nurturing environment of a school. The fifth domain, school factors, include academic failure, low bonding to school, truancy and dropping out, and frequent school transitions. Hawkins et al. (2000) concluded that all of the factors work conjointly to determine whether a youth may become alienated and subsequently violent, but it is the school factors and the role of the school system itself that are the primary focus in this literature review. For as Croninger and Lee (2001, p. 549) state: "…schools are central to this developmental process and are an essential source of social capital for adolescents".

Risk factors attributed to schools. Risk for school failure is seldom due to one factor, but a combination of factors (Siu, 1996). Among students identified as having multiple risk factors in the eighth grade, only 60 percent graduated from high school on time, compared to 90 percent of students with no risk factors (Green & Scott, 1995). Students with multiple risk factors were more likely to report getting into trouble at school, being transferred or suspended for disciplinary reasons, being arrested, and being sent to a juvenile detention center (Green & Scott). When identifying the family, school, and societal factors that put a student at risk of academic failure, it is necessary to comprehend the importance of school in the

transition to adulthood. Feeling alienated from and leaving before diploma completion is particularly harmful for adolescents in that these students are cut off from valuable information, developmental opportunities and experiences, and access to resources before they have the capacity to operate without such support (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

In an effort to comprehend the phenomenon of academic failure among high schoolers, the Search Institute (1991) surveyed over 47,000 youth grades 6 – 12 to identify behaviors that potentially limit psychological, physical, or economic well-being during adolescence (Clark, 1995). Behaviors included involvement in alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, sexuality, depression/suicide, anti-social behaviors, poor school attendance and desire to dropout, vehicle safety, and bulimia. It is important here to note that according to the Search Institute's 1991 report "these [behaviors] do not include single incidences of adventure or experimentation, but are persistent patterns of health-compromising and future-jeopardizing behaviors" (p.6). Dryfoos (1990) estimated that one in four 10 - 17 year olds are at high risk of multiple problem behaviors.

School factors typically associated with potential non-completers can be characterized, in part, by low or poor attendance, behavioral conflicts leading to suspensions and expulsions, below level grade performance, and low standardized test scores (Rodriguez, 1997). Other school behaviors can include:

1. Lack of respect for authority, feelings of alienation;

2. Grade retention – especially in early grades;

3. Dissatisfaction and frustration with school;

4. Lack of available and/or adequate counseling opportunities;

5. Inadequate school services;

6. Hostile school climate;

7. Low expectations, low commitment, (as listed in McMillan, 1992).

Doing poorly in school and expecting to do poorly in school are associated with all the risk factors. Being behind in an expected grade level is one of the strongest predictors of all the risk factors (Clark, 1995).

The impact of discipline on students. The forces which lead students to give up on school are well documented: unhappy or dysfunctional homes, poverty and limited parental education, low reading and mathematics achievement, academic retention, etc. Suspensions and expulsions tend to speed up the dropping out process (DeRidder, 1990; Rocha). Being suspended or expelled is one of the top three school-related reasons for non-completion. Students who have been suspended or had trouble with the police are much more likely to become non-completers. Discipline statistics provide impactful data regarding who drops out and when the dropouts occur. The relationship between being suspended or expelled and being a non-completer has been examined, and current literature provides ample evidence that such acts exacerbate the alienation process and expedite the early leaving process (DeRidder, 1990; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Skiba & Rausch, 2004).

A renewed focus on this type of relational data is a result of highly publicized school violence and has centered upon the "zero-tolerance" policies (Rocha). The goal

of zero-tolerance policies is to curtail discipline problems by establishing severe consequences such as suspensions and expulsions for student misconduct (Rocha). While the connection between expulsion and failure to graduate is self-evident, Skiba and Peterson (1999, p. 376) note that suspension is a "moderate to strong predictor of a student's dropping out of school." The authors conclude that suspensions and expulsions appear to be linked to racial and social status discrimination. In addition, school pushouts (a term that describes at-risk students who continually receive signals from their schools that they are neither able nor worthy to continue to graduation and who are frequently encouraged to leave) and early dismissals through suspensions and expulsions appear to be the results of school enrollment patterns, demographics, student backgrounds and attitudes, and school and teacher expectations (DeRidder, 1990; Rocha; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Wehlage, 1986). Additionally, school characteristics such as overall suspension rate, teacher attitudes, administrative centralization, quality of school governance, teacher perception of student achievement, and racial makeup of the school appear to be more strongly predictive of school suspension than student attitudes and behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2003).

What may be the important question here concerns the perceived fairness of a school's discipline system to the alienated and marginalized youth. Correctly or incorrectly, students tend to negatively perceive a school's climate when involved in disciplinary proceedings (Wehlage, 1986) and the perception of unfair treatment was identified more intensely by underrepresented populations (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Suspension because of inappropriate behavior sends a powerful message to the marginal, at-risk student indicating that he or she does not belong in school.

Hostile and resentful students who chose to stay in school acquire negative reputations among students and staff (Carley, 1994). In fact, Carley describes them as having the following impact: "Their attitudes become a transactional phenomenon in the relationship among the students, their friends, the administration, the teachers, and the student body (p. 221)." Many high schools have a subgroup of students who are caught up in a process of alienation. Sinclair and Ghory (1987) referred to these individuals as "retreating students"; students who are reluctant or altogether unwilling to maintain the charade of acceptable behavior in school. Administrators often experience these students as the worst of the worst, "the 'bad apples' who have chosen not to drop out of school but remain with resentful attitudes" (Carley, p. 221). Contributing to the stalemate, parental pressure and legal obligations demand that these students remain in school. Whereas non-completers are soon forgotten, the "hostile stay-ins lurking on the fringe of the school property are a nagging symbol of transactional failure within the system" (Carley, p. 222). Together with their friends, they form an alienated subgroup that takes on an adversarial relationship with the school.

Research aimed at understanding the domains contributing to at-risk status in students indicates that disciplinary action has a significant impact on student's attitudes and willingness and is a significant factor influencing academic achievement and alienation. Research also indicates that certain behaviors in schools such as

absenteeism and insubordination lead to adverse disciplinary action, which tends to

disproportionately impact underrepresented populations, and boys, in particular. These

contributing factors, which can lead a student to give up on school, are those that must

be accounted for when considering alienation in schools and, most certainly, bear

continued investigation.

School Climate

A large body of literature is dedicated to the examination of the factors that

contribute to academic failure. Of growing interest to that discussion is the role school

climate plays in student behaviors and attitudes. School climate can be defined as "the

collective personality of a school; the atmosphere as characterized by the social and

professional interactions of the individuals in the school" (American School Counselor

Association [ASCA], 2003). Ecological models embrace a systemic focus, wherein

the framework provides an awareness of the interplay of the contextual variables such

as the learning environment, the community as a resource, peer to peer interactions,

and peer to educator interactions (Roach & Kratochwill, 2004; Sheridan & Gutkin,

2000).

Researchers have used various definitions of school climate; Hoy and Miskel

(2005) define school climate as "the set of internal characteristics that distinguish one

school from another and influence the behaviors of each school's members" (p. 185).

A positive school climate can enhance staff performance, promote higher morale, and

improve student achievement (Frieberg, 1998; Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005)

and studies by Heck (2000) and Goddard et al. (2000) link school climate and student

achievement (Kelley et al., 2005).

Current literature on school climate seems to agree with the 1986 statement

from Hoy, English, and Steffy:

> School climate may be one of the most important ingredients of
> a successful instructional program. Without a climate that creates
> a harmonious and well functioning school, a high degree of academic
> achievement is difficult, if not downright impossible to obtain (p. 15).

Bulach, Malone, and Castleman (1995) found that a significant relationship exists

between student achievement and school climate and Bulach and Malone (1994) and

Kelley et al. (2005) concluded that school climate is a significant factor in successful

school reform. Academic achievement is related to schools with a strong academic

emphasis within the context of open and healthy climates (Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990)

and "unless students experience a positive and supportive climate, some may never

achieve that most minimum standards or realize their full potential" (Urban, 1999,

p. 69).

The overall school climate appears to have significant impact on a students'

perception of their sense of belonging, contributing to either a feeling of "place

attachment" (Swaminathin. 2004), or one of alienation. Integral to the creation of a

welcoming and safe school climate, the classroom climate also has a powerful

influence on student's connections to school.

Classroom climate. There are many extraneous factors that influence student attitude

and behavior such as a families' socio-economic status, community crime and safety,

as well as a student's individual predisposition to disability and mental illness (Roach

& Kratochwill, 2004). School and classroom contexts, however, contain factors that

educators do control which influence student attitude and behaviors. Roach and

Kratochwill postulate that although researchers in school psychology and special

education have "created measures of classroom environment and interaction,

researchers have generally given less attention to measures of school context" (p. 10).

This is an unfortunate condition because the classrooms, "nested within schools", have

climates that more powerfully impact students and are directly and indirectly

influenced by the wider school context (DeSurra & Church, 1994).

It only takes one student who has given up the pretense of behaving to affect

the climate of an entire classroom (Carley, 1994) and one teacher to convey to a

student that he or she has limited status and worth (DeSurra & Church, 1994).

Unfortunately, the messages communicated from teacher to student do not always

convey sympathy, understanding, or positive regard. DeSurra and Church (p. 8)

provide an apt example:

> … in some classroom environments a teacher might inadvertently
> communicate to a student restricting preconceptions about appropriate
> behavior or expected behaviors, attitudes, or personal goals based not
> on individual characteristics, but on stereotypical sex roles (Hall,
> 1982). To further illustrate this phenomenon a parallel can be drawn
> between the sexist educator and the heterosexist educator. These
> negatively perceived messages are not conducive to open, supportive
> environment that research indicates as crucial to a student's effective
> schooling.

The literature indicates that when students perceive school and classroom

climates to be oppressive, non-supportive, and rigid, there is a greater tendency to

become alienated and exhibit alienating behaviors (Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990; Kelley et al., 2005; Roach & Kratochwill, 2004; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000).

The Relationship between School Climate and Student Alienation

The literature supports the idea that the school environment and school processes impact the degree of student connectedness and alienation. And while much attention has been paid to the study of students' intellectual abilities and social development, "less attention has been paid to how well schools engage students in school life and how this affects their outlook on schooling and the future" (Thomson, 2005, p.10). Currently, schools are deemed effective based on the percentage of students who achieve an acceptable score on state and federally mandated standards-based assessments of reading and reading comprehension, writing, science, mathematics, and history. From a parent perspective, an effective school is one in which "students have learned the basic skills they need to enter college, get technical training, or enter the workforce" (Anderson & Cotton, 2001, p.3). In other words, if students aren't prepared for 'the next step", schools have failed. An effective school climate, however, is about more than maximizing academic achievement or university preparedness (Thomson, 2005). Schools are expected to develop both the academic and social needs of student population as described in the following:

> Learning and the love of learning; personal development and self-esteem; life skills, problem-solving and learning how to learn; the development of independent thinkers and well-rounded confident individuals; all rank as highly or more highly as the outcomes of effective schooling as success in a narrow range of academic disciplines (McGaw et al., 1992, p.174).

The daunting task of providing effective academic programs as well as opportunities for social skill development weighs as a heavy burden. Researchers and analysts have provided a variety of explanations for continued low school performance and alienation (Lashway, 2003). According to Lashway, the following three explanations have received the most attention:

1. Demographics – Some schools serve predominately low income populations, incorporating an environment that may destabilize home lives, undermine support from home and community, and creates despair amongst the student body. In addition, "many low-income children are also members of racial minorities that face additional barriers to high achievement (Shannon & Bylsma, 2002).

2. Insufficient Resources – Many states are suffering from an inability to provide stable funding for schools (Jerald, 2001). Lack of resources may account for destabilizing influences on students such as: low teacher morale, high classified and certified turnover, less alternative and after hours programming for failing students, and teachers forced to teach outside their specialties (Jerald, 2001).

3. Ineffective school practices – Jerald (2001) identifies uncoordinated curriculum, superficial instructional strategies, scattershot professional development, and timid leadership as some of the factors that may hold school back from adequately supporting student academic and social growth.

In addition, lack of accountability by school officials is a contributing factor identified by Sullivan (2003) regarding poor quality of education and ineffective school climate. "Lack of accountability is closely tied to the school system's failure to ensure effective

participation by parents and communities" (Sullivan, 2003, p.9) and by excluding

parents and communities from participating, communities cannot hold schools

accountable for the academic underachievement of its students.

Schools tend to operate based on the norms of the dominant, middle class

whether they serve that population or not. Historically, public school administrators

have not shared the same socioeconomic classes as their students (Alston, 2004).

Because a student's social class is strongly correlated with academic success

(Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2000), the better understanding school leaders have of the

life circumstances of the population it serves and the higher the involvement of the

parents and community, the more likely students will feel connected and valued, and

the higher they will achieve.

Corresponding to the socioeconomic divide that exists between school officials

and the communities they represent, research from the 1970's and 1980's concluded

that schools were not effective due to a lack of priorities, understanding, and purpose

in school systems (Alston,2004). More effective school climates may be characterized,

therefore, by a decentralized school structure, shared decision making, high parental

involvement, instructional leadership, high academic expectations, and a climate of

orderliness at both the classroom and building levels (Alston, 2004). It is now easier to

comprehend how unbalanced demographics, unstable school funding and ineffective

teaching practices can interfere with achieving the above definition of effective

schools. Though a multitude of factors exist that influence the academic progress of

any individual, schools with limited resources and an undesirable perception result in

student underachievement. And schools can create a self-fulfilling prophesy for alienating students – they aren't expected to participate much, so they don't (Goodwin, 2000).

By establishing a normative climate, schools can diminish the tendency of some students to disengage and, therefore, enhance school climate. The 2003 report regarding the Small Schools Initiative sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation purports that a normative climate can be characterized as featuring close, personalized relationships between staff and students, a mutual respect among and between adults and students, and high expectations for student learning, both from adults in the community and from the students themselves. Furthermore, effective schools provide extracurricular opportunities (Thomson, 2005) and encourage students to engage in said activities. Thomson writes: "For students with marginal attachment to school and its values, participation in extracurricular activities provides an opportunity to make a positive, voluntary connection to school . . ." (p.11). The literature appears to indicate that school environment and school processes impact the degree of student connectedness and alienation. How well schools engage students in school life, the academic as well as the social, and how this affects their outlook on schooling and the future seems to be a telling factor for school effectiveness. What the literature does not reveal is how the students themselves express the degree to which they are or are not impacted by school climate and academic and social programming designed to effect positive outcomes.

Advocating for the Alienated: The Role of Professional School Counselors and Counselor Educators

While the entire school community is responsible for the creation of a safe and responsive learning environment, school counselors may play a leadership role in encouraging the adoption of such a process for the school and community (Cunningham & Sandhu, 2000). According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Role Statement (1990), professional school counselors provide services to help students learn more effectively. One way they remove barriers to student learning is through individual and group counseling (Myrick, 1993). Another service is consultation. The ASCA Role Statement defined consultation as helping people become more effective in working with others and also helping individuals think through problems and concerns, gain knowledge and skills, and become more objective and self-confident. The ASCA Role Statement defined a third role as coordination. Coordination consists of counselor interventions of various indirect services with the counselor functioning as a liaison between school and community agencies through programming efforts. These three primary roles outline a scope of practice for professional school counselors.

School counselors' knowledge of counseling, classroom guidance, consultation, and coordination services position them to be effective catalysts and advocates for systemic change within their school (Lee, 2005). Research indicates that comprehensive school counseling programs impact school climate (Gysbers, Hughey, Starr, & Lapan, 1992). Examining the link between more fully implemented school counseling programs and student perceptions of a more positive school climate within

their school, Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun (1997) found that students in schools with more fully implemented school counseling programs had a more positive experience, believed that the school more adequately prepared them, that their peers behaved better in school, and experienced a sense of belonging and safety. School counselors can ensure that such a program is school-wide and reaches all students (Leone, Mayer, Malmgren, & Meisel, 2000).

School counselors help eliminate social and emotional barriers to learning and school counselors see themselves as educators who work closely with teachers, administrators, and parents to help students thrive (Vail, 2005). Developing and defining appropriate roles for school counselors continues to be a source of concern for the counseling profession. Although the ASCA National Standards clearly indicate which tasks are considered appropriate to the role (ASCA, 2003), there continues to be confusion by other school personnel, parents, and the greater community regarding the role professional school counselors play (Baker & Gerler, 2004; Schiarra, 2004; Schmidt, 2003). For example, school principals often determine what tasks are given priority by counselors, so their perceptions of the counselor's role can have a strong impact on tasks that counselors are assigned (ASCA, 2003; Ponec & Brock, 2000). Principals' perceptions, however, may not always be congruent with the ASCA role standards.

Professional school counselors must support young people as they explore options, make choices, and prepare for life after high school against a backdrop of the challenges that confront the school systems in which counselors work. The

overarching issue confronting school counselors is pervasive academic failure (NCES, 2000; Olson & Jerald, 1998). In their attempts to address this issue, counselors often must confront complex factors that significantly undermine the ability of many young people to achieve academic success in schools. They also must deal with structural dynamics that greatly impinge upon their professional roles (Lee, 2005). School counselors are faced with major challenges associated with increasing cultural diversity in schools and counseling interventions are greatly impacted by language issues and value differences that come with the cultural diversity that characterizes many schools (Hernández & Seem, 2004), both rural and urban. School counselors also must contend with the contemporary demands placed upon schools for greater accountability. In an era of legislative initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), schools find themselves under significant public pressure to ensure that all students achieve to high academic standards.

Counseling in schools implies a set of competencies on the part of professionals that will enable them to effectively address the personal, interpersonal, and structural challenges that tend to stifle academic success for scores of young people (Hernández & Seem, 2004). Within the context of ASCA National Model (2003), the following represents a set of important competencies for professional school counselors in educational environments. These competencies reflect the knowledge set, skills, and attitudes or beliefs needed to promote student academic, career, and personal-social development given the realities of contemporary schools:

1. Cultural competence - School counselors must be culturally competent (Holcomb-

McCoy, 2004; Lee, 2001). They should possess the awareness, knowledge, and skills to intervene in responsive and appropriate ways into the lives of the increasingly culturally diverse student populations.

2. Skills for promoting empowerment - School counselors must have individual and group counseling skills that are grounded in the concept of empowerment. Empowerment is a developmental process in which people who are powerless or marginalized in some fashion become aware of how power affects their lives (McWhirter, 1994).

3. Systemic perspective - School counselors must adopt a systemic perspective with respect to their helping roles and functions. Rather than focus exclusively on the etiology of problems originating with students, counselors should make the systems in which young people must develop and function the center of attention for programmed intervention (Lee & Walz, 1998).

4. Advocacy - School counselors must be advocates for their students. In this role, counselors intervene in social systems on behalf of students in ways designed to eliminate barriers to academic success (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2003). As advocates, school counselors are systemic change agents, working to impact social systems in ways that will ultimately benefit the students.

5. Collaboration - School counselors must be able to collaborate with key educational stakeholders to promote student development (Bemak, 2000; Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). They should be able to collaborate with families and educational and

community stakeholders to help them become empowered as a proactive force in the educational success of children (Hernández & Seem, 2004).

6. Leadership - School counselors must be leaders in their schools and within the larger community (Bemak, 2000). They should be in the forefront of developing new educational initiatives that promote student development.

Even though an abundance of current literature exists that defines the role of professional school counselors, role confusion and role conflict still exist and both contribute to the ineffectiveness of schools to incorporate alienated students into the system. School counselors struggle to balance the traditional role of "guidance" counselor, focusing only on students' academic and career needs, and the "professional" school counselor, who is now trained to monitor and administer to students' personal/social needs in addition to the academic and career. The struggle to be competent and effective in all of the areas listed above is, at times, stressful and overwhelming.

The literature suggested that it is not only students who suffer from role confusion and poorly defined school counseling programs, but the profession itself (Ballard & Murgatroyd, 1999.) The profession of school counseling is in a period of redefining its identity (Kaffenberger, Murphy, & Bemak, 2006). These authors state unequivocally that

> … it is essential that the leaders of the school counseling field shape
> the discussion, which involves a number of critical issues that will
> define the future direction of school counseling. One important issue
> is the role and function of the school counselor which continues to be
> misunderstood. Another concern is the discrepancy between counselor
> education programs and actual school counselor. There is a lack of

clarity about whether counselor education preparation programs
prepare student counselors for the role they can play in the educational
reform movement (p. 229).

Counselor educators must encourage school counselors to assume leadership roles in
schools and they must teach future school counselors "specific skills in advocacy,
leadership, teaming, collaboration, counseling, consultation, and use of data"
(Education Trust, 2003). School counselors who receive training in the eight domains
in CACREP (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational
Programs) accredited programs may be more able to apply these skills to effect
systemic change which may remove barriers that impede student achievement and
attachment. They also need to teach students to connect their counseling work to the
mission of schools including school improvement plans (Education Trust).

Counselor educators have a moral and ethical responsibility to incorporate
professional development activities throughout the curriculum in order to provide
training and learning opportunities in accordance with CACREP (Spruill & Benshoff,
1999; Remley, Hermann, & Huey, 2003; Stone, 2005). Activities should include ways
for students to experience the professional roles they will assume (Spruill & Benshoff)
and the ability to access the needs of a given student body. The implementation of a
developmental school counselor education program is key to addressing the most
current and pressing needs in school counselor training (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

Promoting development and competence in counselor education programming
implies a focus on student's strengths and assets, and the protective factors essential
for positive student growth, both students in counselor education programs as well as
those in elementary and secondary schools (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Gysbers &

Henderson, 2000). There is a growing body of literature advocating for school

counselor-in-training curriculum which (a) advances school counselor professionalism

(Spruill & Benshoff, 1999), (b) identifies gatekeeping practices and minimum

competencies (Lumadue & Duffey, 1999), (c) promotes the creation of mentor-student

relationships (Brinson & Kottler, 1993), (d) advocates for multicultural competence

(Holcomb-McCoy, 2004), (e) encourages a team approach to providing services for

students (Kaffenberger, Murphy, & Bemak, 2006), and (f) promotes implementation

of a developmental school counseling program (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000). It is

imperative that school counselors gain a working knowledge of how to best serve

children (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004) and it is equally imperative that school counselor

education programs provide that opportunity (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

Counselor education programs and professional organizations can take a

leadership position in defining school counselor roles and educating students and

members regarding the profession's definition of and recommendations for the school

counselor. Swaminathan (2004) suggests that a "shared mission" (p.37) among

personnel such as counselor educators, administrators, counselors, teachers, and staff

will positively impact school effectiveness and student achievement, both socially and

academically.

Conclusion

Low commitment to school, lack of academic aspirations, and the lack of post

high school goals are increasing concerns for the typical professional high school

counselor (Lieberman, 2004). More and more often high school counselors are

encountering students who, for varying reasons, are unable to find a place of belonging in the school setting and seem unable to take advantage of the educational offerings. Recent studies bear out the theory that more students are leaving school systems without a diploma (ETS, 2005; NCES, 2000) and that many of these students have been alienated based on race, ethnicity, language differential, socioeconomic status, and family background (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Davison Avilés et al., 1999; Dryfoos, 1990; Fager & Richen, 1999; Hixon & Tinzman, 1990; Lee, 2005; Rodriguez, 1997; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Feeling a sense of alienation from school appears to be a significant factor in a student's willingness to find relevance in school academically and to cultivate a rewarding social attachment. The ability to create that sense of place (Swaminathan, 2004) and belonging is a fundamental aspect of alienation (Brown et al., 2003a; Mau, 1992). At a time when policy makers are demanding greater accountability via standardized test scores, the television show *Boston Public* depicted a different view, suggesting, through its programming, that other issues are more important in the lives of modern high school students (Hurley et al., 2004). In their article, Hurley and colleagues discuss the idea that today's youth finds themselves further alienated by modern society. When positive student achievement is defined in terms of test scores, an integral component of society, namely its affect, is dismissed as less valuable (Erikson et al., 1996). It would seem that many schools are still operating with out-dated structures that do not help students become a part of a community where there is a sense of trust and safety (Furman, 1998). It would also seem that academic success

cannot be achieved without respecting and accounting for the human need to belong and associate.

Grounding programming on the affective needs of students, counselors can address the alienating factors that impact all students and specifically those that suffer the effects more often, specifically, the underrepresented youth, students from lower socioeconomic status, and boys. Catalano et al. (2004) identified interventions designed to promote healthy choices and behaviors as a preemptive strategy rather than being exclusively reactionary. In a longitudinal study comparing two groupings of students, the group receiving benefit of the interventions achieved higher levels of attachment, commitment, and academic achievement by the 12th grade and at-risk behaviors such as substance abuse, pregnancy and risky sexual behaviors were lower. The importance of school bonding as promoted by comprehensive counseling programs in contributing to positive outcomes to include academic achievement and social competence is clearly evidenced. In the discussion portion of the study, Catalano and his colleagues state:

> …doing this requires a focus on social and emotional competence as well as cognitive competence. Increasing bonding to school, by providing students with opportunities to actively participate in their education, the social and emotional skills to participate effectively, and recognition to enhance motivation to continue to be engaged in academic pursuits, promotes academic success (p. 259).

Intervention research suggests that the relationship is causal. Increasing a student's sense of connectedness or belonging to school decreases health-risk behaviors (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). Schools are central to the developmental process of adolescents and are an essential source of what Croninger

and Lee (2001) call "social capital" or in other words, interpersonal assistance. Research concerning risk factors for academic underachievement reveals the correlation between lack of school attachment and behaviors that result in suspension and expulsion. More concentrated research that offers insight into how to create effective school climate and how to enhance a student's ability to be successful in that climate is essential.

Many studies acknowledge that students fail and quantify that failure. Other studies make effort to identify the individual, familial, and societal factors that influence that failure by observing students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Underrepresented groups continue to lead the lists of failed and failing students, and unsafe school climates fail to address the student's inherent need to belong. Researching the phenomenon of student alienation in the voice of the student seems an ideal method so as to bind together and validate the variety of information provided in the current literature. The hope in studying the experiences of alienated students from their own perspective and experience is to provide an academic grounding to all of the symptoms we see generated as a result of their alienation. None of the literature concerning alienation and its relationship to bonding, school climate, risk factors, and academic failure has done this. After twenty years, the summarizing words of Wehlage (1986, p. 21) profoundly identify the experience yet unexplored:

> The perceptions of these youth must be taken seriously as indicators
> of the extent to which public schools are alienating institutions.
> Dropping out is observable evidence of that alienation in which one
> recognizes that school has rejected the person and the person
> reciprocates by rejecting the school.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Whether a student regards his or her experience in a public school setting as having been positive or negative greatly depends upon school climate (ASCA, 2003; Hoy, 1990; Kaplan & Geoffrey, 1990). The perception that the student has of his or her own success in that setting is tantamount to understanding which types of school programming are most effective. Understanding the student's experience is not only germane, but critical in understanding why and how an educational program is or is not effective. Researchers have attempted to identify the factors that impede a student's academic progress and have developed strategies that may reverse the effects which alienate students. Alienation in schools typically occurs when students feel estranged or detached from the existing social or academic framework of a system (Brown et al., 2003a; Calabrese, 1987). Research indicates that students who identify as being alienated may behave in ways that lead to academic failure, social isolation, drug use and abuse, and dysfunctional relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Levinson, 2001; Wehlage, 1986). The research, however, has been typically one-sided, exploring the issue from the perspective of educators and researchers. Providing students the opportunity to voice and explain their experience requires a phenomenological approach that is designed to capture and distribute that voice. Consequently, this study employed a phenomenological approach in order to explore alienated students' experience in the public school system. The general question of this study was: How

do alienated male students who leave school before diploma completion perceive and describe their school experience and how has that experience impacted their lives?

Phenomenology

Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the processes of human behavior and is primarily concerned with the questions of "how" and "what". Qualitative research takes a naturalistic approach to its subject matter; qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Qualitative research begins with the acceptance that there is a range of different ways of making sense of the world and is concerned with discovering the meanings seen by those who are being researched and with understanding their view of the world rather than that of the researchers (Jones, 1995). Creswell (1998) describes qualitative research metaphorically as an "…intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material" (p. 13). Qualitative research is inquiry aimed at describing and clarifying the human experience as it appears in people's lives and researchers using qualitative methods gather data that serve as evidence for their "distilled descriptions" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138). These descriptions will provide the most genuine and uncorrupted data by which to understand the alienated student experience.

Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach which focuses on understanding a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). It describes the meaning

of the lived experiences of more than one individual and explores the structures of

consciousness in human experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). According to Creswell:

> Researchers search for the essential, invariant structure (or essence) or
> the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the
> Intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the out-
> ward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image,
> and meaning (p. 52).

Husserl (1970) emphasized the world of experience or "the life world" as it is lived,

felt, and understood by human beings. It is the world of immediate experiences

wherein the experience is natural and original, without being tainted by preconceived

notions or post-experience reflection (Souza & Do, 1999).

Phenomenological research seeks understanding for its own sake, emphasizing

more the what of the experience, rather than the why (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Understanding comes from gathering the accumulated explanations of individuals

sharing a common experience. The accumulated explanations are the result of

conversation with a researcher who seeks understanding, and it is only through

genuine discourse that understanding occurs (Souza & Do, 1999). Phenomenological

research differs from other descriptive and qualitative approaches

> because its focus is on the subject's experienced meaning instead of on
> description of their overt actions or behavior. Phenomenology maintains
> the critical distinction between what presents itself as part of a person's
> awareness and what might exist as a reality 'outside' of our experience
> (Polkinghorne,1989, p. 44).

Phenomenology is "concerned with wholeness, with examining entities from many

sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon

or experience is achieved" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58).

The aim in phenomenological research is to grasp how we come to interpret meaning through action, experience, and subjectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Whereas other expressions of qualitative research focus on uncovering themes and patterns within the data to develop theories of processes (Grounded Theory), cultural descriptions (Ethnography), or to derive correct understanding in text (Hermeneutics); Phenomenology focuses on understanding the essence of a phenomenon through explicating its constituents and possible meanings (Moustakas, 1994).

The study of alienated student's perceptions and explanations of their high school experience is consistent with the approach of phenomenological research. This is because the goal of this investigation is to deeply understand the phenomenon of alienation from the perspective of the student. Hopefully the descriptions generated in this study will lead to further studies that will further the dialogue and extend understanding.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher possesses a unique and critical role in the process of qualitative investigation. Since the inquiry of a particular phenomenon takes place in the natural setting of human subjects, a human instrument is required to provide context for the data that are recovered. No other investigative instrument has the characteristics needed to cope with the multifaceted construction of knowing and feeling in humanistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). To illustrate the point, Lincoln and Guba identify phenomenological researchers as "social scientists concerned with the expansion of what count as social data [who] rely increasingly on the experiential, the

embodied, the emotive qualities of human experience that contribute the narrative

quality of life" (p. 275). The researcher, then, as the primary instrument of inquiry has

the "responsibility to make his or her own assumptions, experiences, and biases

known" (Morrow et al., 2001, p. 590). Although it is the collaborative process of

meaning making between and among the researcher and the participants that is valued

(Morrow et al., 2001; Moustakas, 1994), it is understood that the biases, values, and

judgment of the researcher do become part of the research report (Creswell, 1998).

The process of self-reflection is a crucial element to the research in order to be

certain that the meanings conveyed are those of the participants, and not just those of

the researcher (Morrow et al., 2001). Husserl defined this place as the "Epoche" and

he called it "the freedom from suppositions" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). In the Epoche,

a Greek word meaning to stay away from or abstain, the researcher seeks to eliminate

consciousness, previous knowledge, and experiences based in scientific fact that may

provide a knowing of things in advance (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas sees the

Epoche, or bracketing, as "a preparation for deriving new knowledge, a process of

setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events,

and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and to see them again, as if

for the first time" (p. 85). Creswell (1998) suggests that:

> Phenomenological analysis requires the researcher to state his or her own
> assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation and then bracket
> or suspend these preconceptions in order to fuller understand the experience
> of the subject and not impose an a priori hypothesis on the experience (p. 277).

Researcher personal narrative and assumptions. Given that the framing of a

phenomenological study requires the researcher to be the primary instrument of

inquiry and thereby has the responsibility to make his or her own assumptions, experiences, and biases known (Morrow et al., 2001), a disclosure of a personal narrative and assumptions regarding the phenomenon of alienation is obligatory. As stated earlier, the process of self-reflection is a crucial element to the research in order that the reader distinguish between the inevitable mingling of researcher and participant meanings. The following narrative is designed to enable that distinction to be more accurately determined.

As a professional school counselor for five years and a Spanish teacher for eleven years in four different public high schools, I witnessed a dazzling array of students come and go. Most were successful in the sense that they earned an acceptable grade and eventually a diploma. Others were not successful academically and left the system. Their sense of belonging or connectedness to the school and its programs seemed to have a direct relationship to whether or not they completed the prescribed course of study or not. I witnessed many students pass through my world feeling a heightened sense of alienation ranging from what might be described as a typical teen angst to despair and rage.

I was drawn to these students in that I felt I could identify with their situation because I had felt much the same. As a high schooler, I was academically very successful and earned honors for my grades. I also participated in extracurricular activities such as forensics and drama, and attained a reputation as *the* school actress, always having the female lead in school productions and winning trophies at speech tournaments. Nevertheless, I felt school to be confining and unjust in its treatment of

students. I was a victim of discriminatory practices by both administrators and teachers. The pressure to conform was relentless and school policy and practice reminded me daily that I was to mold myself to another's vision or get out. In my generation, there was no alternative but to conform, so I did conform, but with a resentful, defiant air that I have not relinquished as of yet.

I view high school today much as I did as a teen; schools still insist that students conform, and continue to employ discriminatory practices such as relegating special education students to basements and modular units, ELL students to cooking class, art class, and basic math, and all students to a grading system that inspires mediocrity and conventionality. Given my experience as an alienated student, it is not difficult for me to recognize some of the same attitudes and behaviors among the students I encounter.

I do have certain assumptions regarding what I anticipated these participants would offer about their experience. The following are those assumptions:

1. The experience of alienation begins within the first several years of formal public schooling;

2. The attitudes and expectations of the students regarding their belonging in school influence the degree of alienation they experience;

3. Students experience feelings of alienation from both peer interactions and adult interactions;

4. Students lack the ability to communicate their feelings of ostracization to adults or find that adults are unable to effect positive change;

5. Student's impressions of school, either positive and/or negative, are formed early in their school experience;

6. Student's measure their success in school based on academic achievement and social acceptance; and

7. A school climate that exhibits a warm, welcoming, all-inclusive atmosphere influences a student's feelings of belonging and connectedness.

I believe the ability to identify with alienated students and having a modicum of understanding regarding how they experience alienation from school allowed me a certain advantage in communicating with and developing a rapport with the participants in this phenomenology. However, in keeping with the tenets of phenomenology, I made effort to set aside my assumptions so they did not interfere with the meaning making the participants offered of their experience of youth alienation from school.

Researcher ethics. In the effort to centralize the focus of the inquiry on the narratives of the participants, this researcher attempted to approach this study of a phenomenon having set aside "…prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). As a researcher of a human experience anticipating having actual human beings as participants, I was guided by ethical standards and principles. Care and caution were taken to establish clear agreements with the participants, to recognize the necessity of confidentiality and informed consent, and to fully disclose the nature, purpose and requirements of the research, as well as the results of the research (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). This study involved only those

participants who volunteered to be co-researchers, has emphasized processes that are open-ended, and methods and procedures that could be shifted in response to the ideas and suggestions of the participants as needed for accuracy, safety, and comfort. Participants were free to withdraw at any time. Accordingly, the proposal for this investigation was submitted to the Oregon State University Internal Review Board and was approved.

Sampling

Most qualitative research sampling procedures are non-random and not designed to produce research results generalizable to the general population (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). Qualitative samples are designed to produce applicable research from case to case. The sample procedure needs to remain sufficiently open and flexible as to permit randomness and diversity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) realizing that the selection processes of interviewees will have "a profound effect on the ultimate quality of the research" (Coyne, 1997, p. 623). Coyne clarifies by stating that the underlying principle in the selection strategy common to all qualitative research is selecting "information-rich" (p. 627) cases which are selected specifically to fit the purpose of the study.

As opposed to a theoretical sampling option, a phenomenological study is better suited to purposive or purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). Creswell (1998) recommends a criterion sampling, whereby all participants, though not necessarily from the same site or location, all experience the phenomenon under investigation. In phenomenological research, the most critical consideration is finding participants who

are experiencing or have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 1998;

Moustakas, 1994). Although no particular number of participants is required to

conduct a phenomenological inquiry, Creswell recommended a sufficient number to

reach a point of information saturation. In other words, no new aspects of a

phenomenon would emerge from additional participants. Also essential to sample

selection is that participants are interested in understanding the nature of the

phenomenon, are willing to participate in the interview process, and will allow taping

and publishing of their experience (Moustakas, 1994). Polkinghorne (1989) adds that

participants must also be capable of providing a full and sensitive description of their

experience.

In this study sampling involved selecting persons who had experienced a sense

of alienation from the school setting and from their educational process. Participants

were selected based on their fit to the study, that is, males who left or were asked to

leave a regular high school because they were alienated by its climate and processes.

Of the seven participants who agreed and completed the first interview, only five

completed the study. Participants were former public high school students, three were

currently enrolled in an alternative diploma program and two were not. Given the

location of the study was the state of Oregon, participants were former students still

living in the state in accessible locations. Participants were male and between the ages

of 16 – 19 so as to provide a narrowed focus and the depth of experience. Participants

were from varying racial, ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic backgrounds. Participants

were articulate enough to explain their experiences and perceptions, and were willing

and available to meet a minimum of four times.

Participants were located through the assistance of cooperating school districts,

building administrators, and school counselors. The nature and purpose of the study

was explained to the adults who had access to possible participants. The criterion for

participation was to be a former public high school student between the ages of 16 and

19, male, who described feeling alienated from the school system, and felt capable and

willing to describe their experience in an interview format. This focus on boy's

experiences has allowed for rich, in-depth, robust descriptions of that aspect of the

phenomenon. Permission from the legal guardian or parent was sought for the three

participants who were under the age of 18. Interviews were conducted at a neutral

place of the participant's choosing that ensured privacy and confidentially.

<div align="center">*Data Collection*</div>

Qualitative data are gathered primarily in the form of spoken or written

language rather than in the form of numbers (Polkinghorne, 2005). Data for this study

was collected by conducting individual, semi-structured interviews. It was essential to

attain reports of participant's experience as they conceived it. So as to capture that

perception and awareness, the researcher designed a series of questions to assist in

focusing the interviewees on the experience under investigation (see Appendix F).

Questions designed to elicit descriptions of the experience rather than the simple

recollections of events resulted in experiential data (Polkinghorne, 1989). According to Kvale (1983), the phenomenological method involves an attempt to reach the lived world. The process of phenomenological interviewing is informal and interactive (Moustakas, 1994). "Interviewing," Seidman writes,

> provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior. A basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience… Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action (1998, p. 4).

Moustakas (1994) cautions the researcher that although a series of questions may be developed in advance, "these are varied, altered, or not used at all when the co-researcher shares the full story of his or her experience" (p. 115).

The interviews in this study followed the "three-interview series" approach (Seidman, 1998). Seidman validates this method by stating: "people's behaviors become meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them" (1998, p. 11). Patton (1990) concurs that without context there is little possibility of exploring the meaning of the experience under investigation.

The first interview focused on the participant's life history and allowed the interviewer to put the experience in context by asking the participant to tell as much as possible about himself in relation to the topic as possible. The focus was to ask "how" the participant came to be in the current place and situation. Questions for this initial interview addressed: How the participant came to be in the current school setting? and How the participant concluded that he was appropriate for this study?

The second interview focused on the details of the experience. Its purpose was to concentrate on the details of the participant's present experience and to reconstruct the details. The focus was on the relationships they had in the school environment with other students, faculty, administrators, and other staff. Questions for this interview included: What is it like for the participant to be alienated from the school setting? and What the details of that experience are?

The third interview asked the participant to reflect upon the meaning of his experience. Questions addressed the intellectual and emotional connections between the participant's school and life experience. "Making sense or meaning," clarifies Seidman,

> requires that the participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation. It also requires that they look at their present experience in detail and within the context in which it occurs (1998, p. 12).

Questions for this final interview included: What does it mean to the participant to be alienated from the school? and Given how the participant has described the experience in the first two interviews, how does he make sense of his present situation?

All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and edited for accuracy. The transcribed narratives were the data for the study. Data analysis was used to ascertain themes and patterns which emerged through the interviews.

Data Analysis Procedures

The expected outcome of a phenomenological study is to "reveal and unravel the structures, logic, and interrelationships" obtained in the data collection, and data analysis is the "core stage of research efforts" that yields "a description of the essential

features of that experience" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 50). Polkinghorne admits that transforming a collection of interview data into an accurate, clear, and informative structural description is a complex, difficult process. The underlying concept in phenomenological data analysis is to immerse oneself in the data, engage with it reflectively, and generate a rich description that will enlighten the reader as to the deeper essential structures embedded in that particular experience for a particular individual (Thorne, 2000).

The organization of data begins when the researcher reads the transcriptions of interviews, and studies the contents through methods and procedures of phenomenal analysis (Moustakas, 1994). The procedural steps lead the researcher to a description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon under investigation. This study employed a specific method of phenomenal analysis described by Moustakas (1994) as a Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method. This method of organizing and analyzing data was applied to interviews with participants who self-identified as being alienated from the public school system.

Horizonalization. The process of analysis begins when I, as researcher, provided a full description of my own experience of the phenomenon of alienation. In turn, the transcript of each participant was subjected to the same procedure. The process continued by horizonalizing the data. Horizonalizing is the process of listing each statement, sentence or phrase in a verbatim transcript which depicts a separate thought concerning the phenomenon. Each statement was initially treated as having equal value, and every expression was listed. Any repetitive and over-lapping statements and

vague expressions were eliminated leaving only the invariant constituents. Invariant constituents are statements that contain an element of the experience that is necessary for understanding it. The horizons, or meaning units of the experience, that remained were the invariant constituents of the experience.

The invariant constituents were then clustered and identified as core themes of the experience. The invariant constituents and accompanying themes were checked against the complete transcript of each participant. This procedure ensured that the invariant constituents and themes were explicitly expressed in the transcripts, or whether they were compatible with the data if not explicitly expressed. If they were not explicit or compatible, they were eliminated.

Textural Description. The remaining invariant constituents and themes were used to construct a textural description of the experience of alienation for each participant. These descriptions chronicled each participant's sensory experience, and depicted clear images of what happened during the experiences being expressed. The participant's descriptions are presented using his own words and mode(s) of expression. Moustakas (1994) describes the essence of the textural description as follows:

> Throughout there is an interweaving of person, conscious experience, and phenomenon. In this process of explicating the phenomenon, qualities are recognized and described; every perception is granted equal value, nonrepetitive constituents of the experience are linked thematically, and a full description is described (p. 96).

This phase of the phenomenological reduction produced a conscious description of each participant's self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-knowledge of the experience of alienation (Polkinghorne, 1989) in his own words.

Structural Description. Through the use of the imaginative variation of the researcher, a structural description for each participant was created. Using the textural description as the foundation, the description provided an account of the underlying essence of the experience. It attempted to account for "how" the feelings and thoughts of the experience of alienation were connected. Moustakas defines imaginative variation as the seeking of possible meanings through "…imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions" (p. 97). The concept relies on the ability of the researcher to step away from fact, logic, and reasonableness in order to assume a reflective stance where anything is possible (Polkinghorne, 1989). Describing the essential structures of a phenomenon is the major task of imaginative variation. Moustakas clarifies:

> The aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced; in other words the "how" that speaks to conditions that illuminate the "what" of experience. How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is (p. 98)?

Through imaginative variation, the researcher developed an enhanced and expanded version of the textural description, seeking all possible meanings and divergent perspectives. This process included a total immersion into the written data, moving back and forth from a position of imaginative variation to verification. A reflective

period was also required to contemplate the fit of the imaginative variations of the researcher and the structures within the participant data.

Textural-Structural Description. A textural-structural description of the meanings and essence of the experience was constructed for each participant. This step in the analysis process required an integration of the textural and structural descriptions which provided a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This synthesis incorporated the invariant constituents that emerged as core themes. The challenge was to blend the conscious experiences and perceptions of the participants with the underlying structural interpretations of the researcher in order to produce a synthesized description of the experience. The researcher continued to maintain a posture of both immersion and reflection in order to bring forth the meaning and essence of the phenomenon for these participants.

Composite Textural-Structural Description. The final step in this process was to form one composite structural description for the whole group from the textural-structural descriptions of each participant's experience of alienation in the public school setting. This composite left out the specific details of the experience reported by the participants, and centered instead on those aspects of the experience that were "transsituational" or descriptive of the experience in general. The descriptions of the experience were supplied by the participants and the psychological meaning was applied by the researcher to form one general description of the experience (Giorgi, 1986; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). Husserl, sited in Moustakas (1994),

defined the composite description as having "…the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is." This integration of experiences was organized into a thematic structure describing the essence of the phenomenon. It was arrived at as the product of the researcher's multiple readings of the transcribed data, conceptualizing the participant's experiences, and confirming the concepts with the data.

Verification Procedures

The validity of a phenomenological study is contingent on whether the reader can have confidence that the outcomes or findings are well-grounded and well-supported (Polkinghorne, 1989). The degree of validity of the findings of a phenomenology depends upon the power of the presentation to convince the reader that the findings are accurate (Polkinghorne, 1989). The researcher must persuade the reader that the steps from data collection to data analysis and synthesis have followed a logical thought process that can be traced and viewed as valid. Polkinghorne (1989, p. 57) identified five questions that researchers might ask themselves in order to ensure trustworthiness:

1. Did the interviewer influence the contents of the subjects' descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the subjects' actual experience?
2. Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?
3. In the analysis of the transcriptions, were there conclusions other than those offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified these alternatives?
4. Is it possible to go from the general structure description to the Transcriptions and account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?
5. Is the structural description situation-specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations?

These questions were addressed as they related to this investigation of the phenomenon of alienation in public high school.

The validity of the interview process has depended on the ability of the researcher to be in the Epoche, having set aside the "… everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings…, and the phenomenon are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense… (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). The researcher made an effort to remain aware of the prior assumptions in order to set them aside so they did not interfere with the intended meaning of the participant. The researcher also consistently reminded herself of the importance of remaining in the epoche as it pertained to the credibility of the study.

This researcher subjected herself to a process of internal reflection or reflexivity prior to the process of data collection in the effort to be fully aware of and set aside any biases, prejudices, or assumptions. To aid in this reflection process, potential interview questions were constructed prior to the interviews. This process enabled the researcher to become aware of biases, and served as a guide to remain in this mindset throughout the interviewing and analysis stages.

Since from this perspective, the purpose of qualitative research is to describe or understand the phenomena of interest from the participant's eyes, the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To this end, participant feedback was conducted. Participant feedback is the task of sharing the researcher's interpretations and conclusions with the participants themselves checking for accuracy of interpretation and insight regarding

meaning and intention. The researcher checked for accuracy by using the forth

meeting as verification of the textural description. The researcher read the textural

description to each participant making every effort to imitate participant voice tone,

inflection and meaning as understood from the original interview. The decision to read

the descriptions was based on the need to have each participant completely hear and

then reflect upon the description. Each participant differed in his ability to read and

comprehend what was read. The researcher attempted to ensure uniformity in the

procedure and focus the meeting on the content and context of the description.

Low inference descriptors were also used so that the reader would be able to

experience the participants' actual language, dialect, and personal meanings;

participants' exact words are provided in direct quotations in order that the reader may

verify the inferences and conclusions for him or herself.

To further increase the validity of the study, the researcher incorporated in a

system of peer review. Peer review is the discussion of the researcher's interpretations

and conclusions with other people. According to Johnson (1997), peer review or peer

debriefing is a

> discussion with a "disinterested peer"(e.g., with another researcher not
> directly involved). This peer should be skeptical and play the "devil's
> advocate," challenging the researcher to provide solid evidence for any
> interpretations or conclusions. Discussion with peers who are familiar
> with the research can also help provide useful challenges and insights
> (p. 283).

Because the purpose of a qualitative investigation is to generate rich descriptive data

from the participant's worldview, issues of validity are paramount. The repetitive and

cyclical nature of the research process provides the researcher with several different views of the same phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These strategies were used to enhance validity and were, in part, the researcher's process of accountability in providing a credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable study.

The process of transforming the raw data into phenomenological expressions and descriptions brought the greatest threat to the trustworthiness of this investigation. This transformation from horizonalized statements to invariant constituents needed to begin with a unilateral interpretation on the part of the researcher. This logic applied as well to the construction of the textural and composite descriptions. In order to verify the interpretations, the researcher relied on her experiences while immersed in the field, the collection of a sufficient amount of data, and sufficient opportunity to become immersed in the data. In addition to the above mentioned standards of rigor, the researcher performed participant checks and provided thick description to ensure that the phenomenon was seen in context, and the results of the investigation "reflect[ed] the historico-socio-political context of people's lives" (Morrow et al., 2001, p. 594).

Polkinghorne's (1989) final question addresses the possible narrowness of the findings. This study involved participants from more than one school and involved students of differing race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Having a variety of participants has added to the breadth and depth of the study, and has added confidence that the findings are not situation-specific.

Measures to Ensure Confidentiality

This study sought and was granted the approval of the Internal Review Board (IRB) of Oregon State University prior to the collection of data. Procedures within that protocol have emphasized and enforced the protection of confidentiality and the rights of the participants. Accordingly, prior to the collection of data, participant consent forms were signed in the presence of the researcher. The researcher ensured that each participant read and signed an informed consent form that described the nature of their participation in this research project.

To ensure confidentiality, each participant was randomly assigned a case number. Each audio taped interview was identified only by the number assigned to the participant. Upon completion of each interview, the audiotape was transcribed by the researcher. To ensure confidentiality, audiotapes and transcripts were identified by case number only. Once the transcripts were edited for accuracy, the audiotapes were destroyed to conform to Oregon State University IRB recommended best practices. All transcripts, consent forms, and data will be stored for six years in a secure, confidential file. This file will be accessible only to the researcher or her designated representative. At the end of the six year period, consent forms and transcripts will be destroyed.

Conclusion

The qualitative phenomenological research approach has been the most useful in investigating the experience of alienation among high school students. The procedures have included: (a) role of the researcher, (b) sampling, (c) interviewing as

the means of data collection, (d) data analysis processes, (e) verification, and (f)

measures to ensure confidentiality. These procedures have generated a statement of

the essence of the experience of alienation, which have provided a deeper

understanding of what it is like for students who live this experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

Participant One

Textural Description

I felt as though I wasn't prepared for school because I bounced from so many elementary schools. In one school we'd just be starting to read and do math, like addition and subtraction and then, all of a sudden, I'd go to another school where they're already in division and stuff that I didn't know, so I felt kind of like, I guess dumb you could say. I've always felt that I've been somewhat pre-labeled. Like a failure. It just really goes back on my mom, she was always like, "Oh, you're a bad boy. Your father's an alcoholic, your grandpa's an alcoholic, you're going to end up like that and beat women." And I'm like, "What the hell?" And then my mom's like, "There's something wrong with you. You're going to grow up and there's going to be problems." And I'm like, "Screw it, whatever." You know, just trying to blow it off. And I keep hearing it everywhere I go. But I have learned it's not just me, I mean, it's kids my age that get labeled and stuff. And it's time to clear some things up.

Like I said I went to a bunch of elementary schools. I remember one was one of the most off the wall schools. I mean I don't really remember anything from K – 1st grade, because it was so fast paced, but then they were trying to integrate the Spanish classes with us, so, I mean it was crazy. I don't remember much, but I know I didn't learn much those first two years. Then I went to a private school. It was good there. I stayed there until like 3rd grade and I learned how to read real well, and it was a nice school. Since it was a private school, I had to wear a uniform and that worked real

well for me. And yeah, I liked it. I think it was the small classes, is what it was, and the teachers were there too, with more one on one time, more interaction. I got the help that I needed. You don't really get that in a public school with tons of kids and teachers are just going by the book trying to get everything done real quick. For the most part it really wasn't too bad.

Then I went to this other semi-private school. I remember I didn't like that at all 'cause it was so much homework, tons of homework and it was just that I felt I couldn't keep up. I wasn't good at multiplication. I wasn't taught it very well, and then like, every other day we had a multiplication test and I always failed it. There was a teacher there that didn't like me, and I didn't have recesses and stuff like that. That's when I started disliking school and alienating myself from everybody else and just did my own thing. I didn't want to hang out with anybody else and just went to class.

My forth grade teacher, she was horrible. She would just, everybody in the class, she always had a negative comment for them. This one kid, I'll always remember, had just gotten braces and she told him to shut up because she couldn't understand him and not to talk. And I mean, I can kind of understand because she had cancer and she knew she was dying and so she was unhappy, but she took it out on the students. One thing I remember is we were getting packets and we had to do a little bit of math a little bit of word problems. So she told us to do like two things out of it. Well, I did everything except for one thing and then for like an entire week I couldn't do anything fun. Like we were going to go watch a movie at the end of the day and

everybody else got to go watch the movie and I had to stay in the class by myself and everything just because I missed one assignment. And that happened multiple times.

That's when I think I really started feeling down about being in school. I think I've known since about the 3rd grade that I wasn't going to get a fair chance. Things were difficult there and I was just like, "This is not going to work out." I couldn't keep up. And there were other people, like some of my friends who felt the same way because all of a sudden you're into advanced math and it's just insane. In elementary school, and even to this day, I've only had just one or two friends.

When I started going to the Christian school from 6th - 8th grade, it was awful. Some of the classes that we should have had about math and stuff were replaced with like Bible Study and stuff like that. And we didn't really focus on progressing in math and reading and history and what not. I had good experiences with teachers and teachers were nice, but they weren't just academically strong there. It was more religious based work. It was something my mom wanted me to go to because she thought it would be a better environment, and it was in the sense that I got a lot of work done and learned a lot, but socially it just wasn't working for me. I didn't have very many friends there because I couldn't relate very well.

And then I get in high school and all of a sudden, I'm in an Algebra 2 class or whatever, and the work is all foreign to me. See, I wouldn't consider middle school middle school because it was pretty much, well, it wasn't like a separation from the younger kids to the older kids, it was just a classroom that I stayed in. There were no

lockers, there was no passing time or anything like that, it was, you know, eight hours of being whatever in one room.

Actually freshman year I did really good. Personally I thought I did well. I didn't have any altercations, didn't smoke cigarettes, didn't smoke weed or drink. I got easy classes and I was on the wrestling team and had some friends. The bad part of freshman year was you had to do Speech classes and everything, and I was like, "I'm never going to do that. Ever. I'm not going to get up in front of the classroom and speak about something that I don't really care about." They'd give us the topic and then we'd have to talk about it. I don't care about that. And in high school I don't think I really had much of a free time, except for like weekends. Because like when I do go to school, I definitely do try to do my best. Every time I would come home from school to my mom's house there'd be something that she'd complain about. I'd have to go do something. She'd like alienate me from my friends, "Oh, they do drugs. They're horrible people. You're not like that." I'm like, "Whatever." So I'd constantly be doing something that wasn't in my interest, you know, not enjoyable to me. And it's just been that way.

So at the end of freshman year I did start smoking cigarettes, and sophomore year, I got introduced to marijuana and smoked that, you know, just doing high school things, just going to class high, whatever. Sophomore year was just kind of like I went from freshman to senior within a year. I was tired of being there. School is so long; it's such a long process in life. It is. It's crazy. So sophomore year I just kind of, not gave up, but slacked definitely. Kind of like I've already done what I needed to do. My

grades didn't suffer horribly, but they did suffer. I was doing other things, hanging out with friends, skipping class, smoking weed and what not, just being a teenager. I mean sophomore year started out alright, but things kind of went into a decline, like, sort of bumping heads with teachers. It definitely seemed like some people were out to be against me or whatever. Like I was put in a class called Fresh Start for kids who messed up horribly in high school and it's supposed to get you back on track.

Fresh Start was basically a dumb kid class. You know, you screw up, you go there. And my friends too, had been in those kind of classes because they were just pushed aside. They're like, "Oh, you're not doing the work. You have a problem. We're going to put you in a special class." The idea is to recover credits, but what it is, is kind of like a therapy class in a sense. They try to teach you how you should act and give you reasons to be like everybody else. So they're like, "Oh, you need to take Fresh Start class. Even though you really haven't messed up in the normal high school environment, but we're going to put you in anyway." It was being labeled as a failure even though I hadn't really reached the failure status. I wasn't like completely hopeless. I had 15 credits and that's enough to be a sophomore. You know it takes 14. I wasn't like the kind of kid who should be a junior, but I wasn't like a freshman with 3 credits.

I hate stupid people, yet I'm always being treated like that. It pisses me off. I'm like, I'm not saying everybody's dumb compared to me, it's just that I've seriously met some dumb people in my lifetime. Yet at the same time people are always talking down to me, like I'm dumb because of the way I am. I'm like, "No, I'm

a very intelligent person." Just because I don't hold myself like I'm smarter than everybody else, all of a sudden I'm a stoner, loser who's going to end up dropping out. I don't judge anybody. Not unless there's good reason to judge somebody. I am who I am.

Anyway that was a crazy class. I remember going there stoned all the time. It was a ridiculous class. You go in there and the teacher, Ms. X, she was a different kind of teacher. She was kind of hippyish, and her classes were like, "Oh, let's draw a picture about something that made us happy today. Let's watch a video about people having a good time." I just couldn't handle that class without drugs. I was like, "This lady is tripping me out." And I feel bad because I had friends in that class. Most of them, I can remember now, are dropouts. Almost more than half of that class now are dropouts. They ended up dropping that class last year. It didn't really end up helping anybody.

I was missing credits that I needed, so junior year I was overwhelmed with trying to get all these classes that I needed. I didn't have any electives. It was nothing but all requirements, so I just got frustrated, and like way frustrated with that and then socially I was not getting along with people because I was just… I've always been somewhat of an anti-social person. Like I could be like a popular person, but I choose not to be. I choose to be by myself and do what I want to do. But junior year, it all caught up with me. I was having school problems that really, really got to me. I was just so frustrated with school. I had problems with my father, girl problems and ultimately I tried to kill myself. I didn't enjoy that year very much. I was just

frustrated with life and I was like, "Whatever," you know. It was dumb, I know, because just the year before that one of my good friends had just killed himself. So I had just spiraled down in a deep depression. I was on medication, and it didn't do anything for me. And I was just more depressed because I was on it. I was like, "Oh, I'm on medicine for it now? Great." And being frustrated with school definitely made everything else harder because I'm not doing good in school, and therefore, I'm not happy I guess because I'm not succeeding in school, so that makes me kind of anti-social because I'm just, kind of all pissy all the time.

Yeah, that was a hard year but, in the end of it I got a job and things picked up. I think I bounced back pretty quick, because if I really wanted to, I could have graduated last year. I've definitely had a lot of time to reflect on things, those things in my past and I definitely have build a shell towards it. Not like locking in emotions, but in a sense, like I can deal with them and be like, "Whatever, that was just a messed up time."

I can't really recall any serious time that I had a problem with a teacher except for junior year. A teacher is there to teach you, right? And like if you need help, they help you. Well, this one teacher was treating me like the dumbest piece of crap in the world. She was like, I was asking for a word, she was like, "Well, you need to find that out." And I'm like, "Why? You're my teacher, you should just enlighten me." And she was like, "No, I want you to go to the dictionary, read it and write it down 20 times." I'm like, "No, you should tell me what it means, so I could finish my work." And she just started going off at the mouth, trying to be all like, "Oh, you're a bad

student." I just threw a chair at her and I was like, "Fuck you. I'm done. Go to hell."

So I left class. It worked out pretty nicely though. They ended up having trouble with

that teacher and she had to be let go. It didn't look bad for me. Which is a bit different,

because I was a total dick and I should have been kicked out. It takes a lot to get me

that angry. I remember I've only been angry like that a couple times in my life. She

was just hitting that nerve and I was like, "No, I'm not talking this." I was overlooked

a lot in school, especially when I was younger.

It's really hard to get help in school, no matter what anybody says, no matter

how much they change the schools or whatever, it's still hard in a public school for a

kid to get help. No matter what. No matter whether you're dumb, smart, you know.

Every school I've been to has always been a crowded school. Even the private schools

were crowded. I mean, I did get more help with those ones because classes were

smaller, but when you put like 50 kids in a classroom with one teacher, those kids are

not going to get what they need. So, of course, yeah, it contributed to my frustration

because I'd do really horrible on a test, or fall behind in work and then I was like,

'Uh,oh,' and then like after school I'd still feel down. School definitely contributed.

School's a pain in the ass. And I think I say that because like, I don't think any kid can

go through high school and come out completely normal because you're in it for like

13 years of your life, Kindergarten up until you're a senior in high school. And that's

just a long point in a person's life. I mean, as far back as I can remember I've been in

school. Because when you're like 5 years old, you're just starting to come to, and it's

all school that whole time. And it definitely can be a frustrating thing, and people

don't really understand that. I can understand why kids drop out. School's hard. It's not easy. I mean, it is easy if you do what you're supposed to do, but if you can't learn like everybody else, or you're not getting the help you need, it's definitely hard. And I can understand why kids drop out. Why finish school when I can go and get a construction job, you know? I'm not like the smartest student and I've always struggled. I'm like, "I need help. I need help." And then like, a teacher would see me in class and I'd be waving my hand, "I need help with this question," and what not, and then, they'd probably see me out at the corner smoking a cigarette, and all of a sudden, "Well, two and two, he's a bad kid."

It's not like everybody at the high school was like, "Oh, you're a bad kid." It was just a select few teachers that were like, "You were seen outside smoking a cigarette today when you should have been in class." And they're like, "What's your problem, why don't you want to go to class?" And I'm like, "Class is boring." That's the vibe that I would get, but it's not so much like, "Oh, he has bad intentions." Just more or less he isn't going to amount to much. So all my friends kind of know; we're all the same. Like we all know how it is. It's just, of all my friends, I'm the only one left in school. The other ones dropped out, so… I feel like I don't fit in.

I mean the last semester I was there I didn't feel too welcome because it was a new school and new schools bring new kinds of people. I went there, like my entire high school career. I did sports and everything and then as the years progressed, slowly the school, slowly turned its back on me, especially my counselor over there. I'd go in with a really simple problem, like, "Oh, I'm having a problem in this class.

Can I switch over into another?" And then it turns around into, like I'm having issues at home and stuff like that. It just was like that ever since sophomore year with her, and finally this year she's like, "Well, you missed one day of class, we dropped you." It upsets me to think that like they can just, like earlier this year they were like, "We're going to help you graduate this year. We're going to help you graduate." And the second I messed up… and it wasn't even a big mistake. I was in a classroom where they made me sit on the floor. In a brand new, multimillion dollar school, I had to sit on the floor. And I was like, "No, it's a brand new school; there should be enough room for everybody." So I was like, "No." So I quit going to that class. And I tried to go in [to the counseling office], like as soon as I left that class to switch out into another class and they wouldn't let me, right? Well, then I go back into school, like after the weekend or whatever. And I get called into her office and she asks me what I'm doing there. And I'm like, "What do you mean, what am I doing here? Trying to go to school." And she's like, 'Well, actually you're not welcome here anymore because you're a 5th year senior and you kind of wore out your welcome because you don't want to cooperate with us." I was like, 'How did I not cooperate? I came in as soon as I left that class to talk to you about switching out of it into another class." But no one wanted to listen to me. My counselor and my teachers because they all knew I was a super senior and what not, and I just got some really negative feelings towards me.

So they kick me out. But what doesn't make sense to me is they can kick me out of the school, because I'm not welcome anymore, yet I can go there and work.

And that just doesn't make sense to me. They tell me I'm not allowed to be at school, but they let me wash dishes in the cafeteria for like next to nothing. So that's kind of like a slap in the face. "Well, you can't come here to learn, but you can come here and make half of minimum wage." It's just a big slap in my face and I will never forget that.

I mean they screwed me over so many times that I should just not even care. But at the same time, I do all of these years of school, right? Just for a piece of paper to tell me that I have equivalent learning, that I've learned enough. And it's just so dumb that I can't go out and get a certain job because I don't have diploma. But a diploma, it's really confusing me how like a piece of paper can mean so much and I have to work so hard for it. It's just dumb to me why I have to work so hard, like harder than other people it seems, to get this little piece of paper that says I'm smart. Even though I know I'm smart because I've been in high school for five years. I've taken classes over, so I'm pretty sure I know it. School, it's just a pain.

But I have to get it done. I can't be looked on as a drop out. How would that help me? That would make me look even worse than it already does. I mean the school system doesn't really think that highly of me already and people kind of look down on youth in this town. But if I drop out there's just something else that looks bad on me. They're like, "Oh, he's a drop out, smoking a cigarette, hanging at the park, not having a job." I couldn't imagine spending my life in this crappy town. To some people it might be like a paradise, but me, having grown up here as a kid and seeing what really goes on in this town, I could tell you lots about this town. Like you'll see

an African-American walking down the street, and if you look at people, you see the looks that that black person gets. You look at them, and they're like, "Oh, a black person." And you know it's just this town. It's a white majority town. It's a retirement town; there are a lot of retired people here. It's a college town; so there's a lot of uppityness, you could say. I mean you got the rich kids going to college. So I'm not going to be like that. I'm going to have that paper that tells people that I'm intelligent and I'm going to get a job, and hopefully go to college, but I don't know. I think high school's been enough.

Crazy is definitely a good word for it. High school is insane. You do so much stuff in high school. You kind of get pampered and then as soon as you're done, you get dropped on your ass. And you're like, "There you go. You did what you needed to do to set you up for life and now you got your piece of paper, go and get a job." And like I messed up, I failed classes; everybody does, you know, but, what a weird, crazy experience. It's just that in this town, in like our school district, you will get screwed over at some point. It happens to every kid. I'm not the only one, there's tons of people that I could point out to you that went through the same BS that I went through. It's just the way this town is, just the way the school system works here. So my advice would be avoid the corner hang outs, go to all your classes and try to graduate early if possible. Just do what you need to do to get out of there, because the longer you stay the more it's going to pull you down.

Structural Description

P-1 struggled early on with a perception of not being capable of meeting the school's expectation for success. He was not able to function at grade level with any ease and was often separated from classmates based on that inability. P-1 eventually came to identify this perception as being judged and labeled by school personnel as a student incapable of making adequate progress exacerbated by the teacher's inability to provide the time and attention required for him to make adequate progress. P-1 described various scenarios at each grade level wherein he felt abandoned by the teacher and betrayed by the system. This perception of treatment was internalized and has manifested itself in P-1's life as a lingering doubt and often disbelief in his own ability to learn and be successful and the display of "anti-social" and self-destructive behaviors.

The consequences of multiple transitions. P-1 was able to recall the disquieting sensation of not comprehending what was expected of him at an early age. He described his first elementary school experience as "crazy" and felt that too much information was coming at him too quickly. It wasn't until he attended a private school for grades three and four, where he found uniformity and predictability, that he felt he was able to learn comfortably and remembers that experience as being "nice."

The third elementary school P-1 attended brought back the earlier feelings of inadequacy in that he felt as though more was expected of him in

terms of class work and homework than he was able to give. By this time he had learned to believe that teachers were not providing him with the experiences he required to be at grade level. This feeling in combination with a fourth grade teacher who he perceived as treating him and the class abusively was the beginning of his academic withdrawal and social isolation.

From this point forward P-1 described his school experience as containing the following elements: (1) being made to feel he was dumb and less capable than his classmates, (2) teachers not providing him with the necessary time and attention to be able to learn well, and (3) having only a few friends and finding participation in the school's social scene difficult and senseless. P-1 did not adapt easily to different school settings and the constancy of the transitions he made between schools impacted his ability to find routine and predictable outcomes. P-1 admits to needing a different teaching style than the mainstream. He believes he does not learn as readily as most and has blamed and rejected school for not recognizing his needs. This is true for him at all grade levels.

On being a step behind. P-1 was never able to recover from the multiple school transitions. The stress of learning a new environment, making new friends, and being inserted into new learning situations created an elementary experience that left P-1 feeling unbalanced and consistently a step behind. P-1 learned to "just hang back" and "do my own thing" in order not to feel the pain of continually ending up on the short end of comparisons with peers. P-1 was learning to isolate himself from others and maintain an "uninvolved" status. He seemed to have the excuse of being the "new kid"

or having come from a school where "they didn't teach me" what he needed to know in order to adapt quickly into the new setting.

P-1's elementary experience continued into middle school. Having attended his fifth school, a private Christian school, P-1 recalls it as a school where courses in Bible study were substituted for foundational courses in Mathematics, English, and Social Studies. P-1's recollection described a school where he wasn't taught the basic skills that would have enabled him to have greater academic success later on. Therefore, P-1 has developed and harbored feelings of resentment for how his early education unfolded. He believes that his experience could have been significantly different had adults, both at home and school, made different choices with regard to his educational needs.

P-1 has felt a great deal of resentment and bitterness for being relegated to a class designed for students he described as "school failures" his sophomore year of high school. Being assigned to that class was affirming to him that the school was not willing to view him as anything other than an undesirable student, incapable of accomplishing the mainstream expectations for learning and school success. His resentment stemmed in large part from the fact that he felt he had a successful freshman year in which he made effort to succeed academically as well as participate socially, yet he was still assigned to attend a class for "slackers and losers". His drug use and emotional dis-ease escalated upon enrollment into this special class. And he freely admits to becoming more anti-social in attitude and behavior at this point.

Up until this time, P-1 struggled to be a part of the system and find a modicum of success within it. However, being identified as a school failure by being assigned this class, P-1 spiraled into a pattern of destructive thinking and behaving culminating in an attempted suicide. Life was not working for him at any level; family tension was high, peer relationships were strained, and he felt disrespected by teachers. P-1 was gripped by the fear of not being worthwhile and successful in any aspect of life. School had not provided ego enhancement since elementary level. Personal relationships were difficult to maintain in that P-1 self-described as moody and anti-social. Family relationships were strained as neither parent seemed willing or able to offer unconditional support. It was only after the failed suicide that P-1 received personalized attention and found some success in a job that entailed helping others.

Throughout school, P-1's tendency was not to question authority and accept that he was dumb. After the trauma of his junior year, P-1 found a determination to return to school. Public school, however, had not changed and P-1 was confronted with the same issues as before. Being behind in credits, P-1 was enrolled in only required courses and the workload was heavy, offering him no opportunity to "have fun" at school. P-1 perceived yet again a failure on the part of the school to recognize that his learning needs differed from the majority. There seemed to be no accommodation for his social and emotional needs, and P-1 was unable to successfully convey why school had become a hostile environment for him. P-1's reaction to this lack of empathy was harsh. He had exchanged his isolating nature for one more defiant. P-1 had verbal confrontations with teachers, counselors, and administrators,

and in one case became violent. Unable to reconcile his feelings of inadequacy from the past and not being recognized for his uniqueness, P-1 felt unwelcome and was eventually told "you are not welcome here". At this point in time the transformation from a student who was a bit behind but willing to one who was openly defiant and capable of throwing a chair at a teacher was complete. P-1 could not longer contain the anger and frustration of years of feeling inadequate and labeled as dumb. P-1's rejection of the school system was final.

Social influence, peer connections. P-1 seemed to always be wanting. He consistently felt overlooked; he learned early on that he was not particularly significant. P-1's inability to learn independently and adapt quickly was a large contributor to his lack of school success. He required more time on task than others and, by virtue of teacher work loads, he never received the attention that he desired or required. Although not learning disabled, P-1 does process more slowly than the majority and was unable to keep up. He also did not learn or was not taught to advocate for himself. P-1 has suffered from not quite knowing how things were supposed to be and therefore could not make an adjustment to anticipate the next step or stage. He was never able to distinguish himself as above average in any academic area. This seems to be true for him personally as well.

P-1, by nature an introvert, found it a difficult and often times a painful process socially in the schools. By virtue of not being able to attend any one school long term, P-1 was denied the experience of finding solid and lasting social connections with peers that may have enhanced his overall academic experience. Although P-1 went

through a brief period of attempting to connect to school in acceptable ways, for example, joining the wrestling team as a freshman, he ultimately withdrew. P-1 chose friends who shared the same basic school experience and looked to form his alliances outside of the school environment. He was able to associate with peers who also felt mistreated and betrayed by the system and those associations served to strengthen his perception of being a victim to the school's lack of resources.

Up until the 11th grade, P-1 thought of himself as being deficient and subjected to treatment that made graduation unlikely. He became "pissy and difficult to be around". The only time P-1 described feeling socially comfortable and accepted was at the "Corner", a location off campus where students would go to smoke cigarettes and skip class. The attraction for P-1 was the lack of expectation that he be a certain type of person. His perception is one of being totally accepted without judgment. P-1 romanticizes that time as being a solace in an otherwise emotionally tumultuous period in his life.

The desire to escape the constraints and expectations of high school was a guiding factor in P-1's drug use and absenteeism. Feeling bound by the unobtainable expectation of school success, it was easier for P-1 to participate in behaviors that escalated his withdrawal from and failure in school. Believing that he was never "pressured or anything" to use drugs, P-1 found a social group he could associate with that did not require him to be other than he was. He did not have to perform any task that may have led to a loss or failure. By engaging in these behaviors he had conceded that he would not graduate.

Resulting attitudes. P-1 has described his school experience as contributing to his overall dissatisfaction with the place in which he is living. He finds the environment to be disingenuous and lacking regard for youth who do not conform to certain expectations. P-1 perceived himself as alienated from society by virtue of not obtaining a diploma. He is deeply impacted by that knowledge and has vowed to pursue a diploma by whatever means in order not to become a person rejected by the community. His concern that "I can't be looked on as a drop out" is indicative of P-1's internationalization of being unable to make adequate progress in school as it relates to his own self-worth. He has come to view the diploma as the only means available to him to demonstrate to the community that "I'm intelligent" and able to "get a good job" and be viewed as a contributing member, not "a loser." P-1 has enrolled in an alternative program on two separate occasions with the intention to earn a diploma.

The process of alienation has been slow and cumulative for P-1. In order to alleviate some of the angst of school failure, he has extended that experience to be true to some degree for all students. He feels justified in his belief that no student can learn adequately and receive fair treatment in this particular school district regardless of their intellectual ability. By rationalizing that his school experience was not unique to him but rather the norm, P-1 can feel a sense of hopefulness that life will be better and that his lack of success in school had more to do with a failure on the part of the school system rather than his own personal failing or fear of inadequacy. Even though he is willing to acknowledge that he was not the "smartest kid in school", this rationalization allows him to find meaning in his experience and to move toward a

future beyond school. By complaining that the dedication and length of the schooling process currently required of students is beyond what the typical student can do while remaining emotionally healthy, P-1 has found a way to compartmentalize his feelings and shield himself from the depth of his pain and disappointment.

It has only been as he has matured emotionally that P-1 can take full responsibility for his life and set future direction. He may continue to live his life, however, feeling burdened by the sense that he must try harder than most, is destined to struggle for recognition, and must suffer humiliation before he can demonstrate his worth.

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Textural – Structural Description

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Transitions between schools. P-1 acknowledged that the degree of alienation he felt from school has underpinnings in the numerous transitions he made between schools at both the elementary and secondary level as well as from public school settings to private. P- 1 transitioned between five different elementary schools, two different middle schools and three different high school settings. "I mean it was crazy, I don't remember much. I didn't learn much in those first years."

P-1 perceived his first elementary school experience as not preparing him or meeting his learning needs which impacted his ability to adapt to the new setting.

> I went to a bunch of elementary schools, but the first one I went to, I remember it was one of the most off the wall schools. I mean I don't remember anything from kindergarten though the first grade because it was so fast paced and then like they were trying to integrate the Spanish classes with us. And then I went to a private school. It was good there because I learned better how to read and stuff, but it was hard trying to catch up to all the other kids.

The adjustment to each new setting required of P-1 took its toll on the level of

confidence he had in his ability to learn given that he consistently had to maneuver

around that gaps in his education. P-1 also acknowledged the toll the constant

disruption in his learning took on his self-esteem.

> I felt as though I wasn't prepared for school because I bounced from
> like so many schools in elementary. In one school we'd just be starting to read
> and do math, and addition and subtraction and then, all of a sudden I'd go to
> another school where they're already in division and stuff and I didn't know,
> and we were reading novels and so, I felt kind of like, I guess dumb you could
> say. Because I couldn't keep up. And
> there were other people, like some of my friends felt the same way, 'cause they
> just, all of a sudden you're into advanced math and it was just insane.

Acknowledging feeling different. P-1 perceived from the beginning of his school

experience that he was viewed differently and treated differently than most other

students. He came to believe his teachers made assumptions about his ability to learn.

"I was overlooked a lot in school. Especially when I was younger, not so much high

school, but definitely younger." When asked to recall when he might have first felt as

though he was not receiving equal consideration, he responded: "A long time ago. I'd

have to say in 3rd grade when I was going to this one elementary school. 'Cause things

were difficult there too and I was just like, This is not going to work out." In addition,

P-1 verbally acknowledged feeling judged as not being a capable learner. "I've always

felt that I've been somewhat pre-labeled. Like a failure."

As a result of the many transitions, P-1 often did not have the prerequisite

knowledge to be academically successful and experienced being separated into lower

ability work groups to which P-1 reacted by retreating socially. "Elementary school,

even to this day, I've only had just one or two friends. So, back then I only had like

one friend." He had come to view himself more different than other students and

behaved according to that premise.

P-1 continued to experience the feeling of being labeled and felt relegated to

alternate learning settings. He connected his feeling of academic difficulty and failure

to his overall sense of worth.

> I remember I didn't like that at all 'cause it was so much homework,
>
> tons of homework and it was just that I felt I couldn't keep up 'cause
> I wasn't good at multiplication, wasn't taught it very well, and then
> like, every other day we had a multiplication test and I always failed
> it, and uh, there was a teacher there that didn't like me, and uh, I didn't
> have recesses and stuff like that. So that's when I started disliking
> school and alienating myself from everybody else and I just did my
> own thing. I didn't want to hang out with anybody else and just went to
> class, and not really had recesses or anything like that.

As he progressed through high school, P-1 was resigned to being misjudged by school

personnel. He had been assigned to attend a class designed for students needing credit

retrieval options. "I was in a class classed Fresh Start, and it's for kids who messed up

horribly." P-1's resentment increased because he felt did not fit into that category.

> They're like, Oh, you need to take Fresh Start class. Even though you
> really haven't messed up in the normal high school environment, but
> we're going to put you in anyway. And then, being labeled as a failure
> even though I haven't really reached the failure status. I wasn't like
> completely hopeless.

By this time he had developed an attitude of resentment and indifference, and the

scope of his perception of injustice grew to include all students.

> And my friends, who were also before that, like in middle school had
> been in those kind of classes because they were just pushed aside.
> They're like, Oh, you're not doing the work. You have a problem.
> We're going to put you in a special class.

Ultimately P-1 came to view the school district as not being willing to recognize

students' learning needs as simply "par for the course. "

> Like our school district, you will get screwed over at some point. It
> happens to every kid. I'm not the only one. There's tons of people
> that I could point out to you that went through the same bullshit that
> I went through. And it's just the way this town is, just the way the
> school system works here.

The progression of P-1's alienation from the school system is evidenced in his

withdrawal and capitulation. He had not been able to describe a time when he felt

valued, praised, or successful.

His attitude toward most teachers was one of indifference. After years of

feeling disassociated and overlooked, P-1 finally lashed out at one teacher who he

perceived was treating him condescendingly.

> Well, this teacher was treating me like the dumbest piece of crap in
> the world. And she just started going off at the mouth, trying to be all
> like, 'Oh, you're a bad student.' I just threw a chair at her and I was
> like, 'Fuck you. I'm done. Go to hell.

At having reached the point of violence in the classroom, P-1 felt a modicum of guilt,

yet in retrospect has identified feelings of injustice, shame, and outrage and believes

they are justified.

> I was a total dick and I should have been kicked out. I was wrong.
> I'm not that kind of a person. I was just… It takes a lot to get me that
> angry. And I remember I've only been angry like that a couple times
> in my life. She was just hitting that nerve and I was like, 'No, I'm not
> talking this.'

Familial/Peer influences. P-1 found it difficult to speak about his situation at home.

He had no specific words to describe his father or the impact that relationship has had

on his life. He only offered a statement of fact that revealed an estrangement of some

degree. "I just wasn't getting along with people and just, I had gone and visited my

dad and things didn't go too well." This relationship remains incomplete and may

continue to have impact on P-1's self-perception.

P-1 described a contentious relationship with his mother and assigned to her

some responsibility for feeling like a failure.

> It just really goes back on my mom, she was always like, Oh, you
> bad boy. You're gonna be an alcoholic, your grandpa's an alcoholic,
> you're going to end up like that and beat women. And I'm like,
> What the hell.

 His sorrowful description of how he perceived her reflects P-1's belief that he did not

have the home life and the parental support which might have fortified him as he faced

the challenges of his school experience and how the message of rejection he received

from her factored into his interpretation of the events that happened at school.

> My mom's like, Oh, I've wasted my whole life, There's something
> wrong with you. You're going to grow up and there's going to be
> problems. And I'm like, Screw it, whatever. You know, just trying
> to blow it off. And I keep hearing it everywhere I go.

P-1 does not possess an abundance of charisma or an extroverted personality.

He has remained low-key in terms of making friends and making himself known to his

peers. "I hung out with like virtually the same five people that I have for like the same

ten years." P-1 also seemed to prefer to be safe when choosing friends. "And then I

see my friends from 3rd grade, and I'm like, Right on." He had an awareness of the

social climate in high school and did not perceive himself to have been unduly

impacted by peer pressure. "… but as far as peer pressure. I was never really peer

pressured into anything. Like I can honestly say the only time I was pressured into

anything was like smoking a cigarette when I was 7."

P-1 preferred to spend his time alone or with only a few friends. "I just didn't

get along with other people in school 'cause I had learned like, I just never got a long

with certain types of people in high school." He did not choose to participate in the

social scene typical of the schools he attended. His perception of his peers was one of

indifference in that he preferred to remain on the outside looking in, though he did not

seem to harbor feelings of disappointment for his lack of popularity or maintain a

rejection complex.

> The school up on the hill. It is definitely segregated. They've got the
> jocks, the stoners, their preps and whatnot and they stay apart from
> each other. But at CHS, you've got the punk rockers, the Goths,
> whatnot, and they're all mingled. Everybody knows everybody there.
> And it's a nice environment socially. Like I could be like a popular
> person, but I choose not to be, I choose to be by myself and do what I
> want to do.

P-1 found a niche at a place called "the Corner" where he could hang out with

friends and acquaintances and where he felt accepted and connected in a way that he

did not in the schools.

> You could go down this street, and you would just sit there and smoke
> cigarettes and stuff. And like I went down there and I met people, I
> went down there and there's some grungy looking people, but they
> definitely accepted me. And they were all accepting. I went out there
> and smoked cigarettes and made tons of friends out there, because
> everybody was like, Whatever, just chill.

P-1 admitted to feeling peer pressure in terms of smoking marijuana and that spending

time at the Corner was ultimately a negative choice that detracted from his ability to

do school.

It was accepting, but it was like a downer at the same time. People were like, Hey, want to score some weed, but at the same time they were like, Smoke this, smoke this. It felt like, peer pressure I've never really been known for.

Discovering a safe place to spend time outside of school and in avoidance of school work had a consequence P-1 had not predicted. Related to feeling alienated and dismissed by teachers, P-1 felt they judged him as "a lost cause" and of unsavory character when they came to know he spent time at the Corner, which P-1 described as being the notorious local hang out for drug users and skippers.

I went down to the office a lot. Not really because of what I had done, but because of what my friends had done. They'd smoke weed and they'd be like, Well, you were seen with a couple of the stoners. And I was like, Whatever, you know.

P-1 was now caught in a cycle of negativism at both home and school with a building sense of despair and hopelessness. He had built and maintained friendships, yet these connections did not bolster his esteem or productivity and earned P-1 a reputation as a "stoner" whose connotation he equated with "loser." He was receiving this message from the adults at school and at home and seemed unable to find solace in either.

Every time I would come home from school to my mom's house there'd be something that she'd complain about. I'd have to go do something. She'd like alienate me from my friends, Oh, they do drugs. They're horrible people. You're not like that. You can't go out. I'm like, Whatever. So I'd constantly be doing something that wasn't in my interest, you know, not enjoyable to me. And it's just been that way. I'm not saying that I never had fun, I'm just saying like, I just do a lot more unenjoyable things than I do enjoyable things.

An act of hopelessness. P-1 perceived himself to be a capable learner. He clearly comprehended the value of being successful in school as well as his academic limitations. "I guess because I'm not like the smartest student and I've always

struggled. But I mean, school is important to me." He did learn it was important to

become educated and wanted to earn a diploma, yet somehow he was never able to

connect to school. "I've always been somewhat of an anti-social person."

Despite P-1's low connection to the spirit of high school, he perceived his

freshman and sophomore years as having been relatively successful both academically

and socially. "Sophomore year, freshman year I did really good. And personally I

thought I did well." As a freshman, P-1 had joined the wrestling team, had a long term

girlfriend, and had not yet engaged in the use of cigarettes and marijuana and

frequenting the Corner. "I didn't have any altercation, didn't smoke cigarettes, didn't

smoke weed or drink." However, as P-1 matured and became more independent from

home, he chose to experiment with behaviors he perceived of as more adult and

typical to the teen experience. "And at the end of freshman year I started smoking

cigarettes, and sophomore year, I got introduced to marijuana and smoked that, you

know, just doing high school things, just going to class high, whatever, you know."

As P-1 embarked on this junior year, his attitude toward life had soured and his

outlook became pessimistic. He attributes the spiral into suicidal ideation as the result

of deteriorating relationships and feeling incapable and labeled at school.

> But, uh, junior year, it all caught up with me, um, I was having
> school problems that really, really got to me because I was just
> frustrated with school. I had problems with my father, girl problems
> and, uh, ultimately I tried to kill myself, so… so that wasn't a very
> good, uh, I didn't enjoy that year very much.

P-1 found that his life contained too many unmanageable parts and the choices he

made to find solace such as marijuana use and time away from home did not remedy

the growing depression. Even the use of an anti-depressant medication contributed to

his sense of not being normal.

> I just wasn't getting along with people and just, I had gone and visited
> my dad and so I was just frustrated w/ life and I was like, Whatever,
> you know. It was dumb because just the year before that one of my
> good friends had just killed himself, so I was just like, spiraled down in
> a deep depression. I was on medication, and it didn't do anything for
> me. I was just more depressed 'cause I was on it. I was like, Oh, I'm on
> medicine for it now? Great.

Having hit bottom and survived, P-1 began a process of recovery which

included therapy. "I think I bounced back pretty quick." He found a job working at a

local boys and girls club which allowed him to look beyond himself. He also had

become more independent from his home. Upon reflection, P-1 claims some

responsibility for his choices. "But, once again, it comes back on me, slacking off

again. I started smoking weed and cigarettes and hanging out with friends." However,

he attributes his school experience as being a major contributor to his frustration,

depression and attempted suicide.

> Oh, definitely, school had a lot to do with that year. Like junior year I
> had more classes because like the requirements and stuff that you had
> to get done to be a senior, and then I just wasn't really feeling those
> classes and I didn't do too well. I was overwhelmed with trying to get,
> like all these classes that I needed. I didn't have any electives junior
> year. It was nothing but all requirements, so I just got frustrated, and
> like way frustrated with that.

P-1 identified his frustration as stemming from poor communication with family,

friends, and adults in school; he had not learned well how to advocate for his needs.

His attitude and behaviors conveyed his sense of powerlessness and victimization in

particular as it related to his school experience.

> [Frustration with school] was definitely first, and then that kind of like made everything else harder because I'm not doing good in school, and therefore, I'm not happy I guess 'cause I'm not succeeding in school, so that makes me kind of anti-social I guess 'cause I'm just, kind of all pissy all the time.

The decision to leave school. P-1 had known in some fashion since the 3rd grade that he was not the type of student who could typically learn at the pace set by teachers or without their consistent guidance. By middle school he had formed the opinion that he would not receive the education he would need to be successful in high school.

> When I started going to the Christian school from 6th -8th grade, it was awful, because like some of the classes that we should have had about math and stuff were replaced with like Bible Study and stuff like that. And we didn't really focus on like progressing in math and reading and history and whatnot.

Although not yet alienated to the point of abandoning the effort or cynical to the point of blaming the system, P-1 found his middle school experience lacking. "And then I get in high school and all of a sudden, I'm in an Algebra 2 class or 1 or whatever, and the work is all foreign to me."

Progressing through high school P-1 perceived he was doing well, yet by the end of his sophomore year he was credit deficient, and by the end of his junior year he had attempted suicide. He was unable to focus solely on being a student still hoping to earn a diploma. "I was in and out of counseling and therapists because, you know, everybody wanted to, you know, see if I was alright, get to the bottom of things. And I just, I still don't even know why things happened they way they did."

P-1 seemed to be working hard to reestablish a sense of normalcy. P-1 attended an alternative high school which allowed him to recover credits while receiving more one on one teacher support. "I made a lot of friends here real quick. And the work was easy because I worked at my own pace and I ended up not getting very many credits that year, but I felt that I had learned more because it was independent study." The alternative setting worked well for P-1 in that he perceived receiving more individualized attention without the pressure to "keep up."

His situation having stabilized and according to district policy, P-1 returned to the public high school. His physical return was accompanied by the return of the feelings of inferiority and invisibility he had previously experienced. P-1 found himself at the mercy of a system in which he felt overlooked and overwhelmed.

> [It] was hard. I mean the last semester I was there, I didn't have any off periods, I had government classes, which, were… It was an insane class, it was so fast paced. We had a project every day. I couldn't finish the first one before we were on the third one.

P-1 again felt the sting of judgment from school officials and in particular the school counselor. He expressed the feeling of being unwelcome and seemed to feel intimidated by the expectation. Nothing had changed to accommodate P-1's learning needs and he could not find the stamina and fortitude to sustain the effort. P-1 felt alone in his process and faltered.

> It was just my counselor and my teachers, 'cause they all knew I was a super senior and whatnot, and I don't know, I just got some really negative feelings towards me, like my counselor was like, Oh, you know, you missed a class; you're no longer welcome here, blah, blah, blah and they kicked me out.

Throughout his high school experience P-1 felt betrayed and devalued. P-1 was not in reality expelled from school, but was referred back to the alternative program where he continued to struggle, where the desire and opportunity to earn the diploma waned. He had expressed believing that no student, regardless of ability was treated respectfully or received appropriate, individualized instruction. He harbored resentment and a quiet rage toward the "school system."

> It kind of pisses me off. Because I mean, I went there, like my entire high school career, whatever you want to call it, experience. I did sports and everything and then like, as the years progressed, slowly the school, slowly turned it's back on me.

His decision to leave school was ultimately based in an attempt to preserve his dignity as a fledgling adult and find a path that offered a real prospect of future accomplishment.

Meaning of the experience. P-1 learned many life lessons during his school experience. His perspective on the value of school in his current cultural setting comes across as toxic to his self-esteem. His experiences ranged from demeaning, "I'm like, I need help. I need help. And then like, a teacher would see me in class and I'd be like waving my hand, I need help with this question. And they'd never come," to humiliating, "Oh, you're a bad kid. You were seen outside smoking a cigarette today when you should have been in class. What's your problem? Why don't you want to go to class?" P-1 learned about the social divisions by which people separate themselves. "That's what they think of us. They're like, Oh, they're definitely from [that school]. They're out there smoking cigarettes. They don't dress nice. Just looked down upon more than anything." He learned that

regardless of his effort, he would not be able to break out of the caste to which he had

been assigned.

> School's a pain in the ass. And I think, I say that because like, I don't
> think any kid can go through high school and come out completely
> normal because you're in it for like 13 years of your life, kindergarten
> up until you're a senior in high school. And yea, then like after school
> I'd still feel down.

P-1 viewed the difficulties he encountered in school as systemic issues. This

view developed as he matured emotionally and personalized less his perceptions of

teacher's attitudes toward him.

> It's really hard to get help in school, no matter what anybody says,
> no matter how much they change the schools or whatever, it's still
> hard in a public school for a kid to get help. No matter what. No
> matter whether you're dumb, smart, you know. When you put like
> 50 kids in a classroom with one teacher, those kids are not going to
> get what they need.

The retrospective nature of P-1's commentary revealed a tone of cynicism that had

been emerging since middle school. His experiences lead him to believe students

were, in general, powerless and subject to the whims of the system and there was

futility in the effort.

> I can understand why kids drop out. School's hard. It's not easy.
> I mean, it is easy if you do what you're supposed to do, but if
> you can't learn like everybody else, or you're not getting the help
> you need, it's definitely hard. And I can understand why kids drop
> out. Why finish school when I can go and get a construction job, you
> know?

P-1 has struggled with the idea of needing a diploma to demonstrate

one's worth in society. Again a sense of futility as well as injustice emerged while

exploring the meaning of attending school and completing the process of earning a

diploma. "It's just dumb to me like why I have to work so hard, like harder than other

people it seems to get this little piece of paper that says I'm smart." He had not

cultivated an understanding of the intrinsic rewards for his effort and did not

comprehend why he was expected to invest so much of his time and energy. "Because

when you're like 5, you're starting to come to, and it's all school that whole time. And

it definitely can be a frustrating thing, and you know, people don't really understand

that." He viewed school only in terms of how it impacted him and what he was

supposed to get out of it.

> I mean they screwed me over so many times that I should just not
> Even care. But at the same time, I do all of these years of school,
> right? Just for a piece of paper to tell me that I have equivalent
> learning, that I've learned enough. And it's just so dumb that I can't
> go out and get a certain job because I don't have diploma. And it's
> just a piece of paper that, when I eventually get it, probably won't
> mean jack to anybody.

In addition to the futility of earning a diploma, P-1's basically negative explanatory

style emerged as he indicated completing a diploma program had no real value in his

estimation. "Well, you have your diploma but you don't have this. And it's like, great,

there's something else I've got to deal with. School. It's just a pain."

CHAPTER FIVE

Participant Two

Textural Description

I liked going to school, but I always went for people and for not the actual

place. I always went to see my friends and talk to people I usually didn't get to talk to.

Education is, it's really nothing. I mean, it's just bookwork, which bookwork only gets

you so far, yet real life experiences can get you twice as far because you understand

how the world really works and you can use that, you can manipulate that, you can use

that for yourself, you can use that to help other people and that's how it's always felt.

I've always felt like, bookwork, it's just a side thing, I mean we really need to focus

on real life.

I always felt like somehow I already knew it, like the reading and writing and

all the stuff they wanted to teach you at school. Like when we were doing it, the

school work I mean, it just felt like, well, at first, I would love it and then it would just

get really boring and you know how they have to be repetitive to get it in a lot of kids

minds, well, to me, I already had it in my mind so I just got bored of it and didn't do

any of the work. I guess if I knew what a GED was in elementary school, I probably

would have told you I was going to get my GED way back then. I don't know, I've

never really felt attached to school. It's never been a big thing for me. It's been on the

back burner all my life.

As a kid I remember I felt like school was too hard for me. But then I realized it was because I was always getting bored and then I'd get frustrated because I wouldn't really be thinking about what I was doing. So like say in Math, I wouldn't like pay attention and add up the numbers wrong or whatever and then I'd get mad because I thought I was dumb and then, I'd realize, well, I'm just bored of this Math so I'm not paying attention anymore. I've always felt kind of out of place; everything feels different to me. Like they'll be going through Math problems or whatever several times a day, and I'm like, "Well, I get this, why do I have to do it again?" All the other kids just put their head down and start writing and me, I have my head up, and I'm like, "Why do we do this? I don't want to do this." So I was always questioning a lot of things about school and the school environment.

Apparently I had gained a lot of attitude while I was in CA. I moved there before, er, around middle school to be with my dad. I just really wanted to see how it was to live with my dad because my mom has always really been set in her ways and my dad was like a whole different parenting style. And so my mom would say that at least once a day, "Where did this attitude come from?" And I'd say, "I don't know what you're talking about!" in a pretty snotty tone. "That attitude." And so, I started talking back to everybody. That's when my school days started going really down hill. Plus mom put me in a, in a, semi-private school, and the work there was extremely advanced. And I was no where near it.

In CA, the school work was even lower than it had been in elementary school, so I was way behind and I hadn't practiced anything, and they expected me to be doing stuff like cell division and all that junk. So I was like, "What!!" "No, I can't do it." I was in 6th grade; I didn't know anything about any of this. And they were reading "The Iliad," and that lost me too because I had been reading like chapter books in CA, because in CA, they just didn't care. They're like, "Read this." "I'm beyond this." "Read it anyway." "Fine." So I was reading a bunch of chapter books and junk like that for my reading classes and I got here and they're reading "The Iliad." We had to write summaries of every chapter, and I'm like, "What? This is too hard. I'm not doing it." And in CA I'm like, "Can I have double multiplication?" "No. You need to work on what the class is working on." "I already understand this." "Well then, do the work." "But I just want to do something else so that I can work and actually have fun." "No, you need to do what the class is doing." So I was like, "Alright. Whatever." So I ended up blowing off a lot of school work.

So I started mouthing off to the teachers, having none of my work done, I ended up skipping like a huge proportion of the school year. So, that's when everything started to go down hill. And this school was really an extremely uppity school. And so when I got there, I was way out of place. There were maybe two kids that I got along with and both of them were rich, so they really didn't get along with me. We just chilled because we liked the same things. And not to mention that I was on the bus like 3-4 hours after school every day just to get home because of where the school was. They would take everybody back to their houses out in the country and

then they'd come all the way back into town and drop me off at the Boy's and Girl's

Club at like 5 o'clock at night. So the entire time I'd just sit around and ponder,

"Wow, there's only one person who likes me on this bus and not even they truly like

me." I had a lot of time to ponder, not to mention, like I went from super low

expectations in school in CA, and then I jumped right back into a super high. And so I

was totally lost and ended up failing and I ended up not passing because of that.

I went through a lot of things I think people shouldn't have to go through too,

when I was in CA. A lot of violence and a lot of stuff that I was like, "I don't think

people should have to go through this." I witnessed, just a lot of things that went down

there that, well, like I've seen people at a little kid's park, just dealing out crack and

people, you know, like tweekers would come up to them all shakin' and stuff and I

just don't think a kid my age, which I was only like 11 or so when I saw this, I don't

like a kid my age should have to see that. I mean in CA I was running with a different

crowd, so like I was running with trouble makers, but at the time I wasn't a trouble

maker. And so they would do things and I would get blamed for it. So it was just

completely random anger. So, all that school junk, it'd just make me super mad. And

then I did start rebelling.

It's just like the school mindset of like, you know, you go, you do homework,

you turn it in, you talk about it, it just doesn't suit me. And you don' know how many

times I heard somebody say to me, "Oh, but you're so smart. You have so much

potential." Actually it's surprising that a lot of my teachers in like elementary school

and middle school in CA, they didn't care what I did just as long as I showed up at

school. Actually I didn't even show up at school most of the time, and they didn't even care. When I went to here, the OR school, they questioned me occasionally. But they didn't really care either. They knew that I knew the stuff and they knew I just didn't do homework because I didn't feel the need to. I guess they were thinking as well, "You know, he can do it so why force him to show us a million times a day." I almost felt like I was the special kid 'cause all the teachers, they just understood, "He understands the work, why force him to do it again." So we just had an understanding: I don't have to do the homework. I mean occasionally they'd get on my case 'cause all the other kids noticed, "Hey, how come he's not doing his homework?" But overall, they just really didn't care.

After that semi-private school, they took me back to the public school here. And I went there for about 2 and a half years. But I didn't want to do the school thing anymore. So grades weren't good. Attitude wasn't good. As a matter of fact, I think me and my three friends had the record for the highest referrals to not get expelled from middle school. We'd run around the halls, we'd talk back to the teachers, throw our pencils if they told us not to, stand up and just leave class. Some of the teachers, they got on my nerves and stuff, I'd say, "Shut up, fuck off bitch" and just walk out. I was an absolute troublemaker. I did everything possible to make every single teacher I ever met mad, no matter if I liked the teacher or not. It was just amusing to make them angry, so I'd do everything I could. I think I would have been a little less rebellious, like, 'cause I know a lot of the reasons I kept mouthing off to teachers, is because I knew that it would make Mr. X., the male principal, it would make him mad. So, I'd

mouth off to the teacher and they'd always take it as I'm going after them and I'd always explain to them, "It's not you guys. It's me." That's what I'd always say. I was really just trying to hurt Mr. X.

He always had a huge problem with me from the moment we set eyes on each other. I could tell he didn't like me and I just didn't like him either. I don't know why, I just didn't like him. And the first chance he got, he gave me a referral. Second chance, gave me another referral. And then he tried to suspend me for like 3 weeks, no, I think it was like 6 weeks. It was because I told the teachers my name was Peach Cobbler and did all this stuff and blah, blah, they sent me down to the office. And the teacher's like, 'Ok, you're not agreeing with me then go up to the office." So I went up to the office and I was talking to Ms. X. They were co-principals. And Ms. X. is like, "Well, I believe we're going to give you 3 days suspension and we'll see you back on Monday." I was like, "Alright, sounds fine to me. Sounds reasonable." And then, Mr. X. walks in the room and he's like, "No, these boys have been trying to tear apart our school since day one, they are not coming back to school for the rest of the school year."

I think one of the reasons why he wanted to get rid of me was because he couldn't bully me. All the other people, he's like "I'm going to suspend you!" And they're like, "Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry." Me, he'd be like, "I'm going to suspend you!" And me, it'd be like, "Good, do it! Please, I want to see you suspend me for absolutely no reason, please do it." I don't think he liked that at all. And I dress just about like any other kid who was in the school. I didn't stand out, like physically, I think a lot of

it had to do with I am who I am and I think he's racist. He always tried to bring it up.

He like, I noticed also that a lot of the Mexican kids after school were getting

suspended really quick and yet, the white kids would do something almost exactly the

same and, it doesn't matter? I think it was because, actually yeah, when I first met

him, I was talking in Spanish to my mom so, I think he probably took that and

decided, "Ok, this kid's Mexican, I don't like him. Not to mention, this kid fights my

power, so he's out." I've been mulling over this ever since it happened. I was like,

"Well, is he really racist?" And then, I've seen it happen to other kids who go to

school where he was principal, and I think he really is racist because I've noticed his

patterns of suspension and everything, and never the same for the cultured kid or

whatever you want call the Mexican, Black, anything, but for the White kids it was

always, you know, a slap on the wrist is good enough. "Don't do that again. Go down

to the suspension room for today." That's it. He would put me in the SR (suspension

room) for like 3 weeks for the exact same thing they did. I'd run through the hall,

"You, that's detention for 3 weeks. Now!" They'd run down the hall, "Now don't run.

You shouldn't be running, it's not a good idea."

I found it amusing honestly to see him struggle for power over a kid who

didn't care. And which in all honesty, him not letting me have the power, it's the

whole, the tighter he griped me, the more I just slipped through his fingers. The more

he didn't let me have the power, the more power he gave me. Like the day Mr. X.

decides he's going to parade me round the school to show what happens to

troublemakers. All my friends were running around, "Hey, Peach Cobbler, yeahhhh." I mean, I know that made Mr. X. mad, but you know what, that's his fault. He shouldn't have paraded me around the halls.

To me, he was a sign of oppression in the whole world. Too many ethnic kids getting pushed down by an obviously very white man, and it just fit so perfectly. When I was sitting all those days in detention I'd sit back and be like, "Wow, dude, that's how the whole world is?" I mean that's how most Latinos are treated. Even in small cities across the country. White cops or whatever, they [the Mexicans] get arrested for anything. And then like a lot of songs would play through my head about racial things and, I don't know, and maybe that's why I assume he was racist. Although a lot of the things he did to me, I was just like, "This guy has got to be racist, because you just don't do that unless you're racist." To me he was a sign of racism and oppression and all that. And to this day the people who don't believe he's racist still can't explain to me why he was so mean to me then. They're just like, "Well, you were a trouble maker." "Well, not really, not until he was rude to me." And they're like, "Well, he's, he's a hard working…" "No, he's not." I love hearing people's reasons of why he was mean to me. Nobody can rationalize irrational things. How do you do that? You can't.

If I look at my elementary years, then at my high school years, I value both of those. Those experiences have taught me a lot, but my middle school years, they were in shambles. I think that's why I understood the more dark side, so to speak, of the high school because most kids are like, "Oh, you know, the high school is great. There

are no drugs and everything." And I'm just laughing, I'm like, "You don't even know." I always knew in the halls, like most of the time everybody was pretty nice to each other. But when we got outside, the cliques started and the drugs started up.

Well, maybe even my freshman year was one of the worst times… well, some of the worst decisions I made for myself. I think it was the first half of the year I was enrolled in a 9th grade transitions program which really twisted everything up 'cause I didn't get to see my friends. So I would go every single lunch and go smoke a ton of weed outside and go back in just high out of my mind. So when I did go back to the high school I had a full schedule and I ended up skipping every single period just about most of the time. I got back into my old habit of not doing homework, and not doing the next night's homework because I didn't finish that last night's homework and then after a while I didn't finish like 15 assignments because I didn't start the first one so I was just like "Screw it, I'm not even going to try anymore."

Well, at first I went to most of my classes and I'd just miss the one after lunch, but then, I was just like, "I don't really want to go to class. I'll just go smoke a ton of weed." I was always stoned and never went to class. Seeing me in class was like a huge surprise to everybody. And anyway, you hold your hand up for 10 minutes before you get a question answered. As soon as I got to public high school, that's how it was, I mean you had to hold your hand up forever before even a teacher would notice and so, at first, I was like, "Wow, am I really that insignificant?" And then after a while, I came to understand, "Oh, that's how the teacher's treat everybody." I just got along with the program, "If they don't want to listen to me, I won't listen to them."

So I was getting credit denial in all of my classes and now I am like 5 or 6 credits behind as a sophomore, so I figured it was time for a GED. I remember I even joked about it at the end of my 8th grade year during the summer. I was like, "Oh, dude, I doubt I'll graduate." But then it really hit me that I'm not going to be able to graduate after my 1st semester in high school. While I was doing all the things I did, skipping school, you know and having fun, I was like, "Oh dude, I'll fly by school, it's easy." And then it hit me when they transferred me back to the alternative program, I was like, "I'm not going to graduate."

The GED to me seems like a lot better choice. It seems a lot more real you know. It's not like you've got to go for four years and then you'll get your diploma, which isn't all that much better than a GED. I know it's better, but not all that much better. And besides I can go back and get my diploma if I really want to. So, to me a GED was like, no matter how boring, you finish this and then on to get on to real life. Sometimes, I wish I could have done the whole diploma thing. Because I know like on an application it does look a little bit better than a GED. But, I wish, honestly that I wouldn't have moved to CA because that totally put two left feet on me. I didn't know who I was anymore. I was totally confused. I got home and everything was back to normal, yet I wasn't normal anymore, so I just, I always felt like I wish I could have done those years over 'cause I probably would have either stayed in CA or just stayed here and not gone to CA. So, I do feel resentment about that part of it. And about the fact that I really screwed up my high school years. I didn't go to any of my classes at all, so I know I screwed that up and I'm suffering the consequences you know, so I'll

just get my GED. It's getting me out of the school thing faster and I felt like I was mature enough to take on the job world and go out and live on my own already. Speed my life up for the better.

It might be that my school experience and me just blended perfectly so that it made me mature a lot faster. I think a lot of it has turned me into more of an adult life than most kids my age would have to live. Just the way my teachers treat me, they way that kids at school treat me, the way I've been to five different schools, and just all that thrown together has made me mature a lot quicker than a lot of people I know. I mean I'm only 16 years old and the kids my age, they usually get on my nerves because they seem so immature. And then I'm like, "Oh, wait, they're like 6 months younger than me, and yet I don't do the same things that they do." Everybody's always telling me I have a lot of charisma. People are like, "Wow, that's a cool guy," once they actually talk to me. And I guess I was the joker of the school. Like everybody knew that if you wanted to laugh, just kick it with me and my friends; you'd get a good laugh. Even after I came back from CA, my friends, they accepted me right back into the fold, you know. I got many new friends, I fit in perfectly, it was great. That's one thing I've always been proud of is I've never really reached out, people really reach out to me, I like that, it's fun.

I never really belonged in school, pretty much from the beginning. I was mostly an outsider. It just worked best for me on the outside, not in the school. I isolated myself from the school. I guess I could say that I felt disconnected. I was there, but yet I was never really there. I never really got to show who I really was to

them. They never, the phone line was never connected right. I never really got to talk to them. At the very beginning, I think I was too young really to prove anything. And by the time I was like, "I got to prove myself," they were already disconnected. They were just like, "Oh, it's just another student, just help him learn and get him out of the school." And most of the teachers that I had, I know teacher's salary's pretty much suck, but they were only doing it for they money. I mean, they weren't super nice, but they weren't super mean either. They were just like, "Oh, well, you guys are in school, so do work. I'm not going to be mean to you, but do work." I would write a couple of problems out, have a nice day, and see you later. All pretty much disconnected.

I've always referred to myself as a floater. I just, I know everybody, get along with everybody so, me I had places everywhere. And I feel like I was mature from the beginning, so I've always looked at it in a little more mature perspective. I see myself being in one of those jobs where you don't need to be super smart. I want to own a business of some sort. I think I would be pretty good a managing schedules for everybody, handing out paychecks, all that junk. I think I'd be pretty good at that.

Structural Description

P-2 may offer the classic story of the very intelligent and adapt learner who never seemed to find school particularly challenging or necessary and certainly viewed school personnel as plodding and pedantic. He has ultimately come to perceive his school experience as a waste of time and formal education as "nothing". P-2 views school favorably on the one hand as having only been the means to his early social

successes and quite dissatisfactorily on the other by facilitating his coming of age or loss of innocence more quickly than perhaps it should have.

School relevance. School for P-2 was about making and having friends, making a name for himself socially, and satisfying his ego's desire for having the last word. P-2 is a charismatic fellow with a charming smile and easygoing nature. He blends this charm perfectly with a quick wit. P-2 learned at an early age that he was more quick-minded than most and also learned that he could typically control the momentum of any interaction by virtue of his charisma and intelligence. He applied this ability to the school setting.

After what P-2 described as an uneventful and boring elementary experience, he went to new school setting in a neighboring state to live with a different parent. This decision has been the most poignant turning point in P-2's life. His hope to establish a meaningful relationship with his secondary parent did not manifest as he had anticipated and P-2 was allowed to spend the majority of time on his own, and on the street. His complete disenchantment with school occurred during this period while in middle school. He recalls he felt discouraged from learning independently, was told repeatedly "just do what the class is doing", and not allowed choice in reading material or math levels. This seems to be when P-2 gained an attitude of minimalism and apathy regarding the values of school work, and home work in particular. Seeking attention and approval outwardly, P-2 never discovered the ability to satisfy his own curiosity about the world and become intrinsically oriented.

P-2 exhibits a great deal of satisfaction in describing how he "never" did homework. School work to him was "bullshit" designed to numb student's minds and eliminate their uniqueness. However, P-2 exhibited frustration and disappointment upon returning to his primary parent and attending a semi-private school which held high academic expectations for students. Perhaps for the first time in his school experience, P-2 found himself unable to comprehend the material being presented and unskilled regarding seeking aid. Up until this point, P-2 did not have to exert much energy to comprehend school work. He had chosen not to engage in the class work he found repetitive and boring and made a conscious decision to not do homework, but this never meant he did not comprehend the material. Having never learned self-discipline regarding setting and meeting educational goals, P-2 did not cope well in the new school setting and began a pattern of rebellious and defiant behaviors toward authority.

An evolution had taken place. Beginning as a bright and confident student, P-2 by virtue of having teachers he perceived as "too concerned with curriculum" and a permissive home environment, P-2 had become a student who found no use for the pedestrian type of learning he perceived schools insisted on offering. He had witnessed some of the harsher realities of life while living with the secondary parent and discovered that no matter how much one knew, how intelligent, one could still become a victim. School seemed to him a ridiculous waste of time where one did not learn the lessons that were really worth knowing.

P-2 described school as being so "stupid" as to offer abstinence courses for teenagers when, according to him, "teenagers are going to do it anyway." Being subjected to what he viewed as erroneous programming aided his transformation to a somewhat cynical, yet pragmatic 16 year old. Clearly by the time P-2 reached high school, he was already aware of the fact that he would not make an effort required to graduate. He did not have the patience or attitude to do what was necessary to earn a diploma. He was most honest when he described the summer between 8th and 9th grade as the time he realized he simply would not graduate and his childhood was now behind him. With some remorse P-2 recalls the decision to seek a different living situation before middle school. He believes that had he stayed, his current life circumstance would be quite different. To compensate for that error, P-2 adapted an attitude of non-conformism to justify his deviation from the typical school path. Accepting that the past can not be changed, P-2 fully understands that the majority culture does not view him respectfully with regards to his lack of formal education. Therefore, P-2 has decided it is worth obtaining a GED in order to dissuade society's judgment. In this way he believes he will be able to participate in and reap the material rewards his culture of origin offers.

Social ties. Though not malicious in any sense, P-2 does enjoy gaining and maintaining power in relationships. This allows him to control the outcome in such a way so as to feel he had choice and was not a victim to any circumstance. He concedes to enjoying immensely the knowledge that others seek out his attention rather than the

other way around. P-2 puts great stock in knowing that he can make a friend anywhere he goes and can convince people that he is a "cool guy".

Social success is the only lasting success P-2 has experienced in his young life. Only by being well-liked and admired by his peer group has P-2 found a social standing that replaces the normalcy of a "regular" school experience. He can not know what it is like to be esteemed for his prowess as a student; however, he has found that having become emancipated allows him much social power among his peer group. He is admired as the one who "got out" of an uncomfortable home environment and now has total freedom. P-2 describes this status as having advantages and disadvantages. He is in control of his life, yet he is wholly responsible for it as well.

While enjoying the status of leader if his social "pack", P-2 has struggled with finding solidarity within his peer group. From an early age he described feeling a greater emotional maturity than most others his own age. This has affected his ability to feel the security of unconditional acceptance and belonging, both with peers and adults. P-2 lives his life with relatively little guidance from adults. As an emancipated youth, he lives in a youth shelter whose condition for residence is to be enrolled in an educational program, thus allowing P-2 some support to pursue a GED.

P-2 is living on the outside of convention, and although he enjoys the freedom of not conforming to popular conventions, he battles with the feelings

of alienation and isolation his path has produced. P-2 has not found many others who can relate to or comprehend his school and life experiences. He has commented on

wishing he had the opportunity to "do the diploma thing", but realizes that he could never return to a high school and conform to those standards of behavior, and what he describes as an "ignorance" by students about how "life really is."

With regard to his social connection in school, P-2 took on the role of "class clown" while in elementary and middle schools. As previously stated, he had found no particular benefit by engaging in the academics of the experience, therefore he made the most of entertaining himself and his peers. It is clear that P-2 recalls those times fondly, perhaps reminding him of more care-free moments when concerns were about not doing homework rather than how to survive without any work experience.

P-2 has learned to use his natural ability to charm and please and does not present as disingenuous, arrogant, or bitter. He, in fact, is very personable. He is also realistic about his where modern United States culture will allow him to function best. P-2 will tell you: "on the outside."

Disconnection from school. "I feel like I already knew it" summed up P-2's lack of connection to school. Feeling bored with subjects, P-2 moved into a state of being in school "'cause I had to." The natural consequence of P-2's inability to find relevance in learning was to become the school's leading discipline problem. P-2 proudly accepts the title of having received the most referrals in his middle school. It became a game for him, a game he believed he could win.

P-2 masked his feelings of being different than the other students, as he puts it "feeling out of place," by garnering support for his rebellious behaviors from an admiring peer base. They admired P-2's willingness to do the things they would never

venture or dare to do. P-2 was fearless of authority. There was no real consequence for being in trouble at school. He didn't mind being suspended, nor did his suspensions derive any significant consequence in the home.

As a lasting source of entertainment, P-2 enjoyed a power struggle with a particular assistant principal in middle school. P-2 described himself as a "troublemaker" and developed a genuine dislike for the A.P. who, in retrospect, he believes to have been racist. P-2 self-described as Mexican-American, and as such believed he was targeted by this administrator. P-2 described numerous situations in which he would receive harsher punishment than his peers for committing the same offence. The peers he described were Caucasian-Americans.

The enjoyment P-2 derived from the struggle for dominance is an early sign of his search for a personal identity. He did not have typical home life, he did not identify with his peer's level of emotional development, and he did not derive pleasure from learning once the initial introduction to a topic was made. Easily bored and off-task, P-2 would pick fights with his teachers in a conscious effort to force a confrontation with the assistant principal. P-2 was clever enough to understand there was little the administrator could do to him that mattered, so P-2, in his own mind, won the battle of wits with an adult when he was only 13 years old.

This running struggle for dominance fed P-2's belief that he was a "special kid." He perceived himself as special with regard to his school experience because his teacher's didn't force him to complete assignments or demonstrate comprehension of certain curriculum. P-2's perception was that he was "special", more mature, and

teacher's treated him more as a peer rather than a student. Another perspective may be the teachers conceded to P-2's unwillingness to participate and cooperate, so their attention went elsewhere. Teachers were able to overlook his unwillingness to participate fully until he began to be a disruption. His disruption of other's learning ranted him more power and attention. The attention he received, by the end of the middle school years, had become so frequent he was forced to leave six weeks before the end of the school year. The constant run-ins with administration ruined any chance that P-2 would be able to begin his high school experience with a clean slate and fresh attitude. In fact, his high school career lasted for less than one year.

P-2 does not lament the fact he left school without possessing all the knowledge he was supposed to have learned or that school somehow failed him; he does not display bitterness or resentment. He does, however, ponder how his life could now be a bit less stressful had his experience been different. P-2 has already resigned himself to the fact that he will never live the "American dream". He does, however, hope to own a business which caters acceptingly to the tastes of the youth in the community where he can "just give out paychecks and stuff like that."

Textural – Structural Description

Transitions between schools. P-2 began his school experience by attending the same elementary school and completing the 5th grade. He described having enjoyed school in those formative years; however, it was never for school's sake. "At first I really loved going to school. But I always went for people and not for the actual place." He

was an above average student who required little to no supplemental teacher resources

and seemed to be cheerful and compliant.

For the next year and one half P-2 attended a new school in a different state.

He transitioned into middle school having no prior knowledge of the school

environment nor having friends with whom to share the rite of passage. His academic

experience in this school was mostly one of boredom.

> At first, I would love it and then it would just get really boring and
> you know how they have to be repetitive to get it in a lot of kid's
> minds, well, to me, I already had it in mind so I just got bored of it
> and didn't do any of the work.

P-2's growth occurred in the social realm where he expanded upon his ability to attract

friends and influence peers while making decisions that would impact his academic

future and worldview.

> I had a lot of friends who maybe weren't the best to hang out
> with and I witnessed a lot of violence and a lot of stuff that I
> was like, I don't think people should have to go through this.
> That's when my school days started going really down hill.

When P-2 returned to his home state he had developed "lazy homework

habits" and found himself in a semi-private school where academic expectations were

high regarding work habits both in and outside of school. P-2 was unable to adjust to

such contrasting school environments.

> If I had been at that level the whole entire time, I have no doubt I
> could have caught up to that class that I was in easy. But the fact
> that I was way below and jumped straight into it, I was like, What?
> I was lost. Really lost.

P-2 already felt alienated given the disparity in academic expectations. He had

never experienced feeling "dumb" and did not know what to do with those feelings.

Simultaneously he was feeling ostracized socially, an experience completely new to him and one he was also unsure how to cope with. "It was a really extremely uppity school. And so when I got there, I was way out of place." P-2 became insubordinate and defiant and chose not to attend as often as he could. "And so I started mouthing off to the teachers, having none of my work done. I ended up skipping like huge proportion of the school year." At the end of that school year P-2 transferred.

Back in the public system, P-2 displayed a poor attitude toward school. His grades were dismal in that he would not study or make effort to do any homework. He spent his time at school inventing ways for him and a few friends to get into trouble and be out of class.

> Grades weren't good. Attitude wasn't good. As a mater of fact, I think me and my three friends had the record for the highest referrals to get expelled, something like that. We'd run around the halls, we'd talk back to the teachers, throw our pencils if they told us not to, stand up and just leave class.

P-2 chose to disregard the admonishments from his teachers who indicated he could be successful if he made an effort to engage in school rather than risk being expelled from it. P-2 found it preferable to risk expulsion.

P-2 was passed on to high school, however because of his failing status in middle school he was first sent to an alternative setting. "Originally they had sent me to [the alternative school] for the beginning of my freshman year, which really twisted everything up 'cause I didn't get to see my friends the first week or so." At this point P-2 came to know that he would not be completing a traditional diploma program. The die was cast for him in the sense that was unwilling and would continue to be

unwilling to comply. "I didn't want to abide by the stupid rules and laws that the US government set up." He was 14 years old.

P-2 attended intermittently both the alternative high school and the traditional high school for the next two years. By the time he turned 16 he had decided to leave the public school track and pursue his General Education Diploma (GED).

> And then it hit me like, when they transferred me back to [the alternative high school], I was like, Wow, dude, I'm not going to graduate. I know I'm not. So I was just like, Screw it, I'm just going to get my GED.

Familial/Peer influences. P-2 is a person who has a natural ability to feel comfortable in any social setting and who enjoys making friends and entertaining the crowd. "I don't know, everybody's always telling me I have a lot of charisma." He described going to school solely to associate with friends where he was often responsible for norm setting among his peer group. "I always went to see my friends and talk to people I usually don't get to talk to.

That's one thing I've always been proud of is I've never really reached out, people really reach out to me, I like that, it's fun."

A genial fellow able to associate freely with many different peer groups, P-2 spent his school days in search of fun. "I guess I was the joker of the school. Like everybody knew that if you wanted to laugh, just kick it with me and my friends; you'd get a good laugh." P-2 maintained a certain social status which allowed him to fulfill an emotional need to be accepted and have a place to belong.

> It just that's where felt like I belonged because my friends they accepted me right back into my fold, you know. My pack or whatever,

as soon as I got there. I got many new friends, I fit in perfectly, it was great.

In terms of relationships with his parents, P-2 was much more influenced by what he didn't receive rather than by what he did. His parents having separated by his eighth birthday, P-2 struggled to maintain parent-child relationships from that point forward. His father had moved to a different state and P-2 remembered his mother as being emotionally unavailable. "I don't remember exactly when, but, around those years my mom had been, like, not exactly an alcoholic, but she was a pretty heavy drinker, all my life." This situation propelled P-2 to seek out his father, thus his transfer to a new school during the 5th grade.

P-2 enjoyed a freedom he had not experienced while living with his father for that year and one half. He described his father's parenting style as hands off, allowing P-2 to make his own decisions and to come and go as he pleased

> So I was out, just doing whatever I wanted for the greater part
> of the day. After school I'd come home and change and just go outside
> for the rest of the day.

The freedom, while enjoyable to P-2 for the time he could spend with friends experimenting with adult behaviors, permitted P-2 to experience the darker side of humanity he had not yet encountered. There are images which seem to haunt him and have helped him decide there would be a line he would not cross in terms of his own drug use and adherence to the law.

P-2's decision to be with his father was a turning point in his life. He had not been able to form the type of relationship with his father he had hoped for, had been

exposed to life in the United States from the perspective of a minority, and had failed

in school. He returned to his home state having a greater sense of what being a

Mexican-American entailed. Although not obviously of Mexican heritage, P-2

cultivated an appreciation for his father's birth culture; he did, however, decide to

return to his mother and has taken little opportunity to associate with the Mexican-

American community in his home state.

P-2 returned to find his mother a different woman. "She found religion and she

threw out everything all at once, and she like, everything about her 180'd, and I didn't

know who she was by the time I got back up." P-2 had to create a new relationship

with her and has struggled to come to terms with the adjustment.

> As soon as she chose religion, she was like, No, you're a bad kid
> for smoking, da, de, de, da, blah, blah. She changed a whole hell of
> a lot. Yeah. It's grown at least better, like we're pretty good friends,
> but she's still not my mom.

As a result of P-2's experiences and choices, he is currently a 16 year old living in a

youth center in the same town in which his mother lives. Obviously impacted by the

lack of family connection, P-3 finds solace in cultivating a "sort of family" with his

close friends and other youth from the shelter and the street.

The development of disconnection. P-2 chose to describe his school experience as

being one of disconnection. Never wanting to make the adjustment required to

conform to the standards set forth to him, P-2 became disenchanted and bored. "I was

there, but yet I was never really there. I never really got to show who I really was to

them. They never, the phone line was never connected right. I never really got to talk

to them." Capable of doing more than was required of him, P-2 came to regard school

as a pastime and not having much of value to offer him.

> At the very beginning, I think I was too young really to prove
> anything at the time. And by the time I was, I got to prove myself,
> by that time they were already disconnected, they were just like,
> Oh, it's just another student, just help him learn and get him out of
> the school.

Interestingly, P-2 described the teachers as being disconnected as well. He

demonstrated empathy for what he believed had become for many teacher's "just a

job." P-2 intuitively conceives of school as suffering from systemic overload and

internal fracturing.

> And most of the teachers that I had, I know teacher's salary's pretty
> much suck, but they were only doing it for they money. I mean, they
> weren't super nice, but they weren't super mean either. They were just
> like, Oh, well, you guys are in school, so do work. I'm not going to be
> mean to you, but do work. I would write a couple of problems out, have
> a nice day, see you later. All pretty much disconnected.

> P-2 began to display a lackadaisical attitude toward school when describing his

middle school experience. Teachers were characterized as having sacrificed his ability

to make academic progress in favor of their need to keep all students occupied and out

of trouble. In addition to teacher apathy, P-2 described his perception of a typical

experience in school as one in which students were consistently discounted.

> You hold your hand up for 10 minutes before you get a question
> answered. I mean you had to hold your hand up forever before
> even a teacher would notice and so, at first, I was like, Wow, am
> I really that insignificant? And then after a while, I came to
> understand, Oh, that's how the teacher's treat everybody. I just got
> along with the program. If they don't want to listen to me, I won't
> listen to them.

Again, the time P-2 spent with his father was a turning point in his life. He returned to his home state and mother's home with a defiant attitude and rebelliousness that precipitated his entry into high school. P-2 no longer had an influential connection at home and was more invested in making and impressing friends than being a student. His recollection entails teachers who were disinterested and disengaged, therefore he, too, disassociated himself. Life was more interesting elsewhere.

The decision to leave school. P-2 did make an attempt to attend high school though his freshman year. However, he made no sincere commitment to the process and found the easiest path one of self-serving choices and lack of accountability. "My freshman year, I think was one of the worst times… well, some of the worst decisions I made for myself." An all or nothing approach by the school district complicated by sporadic attendance gave P-2 license to engage in high risk behaviors.

> And I think it was the first half of the year I was at [name of school], working there and um, 9th grade Transitions program and I would go ever single lunch and go smoke a ton of weed outside and go back in just high out of my mind and just work and then, when I went back to [name of school] I had a full schedule and I ended up skipping every single period just about most of the time.

P-2 had ceased caring whether he was successful in school. His interpretation of the messages he had received in elementary and middle school allowed him to cultivate an attitude of noncompliance and disdain for a system which seemingly did not value his uniqueness. "The school mindset of like, you know, you go, you do homework, you turn it in, you talk about it, it just, it doesn't suit me."

P-2 contemplated entering a sophomore year being significantly credit deficient. He was well aware he would not be willing to change his way of being to fit into the school system and he had come to know the system would not change for him. He had realized what he had known would be the case.

> At the end of my 8th grade year during the summer. I was like, Oh, dude, I doubt I'll graduate. But then it really hit me that I'm not going to be able to graduate after my 1st semester in high school.

He had learned about the GED option as a freshman and upon turning 16, P-2 left home to live in a youth shelter whose one condition for residency was enrollment in an education program.

The significance of power. Woven in the choices P-2 made regarding school since moving in the 5th grade was a growing defiance of adults and a disdain for the bureaucracy of schools. He had felt let down, unable to comprehend how things had gotten so far off track, and capable of lashing out in defense of his ego. "I did everything possible to make every single teacher I ever met mad, no matter if I liked the teacher or not. It was just amusing to make them angry, so I'd do everything I could." P-2 seemed to enjoy the power he derived from being able to control the actions of teachers, forcing them to engage in his game.

P-2 had intended to only spend a winter vacation with his father and made the decision to stay once he was there. He commented that he had "disappeared" and seemed to enjoy the fact that others (his friends and mother) were in the dark about his choice. "I didn't say goodbye to anybody. I didn't let anybody know that I was leaving. I just didn't come to school one day and disappeared." He also seemed to take

pride in his ability to do well academically or not. "I really toyed around with my

grades." P-2 had come to realize his intelligence and ability to process quickly tended

to give him the upper hand in most interpersonal interactions.

He discovered that showing signs of maturity beyond his years didn't earn him

respect or advancement.

> Especially as a young person, older people will not expect that attitude
> and will immediately make assumptions about what kind of kid that
> you are, and that would get wrapped up in, He must be doing drugs,
> he's got to be some bad seed kind of kid, because he doesn't respect
> his elders. Although many elders don't act in respectful ways.

In middle school P-2 encountered an administrator with whom he developed a

rancorous relationship. The rancor was manifest in a struggle for power. P-2 had

nothing to lose. He had already determined academic standing could not be used

against him, he was a failed student. He enjoyed making an adult squirm, especially

one he viewed as epitomizing school injustice.

> He was a sign of like oppression in the whole world. I think he's
> racist. Because he always tried to bring up, he like, I noticed also
> that a lot of the Mexican kids after school were getting suspended
> really quick and yet, the white kids would do something almost
> exactly the same, and it doesn't matter?

P-2's confrontations with teachers served two purposes: 1) they were a source of

personal amusement and classroom entertainment, and 2) they were often brought to

the attention of the administrator.

> I kept mouthing off to teachers, is because I knew that it would
> make Mr. X. mad. So, I'd mouth off to the teacher and they'd always
> take it as I'm going after them and I'd always explain to them, It's
> not you guys. It's me. That's what I'd always say. And so they would,
> you know, Oh, [P-2 is] having troubles, we'll be more understanding.
> Naw, I was really just trying to hurt Mr. X.

P-2 felt as though he was in the winning position in that he was able force the administrator to act defensively and to engage in the on-going struggle. "I think one of the reasons was he couldn't bully me." P-2 was not intimidated or threatened by the possible consequences of his behavior.

> All the other people, he's like, I'm going to suspend you! And they're like, Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Me, he'd be like, I'm going to suspend you!. And me, it'd be like, Good, do it! Please, I want to see you suspend me for absolutely no reason, please do it. And I don't think he liked that at all.

The on-going struggle continued until P-2 was suspended from school approximately six weeks before the end of his 7th grade year. As a final victory, P-2 described the administrator's decision as being both unethical and against policy. He had forced him to act beyond his limits of tolerance. P-2 had won and was headed to high school.

Meaning of the experience. P-2 brought to high school the knowledge he didn't really belong there. "I belonged outside, not in the school. I isolated myself from the school." He did not fit the profile of a traditional student on a path toward success and reconciled this knowledge by using his social intelligence to cultivate friendships and become a leader of "outsiders and misfits." P-2 while still quite young understands that there will be certain consequences for his choices and that there have been specific reasons for them as well.

> I wish I could have done the whole diploma thing. Because I know like on an application it does look a little bit better than a GED. But, I wish, honestly that I wouldn't have moved because that totally put two left feet on me. I don't know who I was anymore. I was totally confused. I got home and everything was back to normal, yet I wasn't normal anymore.

P-2 has created a situation where he needed to take on adult responsibilities

before most youth. He considers himself capable of handling the stress and pressure of

independence, yet underneath the capable exterior emanated a tone of sadness that life

was not different.

> I think a lot of it has turned me into more of an adult life than most
> kids my age would have to live. Just the way my teachers treat me,
> they ways that kids at school treat me, the way I've been to 5 different
> schools, and just all that thrown together has made me mature a lot
> quicker than a lot of people I know.

From middle school forward P-2 acknowledged he carried primary responsibility for

his choices, yet he remains conflicted knowing that something should have been

different. "It might be that my school experience and me just blended perfectly so that

it made me mature a lot faster. I have a little resentment, but I'm ok."

CHAPTER SIX

Participant Three

Textural Description

I always had problems basically my whole life in school. It always seemed like I was the one who always failed everything. It really sucked having to struggle everyday. School just never seemed to really get me. I mean, teachers just never seemed to have time to answer my questions or give me the help that I needed and it was just easier to get into trouble than do my homework.

I actually went to a few different schools. I remember in elementary school, like I couldn't even read at all; it was hard. And they actually held me back that next year, so I had to do the first grade over again. So then, I went to a private school where they really paid a lot of attention to me and I learned to read and basically learned all the stuff that I was supposed to have already learned. And then I went back to the public schools and in the third grade had a teacher that was so mean. Like one day I had come in from break or something, and I guess I was a little wild. So she calls my house and talks to my mom. She's like, "I think your son forgot to take his medication today." And my mom got so mad at her and she told me about it after I got home from school. I was like, "What, I don't take medication." And later, that same teacher accused me of stealing some candy from her. I had brought my own Jolly Ranchers from home and was eating them, when she just came up to me and accused me of taking hers. She didn't apologize or anything when I showed her that I had my own.

But I really liked my fourth grade teacher. She was nice. She just understood me better and stuff.

I really wasn't good at anything in grade school; not really good at anything until I got to middle school. Then I started to get good at Math. But still I didn't ever do my homework. You know, but sometimes, too, I wasn't challenged enough to the point where I was just bored. I'd get in trouble just so I'd get kicked out and they'd make me go down to like the detention room or whatever for the whole class period. Like in middle school, to get out of class, sometimes I would set it up with a friend to get in trouble the same period so we could both be in detention together. It was more fun just to sit there in detention than be in boring, stupid classes. And I got to spend more time with my friends that way too.

I always had friends. I'd be the funny kid that everybody knew. I kind of like thinking about it that way. Not everybody liked me, and I didn't really like everybody, but everybody knew me. I was the hyper kid who always wanted to be the center of attention. Even the teachers were pretty cool with me in middle school. They'd just pass me along through their classes. Maybe they should have done a better job of getting me to learn, but I was a kid and at the time I didn't care. So I never did my homework or anything and just got passed along into high school.

 I had the same girlfriend through middle school and my freshman year. It's like in high school, you have a bunch of people that you hang out with, and nobody is really welcoming to other like lower groups. If you didn't know people, they would just like pass you by in the hallway and just not pay any attention to you. When I was

a freshman, people would just look down on you all the time, but that's like the extent.

Nobody ever tried to beat me up or anything. I guess I was just like everybody else. I

guess I picked on a few kids, yeah. But, doesn't like everybody?

One thing for sure, classes were too long and classes were way too big.

There'd be like 40 kids if not more in a class at one time. They have so many dumb

policies. There was no way I was ever going to get the help that I needed, and it's like

no one ever really cared if I got it or not anyway. Like this one time, we had a

substitute in Math class, the same guy for however long. And he, he could not teach

worth crap. He was the worst substitute I've ever had. He was like the worst teacher.

He couldn't explain anything, so like that whole class was confused, even the smart

kids. But anyway, after he's done with the lecture part, everybody raises their hands

'cause nobody understands and since I sit in the back it's like, "How am I going to get

help? How's he ever going to get around to me before the class is over?" So half the

time I just wouldn't show up.

More help. I needed help. Teachers need to like understand that I need help

and they need to help me when I need it. Teachers need to pay attention more 'cause I

was on an IEP through all my schooling and I'm like, "Ok, I'm supposed to get extra

help." I get into Middle School and, I mean Middle School was a little different, like

they had a little more help, but I still failed all my classes. And I get to High School

and no teachers recognize it. It's just like, 'Oh, wow, you're just another student in my

class." And I think those students who do struggle and stuff, needed to be helped

beforehand. But it doesn't seem right that I had real reasons for getting extra help and

I never got it. I mean, Ok, I could have done some stuff too. Like I should have done my homework and went to class, but it just seemed like it really didn't matter.

So, I got held back again. You know, I was supposed to be, well, I was going to be a sophomore again, because I didn't get all my freshman credits. And they make you repeat all the required classes you were supposed to do, and sometimes that means being in classes with all freshmen, so everybody knows you failed the class before.

I was always in trouble. Always doing whatever I could. They gave me so many more freedoms 'cause I was always breaking the rules in middle school. And in high school, I could still get away with it. To get out of class was so easy. Like you could go to the counseling office and sign in a time that you were there and then you could just take off and nobody would know. It would be an excused absence because students worked in the office, so no one cared or paid attention.

There was this one lady in the office though; she was nice. She even got pissed at me once, telling me I was f---ing up my life. Yeah, she had tears in her eyes and everything. But I guess most of the teachers were alright. There was my Math teacher. I don't know, I guess I liked both of my math teachers. But her class was a little smaller and she explained it a little better. She was kind of cute too. So I'm like, "Ok, I'll listen to you." But like my shop teacher, he was a d---, sorry, but, he was so mean. I was sitting there one day and he's like, "So, you don't go to school here anymore." And I'm like, "Yeah, I do and I'll come back to your class next semester." And he's like, "Why, so you can just get kicked out again?" Like three times he's like, "You're not doing any good here." Just like being an a--. But the others, they were Ok. They

just never seemed interested in what I had to say really. I don't know, I think my teachers should have tried to help me a lot more. More one on one help would have been great.

But, really I was friends with most of the teachers. I think that's what my problem was. They let me become their friend and when you do that, I don't know, I don't think they should do that because I liked them all, you know, but like I never did my work. Sometimes it felt like they would just kind of look past me. You know how I could tell? I could tell because they would let me get away with whatever. Never turn in homework, not come to class. You know some of them wouldn't even count me absent when I would leave class. They'd just let me do whatever, you know? I guess they never really took me seriously, but I guess I can see why. I mean I never turned in homework. I never turned in anything. Like why should they care if I don't, you know? That's what I see. But they also could have done more.

I'm a good person; I'm like easy to get to know. I'm like, can be pretty much anybody's friend, pretty much. Like I said before I had my friends, but I could kind of hang out with people from any group. Well, maybe not the Mutants. They were like the outcast kids that came together and hung out. Just like the weirder people that are just kind of out there, not with the times, kind of, not like old-fashioned, they're just kind of like weird. And something else that made school kind of hard was like freshman year, you were like friends with all your friends from middle school still, and then get into sophomore year, the groups just split up. You weren't like friends with those people any more. Like the people you grew up with you just, you just don't

talk to them any more. They're not your friends, they talk back and whatever. And then, like, it was towards the end, no it was actually my junior year, this year. Like the beginning of the year, everybody started becoming friends again. I don't know it was kind of cool. It was weird, just like sophomore year; nobody was really friends anymore and like, junior year everybody's friends and they're all hanging out and stuff. It's cool. It's because people grow up, they mature. And like, it's "Why do you like hate these people? Why are you like that?" That's what I saw. So, I start talking to everybody and stuff. My Space had a lot to do with that. I think it had a whole lot to do with that. You know it was family. I grew up with these kids. My best friend is like my brother. I mean it's not like I felt that way about everybody, but it's cool.

And I have a goal. I've had this same goal since the third grade. School is an important part of it. And I'm going to do whatever I have to get my diploma. I think it might take maybe two more years, but I want to show my dad and my sisters that I can do it. Well, actually my dad most of all. I just want him to know that I can do it, you know? And that's basically it, I mean, I'm pretty smart, but I don't know.

Structural Description

P-3 can conjure up no particularly fond memories of his school experience except for the time he was able to spend with his friends. As a student with documented learning disabilities, P-3 always felt school was a struggle and experienced difficulty from the beginning until he decided it was time to leave. Knowing he would not graduate with his class, P-3 left the public high school during his junior year and has attempted to earn credits toward a diploma program in an

alternative setting. He continues to struggle and the unsettled doubt that he will ever finish rests behind his eyes as he vehemently declares "getting my diploma is very important to me."

P-3 suffers from a learning anxiety combined with an intense desire to achieve the same goals as other "typical" teens. He also has developed a self-portrait consisting mainly of low self-worth and insecurity. There has been very little for P-3 to feel pride in regarding his school experience. He perceives that he has received no real recognition for results or acknowledgment for his effort. He feels he was cast off from the mainstream because he could not keep up. There is a resentment, defiance, and rage about him that he works hard to suppress, however, even when he smiles and laughs, the desire to come across as capable and normal is evident. He finds it a kinder story to tell if the reason for his school failure is because he chose not to rather than he couldn't and teachers simply gave up on him.

Perceptions of school. P-3 vacillates between blaming himself and his learning disability and blaming the teachers for not providing him the help that he needed. He found a few teachers he liked and could learn from, but for the most part, he described finding the opposite: teachers who did not really seem to care about him. He claims that he was often "just bored," which appears to be a statement designed to hide the shame he feels about not being able to comprehend much of the material without struggle and extra attention.

P-3 went to three different elementary schools. The first transition was successful in that the new school was semi-private and P-3 felt he received some much

needed attention and finally "learned to read." His esteem grew as he achieved

academically and felt for the first time that he was normal. According to his narrative,

the problem before had been being in a bad school with bad teachers.

The transition back to public elementary was traumatic for P-3 as he recalls

having a teacher who he believed disliked him. It was also at this point P-3 discovered

he had a talent outside of academics. He had developed a reputation as being the

"funny kid," the one goofing around in order to make people laugh. He described a

situation in which this teacher did not appreciate his energy and humor and made life

difficult for him. Here is when he began to separate into two distinct entities at school:

the one who failed academically and the one who was succeeded socially.

Concerning his academics throughout middle school, P-3 perceived "just being

passed along" and failing all his classes. He did not do homework because he never

seemed to understand what to do or how to do it. Expectations for his academic

success were low and he clearly described believing that having an Individualized

Education Plan (IEP) was largely ignored by teachers and his special education case

managers. P-3 spent much of his middle school years being in detention due to

disruptive behaviors. The fact that he and his friends would make plans to get into

trouble in order to meet in the detention room epitomizes his willingness to do

whatever he had to in order to get out of the classroom. For P-3, anything was better

than to be stuck in class.

Once in high school, P-3 learned that most adults would be willing to look past

him. He stated he knew that by letting him "get away with whatever," teachers had

given up on him. As an example he realized that some teachers wouldn't even count him absent thus eliminating any possibility of interventions related to absenteeism. P-3 came to believe that the school did not invest in him as a student and was even told by a school official he might as well just quit.

Interestingly, P-3 makes an effort to be fair by accounting for his own lack of desire to be a student by going to class, participating when he did go, and doing homework. He acknowledges that there was not much ultimately teachers could do by the time he got to high school. P-3 had already discovered that in classes of 40 and more students that were too long, he would not receive the personalized attention he required to be academically successful. He dramatizes the frustration of having his hand up for "what seemed like forever" and never receiving help when so many others needed it as well. One gets the sense that he had known rather early on that he would not be graduating with his class. P-3 was never able to describe a hopefulness about becoming a better student or a learning environment in which he didn't feel ashamed or embarrassed.

P-3's internal struggle of wanting so badly to demonstrate to his friends and family, in particular his father, drives P-3's continued attempts to recover credits. He battles the ever present insecurity and doubt he actually possesses the ability to be academically successful. He goes through periods of commitment to the process and withdrawal from it. He has remained faithful to the idealized idea of earning a diploma so as to be able to join the armed service which he believes will lead him to stability and financial security. P-3 understands that he will need to create a life in which he is

primarily responsible; he also understands he will need a supportive network to guide

his decision making if he is to stay above the law and the poverty line.

The importance of social success. P-3 never had difficulty making friends and

establishing himself as the guy all the other kids in school knew about. For P-3 it

wasn't necessarily important that every one like him, but that everyone knew who he

was. His easy going façade is attractive and one can imagine he had little trouble

impressing girls. Although one gets the sense that P-3 did not take advantage of this

fact stating that he had one long term girlfriend he still wished to be with. P-3 is

acutely aware of and enjoys the fact that others seek out his company; however, he is

not always sure why they would want to do so.

Friends and social status are the two major reasons P-3 continued coming to

school. Home was not a sanctuary, and P-3 looked to his peers for validation and

approval. Being popular was the ultimate way to maintain his need to "be the center of

attention" which he had cultivated throughout elementary school. P-3's level of social

intelligence has allowed him to get by or "skate through" school with a minimum of

parental or administrative intervention. He has been quite successful in making allies

of campus security and certain secretarial staff. He proudly acknowledges his ability to

work the system to his advantage. Knowing the best places to hide out when he

wanted to skip class, who to talk to when he didn't want a phone call to be made

home, and when and how often he needed to be at school. These behaviors would be

indicative of an intuitive person having skill and intelligence. Unfortunately for P-3,

he never felt rewarded and recognized for these abilities; therefore he used

them to garner negative attention from staff and a bad boy reputation among his peers.

Despite the difficulty and constant barrage upon his intellectual self-esteem, P-3 perceived school to be like his family. He had grown up and gone through the different grades with the same peers. They all knew each other well and there was a small sense of security in knowing how every day would be and being familiar with those who would share it. This was P-3's solace.

The meaning of the experience. P-3 believes himself to be basically a good person. He described himself as easy to get to know and able to find a place in any social setting or within any social group. He recognizes that through his school experience he has both abilities and limitations. Though emotionally still immature for a 17 year old, P-3 comprehends he has limited options concerning his future. University life will not be an option and he has never seriously entertained it as such. He expressed his goal since the third grade has been to get his diploma and join the military. The barrier to accomplishing this goal is the lack of desire to complete assignments he believes have little or no relevance to his world. He does not perceive school subjects to be interesting and they do not hold his attention for any length of time. Ultimately he is afraid of what might happen if he actually does accomplish something. He has never felt he was prepared, either at school or at home, to handle being fully responsible and working through challenges. He has typically escaped both.

P-3's social intelligence did not necessarily work to his advantage in school as P-3 believed that since teachers liked him they wouldn't be strict enough with him or take him seriously as a student. Being retained two different times, once in elementary

school and then again in high school, has left P-3 feeling misunderstood and then abandoned by the system. He feels he has been relegated to an alternative setting which allows him freedom to learn at his own pace, but not particularly motivating. It seems to only confirm the belief that he is not normal. P-3's lack of maturity continues to hamper his decisions concerning diploma completion.

P-3 wants to do something with his life. He expressed that he doesn't what to grow up not having money. His school path has been painful and his level of alienation from the mainstream clearly expressed. He never felt like he fit in and felt like he was never provided the tools and resources needed to be academically successful. So relying on his natural abilities, P-3 has fashioned an existence for himself that is outside the boundaries of the expectations of his culture of origin. He will spend much of his early adult years attempting to fight his way back in. He gives the impression that he doesn't quite believe he will be successful.

Textural-Structural Description

Transitions between schools. P-3 transitioned into several different public schools within the same district and one private school during his school career. One unique element of his experience having basis in the school transitions was the fact that P-3 was retained in grade level two different times, once in elementary and once again in high school. Another was the decision to change schools was based on P-3's academic performance rather than the family changing residences.

> The 2nd grade, I really don't even remember that. I just remember
> like coloring, and I couldn't read. I couldn't read at all. It was hard.
> And then, about half way through my 1st grade, I went to the [private
> academy].

P-3 remained at the private academy where he repeated the first grade in order to build basic skills. "But they held me back I remember, they actually held me back that next year, so I did 1ˢᵗ grade over." P-3 recalls his first school experience as one of confusion and one that clearly marked the beginning of his learning difficulties and feelings of academic inferiority.

P-3 returned to the public school system after the 2ⁿᵈ grade. He attended a second elementary school where he remained until completing the 5ᵗʰ grade. Having learned to read, he described the remainder of his elementary days as "pretty much the same ol' thing everyday. I mean it was all pretty boring." Learning, in fact, was difficult for P-3 and he was placed on an academic IEP. He had already made an unconscious decision not to engage in class work given he inevitably "failed every time" nor homework because he "never knew what to do."

His transition to middle school was perfunctory and P-3, due to the disengagement from academics occurring throughout elementary school, chose to engage in activities that would complicate his transition into high school. "They gave me so many more freedoms 'cause I was always breaking the rules in middle school. Always. Always in trouble. Always doing whatever I could. And in high school, I could get away with it."

Beginning high school and transitioning into a set of yet higher academic expectations, P-3 continued to struggle academically and suffer emotionally. His high school experience quickly became a conflicted effort to find a place for success which alternated between bouts in the public high school and its alternative high school.

> I went for my sophomore year, my freshman and sophomore year
> and you know, I got held back. You know, I was supposed to be, I
> was going to be a sophomore again. But yeah, I went for about half.
> Actually I didn't really go for a half. First semester, I would say for
> a month and a half and then I came to [the alternative school]. Second
> semester, I was there for about 2 – 3 weeks and then I came back here.

P-3 never felt settled or secure in his school experience. P-3 has developed a level of

resentment and distrust as he perceived never receiving the aid he required to find

school success. He couldn't "keep up" and did not enjoy the stability and belonging a

"regular kid" might expect.

Familial/Peer influences. Given he did not receive accolades for his academic

performance, P-3's *raison d'etre* in school was the time and attention he would

receive from friends. Often the center of attention, P-3 enjoyed having the reputation

as the class clown. "I'd be the funny kid." He was able to assuage some of his

embarrassment about his academic failure by enhancing his role as an entertainer.

> I was just more interested in my friends and I was always hyper,
> always wanted to be the center of attention. I mean I had a lot
> of friends and stuff, but like I never did homework, I never really
> like participated in the class work, I just wanted to go out to break.
> It was just kind of like boring. And like I was always the kid who
> spoke out in class and had to make fun of everything.

P-3 exhibited a social intelligence unrealized by many. He had an innate sense

of what people liked and wanted to hear. Even though he was not friends directly with

all of the social elements of school, he was known and accepted by them. P-3 was the

type of person whom people viewed as "fun loving and good natured." "And I was

like friends with a lot of different people from different groups. Not friends with

whole groups, but just certain people and stuff that I grew up with." It became highly

important to him to be known as the social center of each class. He would always

place his social life ahead of his school success. Knowing how he operated, P-3

described the circumstance in which he might have been be successful. "Take away

my friends and, move it out into the country somewhere, where there's nothing around

and then sit down and help me."

Being popular was second nature as P-3 attempted to make academic progress

and was the one thing he could count on without question. He was quite adept at

comprehending the social climate and adapting to it in order to maintain his social

standing and sense of personal power.

> It was like freshman year you were like friends with all your friends
> from middle school still. And then get into sophomore year the groups
> just split up. You weren't like friends with those people any more. Like
> the people you grew up with you just, you just don't talk to them any
> more. They're not your friends, they talk back and whatever. And then,
> like, towards the end, everybody started becoming friends again.

P-3 was the popular guy with little academic possibility and no connection to the

typical high school activities such as athletics which would have heightened his social

value. The social acceptance was clearly a major reason he chose to go to school,

however, it also served another function: escaping the discomfort of being at home.

P-3 described home as a place where peace did not exist. Seemingly it did not

provide him a sense of unconditional love and acceptance. P-3 gave the impression

that his father was hostile and unbending yet of his two parents, provided him the

greatest sense of stability. "There was always like problems. I never had a smooth

moment. There's always something different happening, like problems or whatever.

There was never like peace."

Sadly he found school to be solace from the discomfort and discontent of home. When questioned whether he felt school was a hostile environment or felt fearful about being there, P-3 replied, "Just at my house." There was an air of low expectations in his description and a clear desire on the part of P-3's siblings, in particular his sisters, to find a way out as quickly as possible.

> My sisters, all my sisters, except for my two younger ones. My 26 year old one she didn't even graduate from high school. She's like 2 weeks from finals her senior year and like dropped out. Then my other sister, who's 22, she got her GED and my sister who's here is getting her GED and my other sister who has a baby got her GED.

The family history does not model or set the expectation for P-3 to achieve his 3rd grade goal of graduating and joining the military.

P-3 continues to believe he will achieve his goal however. He wants to believe it can be done, that he can succeed. Yet when P-3 spoke of it, there was an underlying tone of desperation and denial of the more likely outcome.

> My brother's the only one who's graduated so far. And I'm going to be the 2nd one. I'm going to prove to them that it does pay off to have a diploma and have a plan in your life. 'Cause they're just hopping around, not having a good job, doing whatever, and they don't care; I don't want to do that.

It is clear P-3 has detrimental family factors he carries with him that have impacted his self-concept and perceived worth in the world. Although he speaks of his future successes, one is aware of the defensiveness in his tone and fear of judgment in his eyes indicating he may not believe in his own prophesy.

Acknowledging limitations. P-3 spoke in no uncertain terms about his academic troubles in school. From the first he did not perform well.

> I've always like struggled. Had like problems basically, like my whole life in the school system. I'm not like pointing fingers at anybody. Like, I don't know, I just never really was like the best student in the world. I was always the one who would like fail everything. Yeah, not do good.

It was not long before he viewed school as "boring" and unable to offer him much of value or interest. One finds telling his commentary recalling the 1st grade as being his most successful time in school. "They taught me how to read and I remember that as being the best I've ever been in school, just like understanding and getting my work done and stuff and that was like in 1st grade."

P-3 made choice not to do homework. He made it very clear homework was not a part of his routine and he would not be bothered. This development also emerged at the elementary level. "When I first started getting homework I just looked at it like, I don't want to do this. I got better things to do like play." He admitted to making little effort because he could not retain the information from school to home. He simply did not know what to do without guidance indicating he may not have received much or any support from home.

P-3 earned a modicum of academic success in math beginning in middle school which he owed to smaller class size and a teacher's willingness to provide him the individualized support he needed. "And she was kind of cute, so I'm like, Ok, I'll listen to her." Willing to be accountable for not doing as much as he could have to learn, P-3 does acknowledge that teachers could have done more to support him. His IEP required teachers to offer accommodations and additional support which he perceives he never received in any meaningful way at any point in his school career.

> Teachers need to pay attention more, 'cause I was on an IEP through all my schooling and like, Ok I'm supposed to get extra help, get into middle school and, I mean middle school was a little different, like they had a little more help, but I still failed all my classes and get to high school and no teachers recognize it. It's just like, Oh, wow, you're just another student in my class.

P-3's reality included the perception of not having received what he needed because he consistently failed classes and was still passed on. His constant experience with failure and "not getting it" dominated his experience and exposes the rationale for his attitude of suspicion and defensiveness. He has been unable to reconcile his academic limitations with his academic aspirations.

The decision to leave early. P-3 has not relinquished the idea of earning a high school diploma; he is pursuing an option other than the traditional 4-year high school method. "I'll figure it out one of these days. Not graduating is not an option." By the time he had entered high school the pattern of failure was set. Carrying this mindset since middle school, there was no expectation that P-3 would achieve a different outcome. In a position of being credit deficient and having to repeat freshman level courses, P-3 transferred to an alternative site offering individualized instruction and a favorable teacher-student ratio.

The lack of confidence in the system and sense of his own academic limitations were the factors predicating his failed freshman year and subsequent transfer. P-3 had interpreted teacher's attitudes toward him as those of disinterest and lack of concern.

> They just never seemed interested in what I had to say really. I could tell that when they would let me get away with whatever. Like some of them wouldn't even count me absent when I would leave class. Just let me do whatever, you know?

He, in turn, demonstrated the same attitude. He viewed classes as being boring and lifeless and therefore paid little or no attention. He was disruptive to the learning process in as many ways as he could conceive of. He learned to take advantage of school policies in order to conceal his misuse of school time. "I just wouldn't ever go to class, and I'd always find ways to get it excused. Like somehow find a way to get my class excused so I didn't have to go." P-3 offered the system what he felt he received from it. The decision was not necessarily a conscious one on his part, but the parallel is evident.

Meaning of the experience. P-3 understands he must earn a diploma in order to achieve his goal of entrance into the armed service. Therefore, as he stated, "not graduating is not an option." Yet he continues his habit of non-attendance and incomplete homework assignments. It is the formalized process of learning that has turned him off. He excitedly described his ability to learn on his terms.

> I'm like knowledgeable. I've like watched the History Channel since
> I was like 5, and the Discovery Channel. My dad always watched it and
> that's what I'd watch when I was with him, like the Military Channel.
> You ask me whatever you want and I'll tell you.

Proud of this accomplishment, P-3 is fortified by the fact that he can learn and testifies that if he would "just get serious" he could get it done.

As a 17 year old with a freshman/sophomore credit status, the odds for completing are not in his favor and he knows it. When asked whether pursuing a GED was an option, the interviewer was met with a flash of anger and a resounding "No!" followed by, "I mean like my mom and my step dad would always say, Just get your

GED, and get it over with. I'm like, No, I'm not getting my GED, leave me alone." P-3 is consumed by cultivating his "image" and perceives the GED as a step toward anonymity and an ultimate failure in life. The chip on his shoulder conceals his insecurity and the unsureness in his own ability.

P-3 has a concept of how he wants his life to unfold. The combination of home and school has provoked a desire to find stability and predictability.

> I want to do something with my life. I want to go into the military, that's what I've always wanted to do since I was in the 3rd grade was to go into the military. I don't want to go into, what is it, the National Guard. I want to be in the military for 20 years and retire.

The military is attractive to P-3 because he believes he won't be made to feel stupid or be alone. He would not have to struggle regarding his livelihood and would learn lifelong valuable skills which he could use to his advantage.

> Still getting paid every month, having getting good retirement checks too. And then having skills to go into another job for what, another 20 years, and have another retirement plus benefits for life from the military.

This is a life he believes he is capable of creating given he earn a diploma. The irony is not lost on him that the military respects the diploma, the diploma gets him into the military, and the military gets him respect. P-3 is in the position of proving his worth.

P-3 is plagued by a "life is not fair and then you die" attitude. Learning from home that growing up is a tough and painful process, P-3 experienced much the same in school. He is willing to be accountable for his choices, but struggles to reconcile how school could not take care of its business either.

> I think it could have been a lot better. Like looking back, I don't know, they, I don't know about them 'cause I could have tried a lot harder

also. I mean, it wasn't like. Oh, it's all the school's fault. I had issues
and stuff and I just, I don't know, I could have done better and not be
in the position I am now. But also they could have done more.

P-3 has a sense of what he needed in school, but somehow it was never forthcoming.

"I just didn't try, didn't care. Except when most of the time when I did need help,

teachers didn't take me seriously." The cycle of not caring and not receiving support

exemplifies P-3's high school experience. He expressed a desire to go back in time

and do things differently. Asked what the school could do differently, P-3 stated

coolly: "Just help me graduate. I'll graduate if you help me."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Participant Four

Textural Description

I have gone to school in so many different places, and three different states. I did quite a bit of moving around and, you know, I really think that made a difference. Life might be different, you know; I might have already graduated. But I've also made a lot of friends along the way, so on the up side I made a lot of friends. But on the down side I miss a lot of the friends I had. A lot of people liked to talk to me and I was their friend and all, but when it came right down to it I wasn't who I was supposed to be. I think school had a lot to do with my being where I am today.

Don't get me wrong; in the beginning I actually loved school so much. When I was sick I actually begged my mom to let me go to school. Just because for one reason, I didn't really like staying home that much, um, my life was kind of boring. I would go to school, come home, do homework, watch some TV, go to bed, and we'd do that everyday. I just didn't learn to do my work. I goofed off in class. I talked too much. They'd always constantly have to get me to work and I wouldn't work. Eventually I got my stuff done, but I didn't do enough to get on to 3rd grade, so they held me back a year. Second grade is about when I kind of lost my eyesight and I had to get glasses. So I went from 2nd grade over again, that's when I got held back and that's probably why I'm 19 and not graduated yet. And that's where I am today. I was always falling back. So, I'm not where I should be.

When I think back, there was never any help for me because I couldn't see. My teachers thought I was mentally retarded. My mom said, "No, he just can't see. You guys are retarded." That's actually what my mom said, "You teachers are retards, and we are taking him out of this district and putting him in the other school district." The other district's schools were actually very easy, but they teach you, and I got excellent grades. I got, I couldn't believe it, by my 4th grade year I'm getting straight A's, 4.0. I have glasses on and I'm doing great.

But like I said, I moved around a lot. I went from 2nd grade all the way up to 6th grade at this one school. And then I got out of that school about the middle of the year and then I went over to this other place and lived with my sister for a little bit and uh, finished my 6th grade year. Then I moved back with my mom and I went to Middle School. But I didn't finish my 7th grade year either. I moved up to my dad's to finish my 7th grade year. And I finished my 7th grade year and went all the up to my junior year, uh, pretty much.

When I started Middle School, I was teased a lot; I was considered a nerd. They'd call me "farmer boy" because I'd wear overalls all the time. I did have some friends though, you know. I was the average student, I guess. I got the average grades. The A's, the B's, the C's, and D's. And F's every once in a while. But then I also look out for other things, you know, I, uh, look out for my friends and I would kind of help them with their school work.

They say peer pressure isn't all that strong, but it is. It's VERY strong. You know it's like I figured, my parents are always going to love me, but if I don't do this

with my friends then they're not going to like me. And I think people would say that I was a real jokester and that I really liked to make people laugh. But I'm also a very reliable person. When I say I'm going to do something I do it. But I just didn't really express it. Um, I kind of held it back and then once I realized that people really liked that kind of stuff I really unleashed it and then people kind of liked me better. And then I eventually figured out, "You know what, if they don't like me, then who cares, you know." So whatever you are, teacher's pet, a jock, it all depends on the situation. It's not really what the school or what the peers tell you what you are, it's what you want to be.

But anyway, I realized at a very early age that school was important. I really didn't want not go to school, because I knew I had to go to school. But it was hard. Like my literature teacher in the 6th grade, he was like a college professor. He treated us like we were college students. So, I didn't like that very well, because he was too hard, but, um, I guess he kind of taught me that if someone's going to be hard to you, you might as well be hard back. If he's going to treat you like a college student, then I'm going to treat him like a college professor. Yeah, I never liked that guy. Like I said, Middle School was quite hard, but I still pushed through and I came out with good grades. I think I even made Honor Roll in the 8th grade.

About that time I ran off to a big city in a different state. You know, the ghetto has its own life and I wanted to go find a different life. What I saw is that it's a war between what people think and how people live, and a lot of it is a bunch of BS. They don't want to believe it's bullshit, but it is. People can't talk things out anymore; they

just shoot people, they have to shoot each other. And in school, there was like groups and stuff like that. You got the big black group that wears the red, the big black group that wears the blue, and they sit on opposite ends of the school. They get their classes set up that way because the people know that if you get blue and red mixed together, you're gonna have death. So they set 'em up on different sides of the school and this is one big hallway and they're at opposite ends. And you have the rap group here, everybody who raps and everything. The girls over here, the preppie ones and everything like that, they're all black, all black girls. And then you have the nerdy kind of guys, and then you have like your social outcasts and the people who stink and losers and stuff like that.

In the city teachers wouldn't teach any, like, very important life skills type of things, nothing really important, just the basics. It was kind of like school meets boot camp. First thing you do is take the bag off and you put it through the box. It goes through the box; it reads what you have in your bag. You go through and you empty your pockets and everything. If you beep you stop. Now, um, these cops, they actually have loaded guns. If you don't beep you walk off and go your way. I'd walk through and nothing would beep. I'd go grab my stuff and, the really funny thing is everybody around there wears a keychain with a key on it. A necklace with a key on it. And what that was about was they have two locks on the locker, one is a key lock with a cage. You open up the cage, and there's spaces in between the lockers like that so the door can go, like that. And then you open up your locker with a combination, then you close it and you have to lock it back up. If you don't lock it back up, people can have a

free run of your locker. And if you lose your locker you're screwed 'cause they won't give you another one.

And teachers couldn't interact in a really personal way with students. When I was there, three teachers actually died in the school. Um, two were hung from the balcony and one was shot to death, ran over and crushed. Yeah, the Mexicans, they were really pissed off about something. The Mexicans, were really, that's one group I did forget I don't want to leave out, but in the hallway they sit right in the center and they take up… the hallway like, uh, the Mexicans would leave a space like that and crowd everybody's group. So needless to say I didn't do a lot of learning in that school. I didn't learn a damn thing except maybe how to survive.

But my dad found out that I was out of the state, so I headed back. My freshman year was alright, you know I was getting pretty, pretty darn good grades and my dad was really hammering me on grades, uh, my step-mom as well. My sophomore year was about the same. I did have my ups and my downs for different subjects, different teachers, different experiences and such. My junior year was excellent. I got straight A's. My senior year, kind of went flop. The day I met my principal, er, vice-principal at the High School when I got back with my mom is when I guess I first had the feeling I wasn't going to make it.

When I got to my junior and my senior year I thought, "Man, I know what I need to do with my life, but I got to take action to do it. I can't just let my counselors decide for me about what I'm going to do; I got to do it myself." It's sad to say, but that's when I met the vice-principal. I mean, I don't really mind him. In fact, I liked

the guy in the beginning, he seemed Ok and then I kind of brought out his evil side

and he kind of like, and I don't know how he did it, but all of a sudden, like my

teachers liked me in the beginning and then they didn't. It's like he kind of like spread

the word about me or something through the school. I've heard it many times from my

dad, "Don't spread your word at school, because if you tell the teachers, the teachers

sit around in the lunch room, their own personal lunch room, and talk about students."

And I don't know if that's true or not, but it kind of seemed like my dad was actually

speaking the truth, because the teachers would look at me differently, they would

actually grade me differently.

That's truly how it felt, like it was a gang up on me. Like, "We're going to

work you so hard, we're going to make sure either you're going to have a really hard

time graduating or you're going to show us that you can do it." And I couldn't.

Because of, actually my habits, my habits, of what they were and when they were.

Different schools, different habits. Different lifestyles, it's all about lifestyle and how

it is. But, I really knew I wouldn't graduate the day that my, that my Creative Writing

teacher got in my face. He got in my face and he told me to leave for something I

didn't do. And I told him, excuse my censorship, but I told him to "Fuck OFF!" He

said I was doing something that I wasn't doing and he was putting words in my mouth

and embarrassing me in front of the student body, and the student body knew me.

Everybody knew me from Middle School when I was going here before. I was quite

popular and everybody liked me and when I moved they all missed me and I came

back and everybody liked me again. After coming back from the city it was really

hard to fit in again after all the different life experiences I had. It was really hard, not a lot of people out here did they same kinds of things I did everyday. They're different cultures. Because when I first got back, I walked in and people were scared. I looked different and acted different. And I guess I eventually softened, but this teacher made me feel like I had no place, that I was evil and that's not right.

The vice-principal really made me feel unwelcome though. Well, I guess he didn't like the fact that I skated on school property on the first day of school. Because I didn't see a No Skating sign, so I kind of took advantage of it. I know there was no skating there, so, maybe I was just kind of testing his patience. I was kind of being a jackass, but so you know, it was worth it. So you know I guess maybe that was my mistake, I kind of, I kind of prodded it, right on the first day and maybe that's what made him not really like me. And he would always get on my case about smoking around the school. I'd go off campus, and I'd go down the street, down the street about two or three of those road markers and then I'd have a cigarette.

They would catch me smoking off property. I mean I would smoke off property because, of course, the system says there's no smoking on the campus. So I'd smoke off property, but I wouldn't smoke far away enough, you know. And then I started going underneath the bridge and smoking. And then we'd come up and there'd be, um, after we'd smoke a cigarette and then go back to class and have like ten minutes to go to class. It takes five minutes to walk out, five minutes to walk back, you're in class. So, you know, no harm done, you know. If I wanted to have a

cigarette, I'd have a cigarette. And he'd still come out there and he'd pester me and bother me. Finally I got tired of it, and so I left.

He was ruining my reputation, trying to use me as a, I don't know, maybe trying to use me as a piece of bovine or something, a piece of cattle, like I'm nothing compared to everybody else. And it really felt wrong and that's why I left. And to this day, I'll tell them, you know, I'll flip 'em the bird; "I don't like you, get a way from me. I don't need you in my life. You make my life hell, you make my life hell. I'll embarrass the hell out of you." He excluded me. And he's like, "You're an outsider." "No, I'm not, don't be prejudice." That's what he was being. I guess I'm just not welcome on campus. Officially they never kicked me out. I just left. I should be able to come back if I wished to do so or pleased 'cause I never did anything wrong. But, it's just, he actually treated me like they did back in the '50's with the African-American's and the White Supremacists. He's treating me like I'm, like he's a white supremacist and I'm a black man.

Sometimes teachers were my best friends. But when they yelled at me, I lost respect when they yelled at me. They can talk as individuals, as human beings. I'm a human being. I can hear. You don't have to yell. And we can talk about it. And when the teacher yelled at me I said, "You're an inconsiderate douchebag." I called him a douchebag and I walked out, and then he started calling me back and I just told him, "Fuck you. Go away. I don't want to talk to you." And the vice-principal, he still doesn't leave me alone. And I don't know if that's a rough way of caring, I don't know. But, to look at something and say, "Hey, I don't think I'm going to be able to

do this." It's really hard for a person. It's something you really want to do and then you just can't. That really just ranks on your heart. And for somebody to be a blocker like that, that's wrong. That's morally wrong.

When I walked in the high school doors in OR, everybody, it's like everybody likes me at school, you know they don't hate me. It's other people who are around the school who don't like me. Not in this town though. Everybody knows me because I grew up here most of my life. But when I walk into a WA school, um, sometimes there's drama, sometimes there's not. Um, there's a lot different from NY, 'cause NY, if there was drama people died. Um, in WA, if you got drama somebody's either gonna get beat up, talked to or taken down to the principal's office. You know, here I'm pussy footing it, and when I got back, when I went from that school and went to NYC, I thought it was going to be like that, but it wasn't and I saw people die and I was like, "Woow." And then I moved back to WA and I came back and that was a hard fall. I was, like if you go somewhere and you're like a green horn and you go off and go to do something hard and come back to that green horn state with what you learned, people are going to look at you different.

I came down to OR schools and I thought it was going to be easy like it was, like it was in Elementary School, 'cause that's what I really remember. I just came back and it got so hard. I was singled out. And a lot of people did a lot worse stuff than I did and I got in the most trouble. I was in the principal's office constantly. You know, I've gone down the bad path a couple of times, I mean I've gotten into trouble with the law and all that, but, you know I've learned from my mistakes not to do it

again and become a better person. I had my ups and I had my downs and it kind of made me learn from my mistakes and learn from my achievements as well. It's all about balance. Finding inner balance within yourself is the first thing you need to do in life.

What I really want to do is to make my parents proud of me. My dad is still kind of, I did some things while I was up there, and I kind of made him mad. I do things for my mom, she loves me, of course, and they love me. I do believe that at some point in my life that my parents will be proud of me. It will probably be about the time that I join the Navy my parents will be proud of me or when I graduate.

It's not fair that schools have so much power over people. And it's not fair what kids do to other kids, but it is what people do, it's reality and it's basic instinct. And well, I'm going to explain something that I truly think should happen when teachers are hired. They should have a counseling examination to see if there are actually, truly fit. To put them under stress, actually put them underneath stress, and see how they deal with it. Because obviously this vice-principal can't deal with stress and he took it out on me. And it really did hurt me inside and made me feel like a piece of shit, a piece of crap.

I could actually be done. I only had seven credits to do. And you can do seven credits in one semester at school and it just never got done because I didn't go to school because I didn't want to be around the stupid vice-principal. School needs to be a nurturing place. At the same time it needs to be an educational place, and a recreational place. A place to have fun, a place to learn. Live, laugh, learn.

Structural Description

The desire to find acceptance and a sense of belonging runs very deep for P-4. His school history tells a story of transition and the search for a peer group who would allow him in. In his mind, P-4 has substituted the value of life experiences with that of school stability and learning. He outwardly claims his experiences have been a right of passage of sorts toward adulthood and exhibits a great deal of pride in his survival of them; however, it is clear to the observer that the genuine P-4 is somehow lost in midst of the experiences and he has yet to find a solid place to land.

The need to please. Given that P-4 started and restarted school six different times, he became quite adept at molding his personality to one he believed would allow him entry into a school's social structure. Regardless of the school environment, P-4 adapted. While a valuable skill to possess, P-4's brand of adaptability masks his insecurity and core belief that he is a "freak." He views himself as a person who physically does not fit in; he is exceptionally tall and thin. He believes himself to be less intelligent than others and a friend who has to work very hard to demonstrate his worth. Once a relationship is established, however, P-4 becomes the most loyal of friends and will literally do anything to preserve that bond.

Once he became aware of how others reacted to his physical attributes, P-4 struggled both socially and academically. He sites a particularly difficult time quite early in his school experience. An issue with his eyesight in the 2nd grade escalated into his being retained a year as well as, for the first time, viewing himself as different from his classmates in a negative sense. He perceived that his teachers believed he was

retarded and set him apart. It seems it was at his point P-4 lost some basic trust in the school system. He described being transferred to a new school in a different district in which he was able to learn foundational skills, yet he did not feel valued as an individual. His love for school was waning and that energy was being transferred into the development of a defensiveness and rebellion that would manifest in middle and high school.

P-4's memories of middle school consist mainly of being perceived as a social outcast. His personal interests did not transfer to school and he felt an object of ridicule and derision. When asked what teachers and other school adults did to help him in this regard, P-4 responded that he was sure they weren't even aware. P-4 began to cultivate qualities he believed others would appreciate. At his time he attempted to be the jokester, the pressure to fit in whatever way he could was great enough that even ridiculing himself was acceptable. He became the person that everyone could get along with. His statement: "I wasn't who I was supposed to be" is telling of a person who was aware he was becoming disingenuous, but could find no other way to be to satisfy his need for friends and belonging.

The saga of P-4's need to please becomes sorrowful as he describes his move to a major metropolitan environment and his school experience there. He describes an experience of gang involvement and how those values became the core of his belief system. While there is no doubt that P-4 experienced many things, some violent, some tragic, there is a sense that some of his memories are not based entirely in reality. Again his need to please is such that there is a feeling that the stories being related are

those that can best keep a listener interested and entertained. It may be that P-4 has cultivated so well the ability to please and say the "right thing" that his reality becomes whatever he can offer in the moment to keep people interested and attached. While one may give the benefit of the doubt to such recollections, there is a need to temper the deeds of P-4's narratives and focus on the underlying issues and emotions.

On being in school. With so many transitions between schools, P-4's focus had consistently been on the social side, using his energy to create and keep friends and a place of acceptance among them. Up through middle school he did not place a great deal of importance on the academic side. P-4 described being able to do the work, having resolved his eyesight issue and regained his confidence to do what teachers expected him to do. As he continued to struggle to find social parity, he found that the behaviors of the person he was creating were not acceptable to school administration.

P-4 had been cultivating an outlaw persona. One who smoked, talked tough, was ready to fight, and reacted impulsively to threats to his identity. He emphasized his gang affiliation in order to impress and intimidate. He was very concerned with how others thought of him, and by tangling with administration P-4 achieved his goal of being noticed and admired as the outlaw.

The negative consequence to the power struggle between P-4 and one male administrator in particular was not being in school consistently enough to earn credits toward graduation. Because P-4 did not inwardly enjoy the confrontation and conflict, he would not attend school regularly. He became resentful of what he perceived to be a deliberate effort to humiliate and ostracize him by school personnel. This in turn lead

to a heightened status in his mind of hero as he championed the rights of younger

classmen to deviate from acceptable school behavior. P-4 had ultimately sacrificed his

ability to graduate for social standing.

P-4 was not able to reconcile his desire for social acceptance and the ability to

be academically successful. He speaks to understanding the importance of earning a

diploma, what it would mean to his family, and what benefits he perceives he would

receive as a result. Yet he can not seem to allow the process of completing a diploma

program to become priority. He has come to believe that the day he met the school

administrator is the day he knew he would not graduate. P-4 finds himself stuck in a

place where he can not move forward without sacrificing the outlaw/outsider persona

and the alternative lifestyle which took years to cultivate.

Life lessons. Being in school, while required, has brought to P-4 multiple experiences

wherein he has felt misunderstood, overlooked, undervalued, defeated, and

unwelcome. It has also provided him with an audience for his growth to adulthood and

multiple opportunities to discover his own resiliency and ability to survive.

P-4 laments the perceived lack of guidance on the part of schools toward

discovering his own natural talents and skills which might have shaped his

development as a successful student and lifelong learner. P-4 at age 19 feels he does

not have any viable means of earning a living, an obligation and the skills for which he

believes school is supposed to provide and which he believes he did not receive. P-4

remains in a state of limbo between being a high schooler not yet prepared to manage

is own life and an adult capable of getting his needs met.

Upon contemplating his school experience and what it has meant to him, P-4 described learning about achieving a balance between all things. "There's yin and yang," he stated many times; "there's inner balance." P-4 stated his life philosophy more as reconciled musings rather than expressions of empowerment. After witnessing the "realities" of life in the city, P-4 has struggled with understanding why living contains such injustice and cruelty. He struggles to understand why he has less than others in terms of wealth, opportunity, and connections. To combat these frustrations, P-4 decided to focus his energy inwardly and be the best friend he knows how to be, meaning remaining loyal regardless of right or wrong. He has, however, become neutral regarding life. P-4 has learned not to expect too much, yet there remains a thread in his narrative that holds onto the ideal of "be all that you can be."

Textural-Structural Description

Transitions between schools. P-4 seemed make a habit of changing schools. "Yeah, I moved around so much." Attending two elementary schools, four middle schools, and five different high schools, being and feeling on the outside was a familiar sensation. P-4 believes the multiple transitions made a difference in his inability to complete a traditional diploma program and be prepared to enter into a more adult phase of life.

> And that's where I am today. I'm always falling back. So, I'm not
> where I should be. I'm just right here and I should be right here
> [measuring on table with hands] but I'm right here. I'm still a senior.
> I should already be in the Navy right now, you know, wherever I'm
> supposed to be, but I'm not.

P-4 exudes a sense of loss and disbelief when contemplating how his life has developed. There is an air of low expectation that rises from him as if he has come to believe he may not deserve much more than he already has.

A beginning place for this state of being may have been his early elementary experience. P-4 explained getting a slow start complicated by an inability to focus and bring tasks to fruition as well as a partial loss of eyesight. He did not accomplish what was required of him in the 2nd grade and was retained.

> I just didn't learn to do my work. I goofed off in class. I talked too much. They'd always constantly have to get me to work and I wouldn't work. Eventually I got my stuff done, but I didn't do enough to get on to 3rd grade, so they held me back a year.

Memories of this year and these events are among the most detailed and poignant of which P-4 speaks when contemplating his school experiences and where he is in present day because of those experiences. It is clear he was impacted by the first transition into a new school. "But, um, I didn't get glasses until I moved to [name of place]. Um, and then I went from 2nd grade over again, that's when I got held back and that's probably why… I'm 19 when I'm graduating, maybe."

With a tendency to look to the positive, the number of schools P-4 attended provided him with a unique circumstance which he has learned to use to generate interest and attention from others. He has many stories to tell and by nature has a narrative style of expression. However, P-4 speaks only matter of factly about events and frames relationships in terms of places and time rather than meaning or attachment. He does not tend to include his feelings or how he was personally impacted by the circumstances in his narratives.

> Well like, I started high school in WA, and then, I went to high
> school in WA and then I went over and I visited family in NY and
> I went there for a couple months, and then I came back and finished
> high school in WA and then I did my senior year down here [in OR.]

P-4 has learned to compartmentalize his school and personal history which allows him

to keep buried a deep seeded insecurity based on a lack of stability at home.

His movement from school to school through his middle and high school years

is another indicator of the lack of stability and growing sense that something was

missing from his life. P-4 experienced moving from family member to family

member in search of what he called "inner balance," also known as predictability and

structure.

> And then I got out of [name of school] about the middle of the year
> and then I went over [name of school] and lived with my sister for
> a little bit and uh, finished my 6th grade year. Then I moved with my
> mom and I went to [name of school] before [name of school] was
> built. And I didn't finish my 7th grade year either. I moved up to
> my dad's to finish my 7th grade year.

Still not finding what he lacked in his home life, P-4 continued to search by moving as

far as he could to an inner city environment. This decision to run away to the "big

city" has clearly been a defining moment in his life thus far.

> NYC was a little bit different 'cause for one thing the schools, they
> were really, teachers wouldn't teach any like very important life skills
> type of things, nothing really important, just the basics. They were
> more afraid of getting shot and killed.

After this life altering experience P-4 returned to once again shift between his

parents' homes. He also shifted between schools attempting to adapt to each school's

unique environment. P-4's focus was not on academics, he was simply hoping to fit in

and settle down.

A longing for belonging. P-4 spent much of his school career seeking opportunities to fit in for reasons of emotional as well as physical well-being. However, the instability he experienced in both his school and home worlds took its toll. "A lot of people liked to talk to me and I was their friend and all, but when it came right down to it I wasn't who I was supposed to be." P-4 seemed to consistently be in the cross fire between peer pressure and school rules. He vacillated between pleasing parents and teachers and his friends; P-4 seemed unable to find a way to balance both and be content.

P-4 had moved several times between the homes of his parents seeking both freedom and approval. He was unable to speak openly regarding the feelings he has for either of his parents. There are unreconciled issues tucked behind his eyes as he spoke first about his mother.

> My mom, she's kind of, she's a teacher, so I mean she's going to
> always think the way she thinks. That's who she is. I love her, but,
> I can't really change her, so, I just love her for who she is.

There is an unrevealed tension in his tone which seems to indicate the lack of something. Something he wanted from his mother she was unable to offer or P-4 was unable to receive. He is deeply concerned with disappointing her or not meeting her expectation. Sadly, it seems the information regarding their mutual concerns and feelings remain unspoken between them.

The situation with his biological father mirrors that of his mother. P-4 is concerned with living up to a certain ideal, yet the parameters of that ideal have not been clearly communicated. P-4 believes he is valued by his father, "I do think that my dad is proud of me," and puts great store in his father's musings about life, "My dad

will always say: Don't spread your word at school, because if you tell the teachers, the teachers sit around in the lunch room and talk about students."

Family is important to P-4. His standing with his family is central to understanding what motivates him. He expressed gratitude for what he has received from his parents." I thank my mom for everything, my dad too. They've taught me so much." P-4 also has a step-mother and step-father that seem to have had a positive impact. He spoke especially well of his step-father for providing some element of guidance and acceptance. Still P-4 lives with a nagging fear of letting them down. "And they're going to be disappointed in me and I hate, I the, disappointing my parents 'cause I feel like crap." As the following narrative reveals P-4 feels deeply the pending stigma of being the only child who does not graduate. He will not belong.

> We have a holly tree in front of our house and every single child that
> has graduated from high school... Ok, that plant has been dead forever.
> But every time one of us graduates and we get a picture in front of it,
> it always comes back to life. So it's kind of a miracle thing on our
> property and I'm not going to be able to graduate on time like I said I
> was going to. So it's like, I'm not going to get that picture, so I'm
> going to be the odd one out of the family.

The polarity of rejection versus acceptance permeates P-4's decision-making regarding family and friends alike. He wants so badly to be well considered by all and has cultivated a way of being he believes is pleasing and advantageous.

> It's called power of presence. And if you have the power of presence,
> people, you're going to get cool stuff. You're going to get good stuff.
> You're going to get good feedback. You're going to get a good line of
> credit, you're going to have everything you've ever wanted in your life.

P-4, although at one point distressed by not being able to be authentic, discovered a preference in having a reputation as fun-loving, fiercely loyal, and willing to do

whatever he needed to protect and maintain that connection. Once P-4 came to find a greater positive response from peers than home or school he stepped into the persona full force. "I kind of held it back and then once I realized that people really liked that kind of stuff I really unleashed it and then people kind of liked me better."

A people pleaser, P-4 was easily persuaded to follow those he perceived as having great "power of presence" who offered allegiance or friendship. His gang affiliation epitomizes this concept. Joining offered emotional and physical protection when little else was available. P-4 had chosen to run away from his father and became overwhelmed with feelings of intense insecurity, loneliness, and vulnerability.

> If you wanted to survive you stayed off certain streets, stayed off of certain parts of the neighborhood. If you're going to be safe all around, you might as well just join. I did join. I was a gangster for a while I guess.

His life in the ghetto was short, but was certainly a pivotal time in his life. P-4 described many images and acts of intimidation and violence he found both repugnant and riveting. P-4 also discovered the gangster image was attractive to many younger, more impressionable youth back in the Pacific Northwest.

Back at his father's home, P-4 retuned to a public school without teaching cages and metal detectors and felt very out of place and misunderstood. The skills he had acquired in order survive there did not have a place here. But with some modification he found a niche as an "outcast" and rebel. He became the guy who could get you cigarettes or beer. Being a high school student did not fit that image particularly well. P-4's power of presence interacted badly with several male adults at school.

> And then they were ruining my reputation, trying to use me as
> a, I don't know, maybe trying to use me as a piece of bovine or
> something, a piece of cattle, like I'm nothing compared to everybody
> else. Like I have no place. I have no… I'm evil.

P-4 felt compelled to leave school. His power of presence did not equal theirs. This failure to fit is representative of P-4's experience in constructing relationships both personally and professionally.

The decision to leave early. P-4 identifies his first encounter with a male administrator his senior year as the moment he knew he would not earn a diploma in the traditional fashion. Asked when he really understood he would not be graduating, P-4 responded: "The day I met my principal at [name of school]. Sad to say." The story of P-4's school experience leads one to believe the die may have been cast as early as late elementary and early middle school, however, P-4 accepted the reality only at that point. He was battling too many forces such as peer pressure, stresses in the home, and feeling like a stranger in his home community. Something had to give and school work and following school policy was the easiest to let go.

The forces P-4 was battling all seemed to converge on him in school. He had rejoined the system where he began his school experience, believing he would find things as he left them. However, he had changed a great deal and so had the social network. "I'm the oldest person in the whole school. I'm the tallest person in the school. I'm the one who looks like an adult the most. I stick out like a sore thumb." Despite the physical features that he felt precluded him from fitting in, P-4 found some acceptance among those on the fringe, the outcasts, "the misfits and the stoners." He had softened the "gansta" persona and found a way to please people.

> I took the blame, I take, when people, get in trouble, like people who
> are younger so they don't get MIP's, I take the blame. I'm like, Nuh
> uh, they're mine. I was smoking. They weren't smoking, they were
> just hanging out with me.

P-4 found himself in a position of having to reject school authority to maintain his social position.

In addition to working so very hard emotionally to fill his need for acceptance, P-4 battled the management styles of school officials he perceived as belittling. He had a continuous and contentious push-pull relationship with a particular administrator. He also suffered a humiliating experience with a male teacher which seemed to be a final nail in the coffin of P-4's diploma.

> I knew I wouldn't graduate the day that my, that my Creative
> Writing teacher got in my face. He got in my face and he told
> me to leave for something I didn't, and I didn't, and I told him,
> excuse my censorship, but I told him to Fuck OFF! He said I was
> doing something that I wasn't doing and he was putting words in
> my mouth and embarrassing me in front of the student body.

P-4 felt trapped in a win-lose situation. The only way he would win was to be more powerful than the teacher. His only recourse was to walk out. That way he could preserve his image and his dignity. P-4 admitted to feeling the strength of peer pressure and was guided by it. But having felt humiliated and embarrassed in front of his peers was only a piece of what drove P-4 away. He also felt his honor had been denigrated.

> And it really felt wrong and that's why I left. And to this day, I'll
> tell them, you know, I'll flip 'em the bird; I don't like you get a
> way from me. I don't need you in my life. You make my life hell,
> you make my life hell. I'll embarrass the hell out of you.

P-4 felt persecuted and singled out. The feeling of being treated unjustly from this experience became the capstone for all the other similar humiliations he had endured. He no longer fit in school where he perceived teachers and administrators were exempt from causing harm.

> But, to look at something and say, Hey, I don't think I'm going to be able to do this. It's really hard for a person. It's something you really want to do and then you just can't. That really just ranks on your heart. And for somebody to be a blocker like that, that's wrong. That's morally wrong.

The sense of honor and code of conduct P-4 had cultivated while in a gang was a powerful guide in his decision-making. He remained loyal to those who accepted him regardless of who they were. By leaving public high school he could preserve that part of himself.

Meaning of the experience. P-4 has an existential orientation when contemplating his life. He spoke of yin and yang and inner balance as being the underpinning of his cognitive and behavioral process. "It's all about balance. Finding inner balance, within yourself is the first thing you need to do in life." He believes in the concept of karma, "What goes around comes around" and an understanding that he is ultimately accountable for his choices. "It's all about choices. It's all interconnected."

He has learned that each person must endure hardships along with moments of contentment. Even though the pain of his many experiences both in school and on his own are evident in his tone and expression, P-4 works hard to maintain a positive outlook.

> I've gone down the bad path a couple of times, I mean I've gotten into trouble with the law and all that, but, you know I've learned

from my mistakes not to do it again and become a better person.

There was still a hopefulness in his manner as he spoke of the possibility of a future in

the armed services followed by college at his hometown university. This outcome

would mean vindication for him. Rising above his circumstances, proving to everyone

how capable he is, how powerful and how pleasing.

> I have something to say and spread out between both sides and
> I'm saying something. Don't commit to something you're going
> to quit. If you do something wrong you're going to die. I like this.

> Moving from school to school, struggling to fit in, and struggling to survive, P-

4 attempted to find meaning in his history. He wants so badly to demonstrate his worth

and be viewed by others as having value. He also wants to impact and influence

people.

> This is, we could be living our last day or we could be living the
> first day of something new. And I believe that my life experiences
> are going to help somebody some day. For all I know this could, I
> could be helping somebody right now. I could be helping you right
> now.

The need to please still remains a constant in his desire to have an impact. If he is

successful he will be remembered. He will exist. P-4 has a complex character

interwoven with critical forces pressuring him to "be something." He has been

gathering strength from his experiences. He is not done.

> School has come to represent for P-4 both the best and worst of what life has to

offer. School can be about rising up and dreaming big. It can also be about conformity

and punitive and petty people. He has learned to adapt. He has learned he can be

powerful and create situations to his benefit. He believes others how misuse their

power of presence such as egomaniacal school officials are detrimental. P-4's overall

school experience has been beneficial in the sense that he has now grown up and,

through his experiences, grown stronger.

> The only reason I liked it is because it got me into something that eventually made me stronger. Made me stronger is mental, physical and emotional. It taught me how to live, laugh and learn. I taught me how to live.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Participant Five

Textural Description

Not only did I go from a regular high school to a continuation high school to try to graduate, but I did it twice. Even after I went to continuation school and back to regular high school, I had to come back to a continuation school so I could try to graduate from another, a different high school. I just feel like I have something to say about what it's really about to be in high school and I want to get my story heard. People assume that it's like, you know, it's just natural to graduate from high school. But you know, I guess they just forget times are different. It's not the easiest thing; a lot can happen in four years.

I started off at one elementary school in CA. It was a private school, so we had to dress up and wear uniforms everyday. It was pretty nice. I got picked up and dropped off every day. Teachers, principals, everybody was nice. It was a lot of security. And I did look forward to going to school, but it was mainly just to see my friends. Also it was required to learn how to play the piano, so I looked forward to that also because I liked doing it. I did the chimes and playing the keyboard and stuff like that, so we just entertained a bunch of people and we did concerts put on by the school. And I did like sports. They didn't have like a sports team, but I did sports outside of school. There's not just one thing that really explains my elementary experience. It was basically like the same routine. Everything, everyday the same thing. So I really enjoyed it, even though I'm not like a routine type person now, back

then I liked it. And friends were easy to come by. My family knew a lot of people so, uh, my friendships were basically tied into my family friends and stuff like that.

I didn't get to middle school until the 7th grade. My elementary school went through to the 6th grade, so I didn't get to middle school until the 7th grade, and most people get there in the 6th grade. I moved to the Valley where it was real hot. I had to meet new people, but I met them pretty fast. So I started middle school and I had to make the transfer from private school to public school. I ended up getting into a lot of trouble, and I just didn't make the transfer too well at first. So I got into a lot of trouble out there.

I really wasn't ready for the transition and it took me by surprise. Mostly it was not going to class, setting off sprinklers during something, that kind of thing. Anything you could get in trouble for, I would do. Yeah, at least when there wasn't someone watching over me. I think basically I just took advantage of, you know, not having somebody watch over me and just had a lot of fun. I wasn't ready for the transition; I wasn't ready to be on my own. You know, like walking to school and just doing my own work without somebody behind me. The first six years I basically had somebody pushing me along the whole way, and then going to middle school, 7th grade, I didn't have that so it was hard to deal with. Because at first it was that I wasn't getting picked up and dropped off 'cause I only lived a few blocks from my school, so I walked everyday. In private school, you, well, everybody had a specific class they're supposed to be in and you had to be there. And in public school, I basically was on my

own; I didn't have somebody on my back. It was I did it or it wasn't going to get done. Yeah, they kind of laid back and watched more.

Everything was the same except for me, I just changed. It was just me and school. I guess I was trying to fit it, find a way to fit into a new place, looking for new friends, and the people who accepted me first were like that, you know trouble makers. That probably was it. It was probably part of the reason, is the people that were like the closest in age to me were not the best students, and I didn't get the best example from them. As far as the academics go though, they were still pretty decent, a "C" average probably. I didn't enjoy going to class, so I just did enough so I could get by and have fun, pretty much.

Then I moved from the Valley to another place which is about an hour and a half drive. And it was a lot smaller place with lots of animals, um, horses that lived like right next to the streets and it was weird 'cause I had to leave behind all my friends and I had to meet all these new people for my first year of high school. But I met them pretty fast. The high school was really big, which I liked being around a lot of people. It was about 4800 students. Yeah, real big. I really enjoyed high school with all the people. But I kind of came out of middle school slacking off on academics, so my 9th and 10th grade I kind of slacked on them too and fell behind.

I can't even remember how many times I had someone say to me, "You're so smart. Look what kind of opportunities you're going to have. You can be really successful. Why don't you take care of your business?" I heard that way too much! It was mainly because, I mean, how I really fell behind was girls. I really just put a lot of

effort into girls and none into school. In CA it seems as if everybody can hang out with everybody and there's so many people, so like it doesn't matter. And I know football and sports and stuff like that really kept me out of trouble and they gave me something to do with my time, so if that got taken away, it's like I'd be more into the other side of the crowd. I'd be more into the crowd that does drugs to be honest. It was just in that school there was no Hispanics, Latinos, or Mexicans, it was about 90 something percent Asian, and the rest were Caucasians and a few African-American's. So I kind of felt like there was a high expectation, but then again, they know I'm not Asian so 9th and 10th grade I just slacked.

And then 11th grade I decided I'd go to a continuation school because I was lacking credits. It was only a couple of blocks away from the regular high school. And it was actually my choice because I still wanted to graduate, and I knew it was the only way I would actually do my work and get my credits. There was a lot more freedom and I gained all my credits that I needed for 9th, 10th and 11th grade. Well, because at the continuation school there really wasn't that many girls and, I don't know, my teachers just fell in love with me. They just helped me out a lot and got me back on track and just like made sure I had to do what I had to do. And, somehow I doubled my credits and got back on track very fast. I got ahead in that one semester, so I went back to the regular high school and continued there the second semester of junior year and finished out that year. And then, I mean, I was doing so good I was the president of my school, and everything got back to being good.

You know, now that I have a chance to think about it, I feel that, I mean I know that people, like a lot of people stereotype people, and a lot of people get surprised when they hear how I talk and how I act and, you know, my manners and stuff like that. Most people expect African-American's to all talk the same way. You know what I mean? And that's part of the reason why I kind of act a certain way around people and parents. I was always a sweet person to grown ups and stuff like that. I kind of put on, not a fake act, but I always had the same personality towards grown ups, but like around school or around friends and stuff, I was just a totally different person. So I just kept them separate. I made sure I always had respect for my elders, but when I get around my friends and all that, it's just a totally different person. I mean, they're both the real me, but I feel I should act different around different people. So like you know you want to respect your elders, but I'm the leader with my friends so I have to act different. So I act one way towards my friends, but then towards school officials and teachers and parents I was the other person. I am not the average African-American I guess you'd say. That's maybe one thing I've learned from high school. Everybody's just stereotypical and they expect you to be one way, and I'd just surprise everybody and be my way.

So then over the summer between my junior and senior year, my parents got into a lot of arguments and stuff and they decided to divorce. My mom decided to come out to Oregon and have me, well, she gave me the decision to live with her or my brother and I decided to live with him. So I started my senior year which was really bad because I had to meet all new people again. Except this time it was in a

different state so, I couldn't like just drive to my friend's houses and stuff like that and see my old friends. It's real far away. I was just really mad, really sad to leave all my friends and just did not want to be here at all, did not want to leave my home that I had lived all of my life. It was real hard for me.

I got on My Space and met a lot of people from here. So actually I did feel more comfortable because when I first moved out here I went to school and met them all in person and we went out a lot. By the time school started I already knew a lot of people. I just started hanging out with them and then they introduced me to their friends and I just met a whole bunch more people. It's different though because in CA people really don't have groups because everybody can hang out with different races. But out here in OR, everybody's a member of a specific group that they stay to, and like a specific spot. They eat at lunch at that spot, and hang out with their friends and stuff like that. So, that was basically like a big difference for me.

And what another big change was, basically, just the size of the school. Even though there wasn't that many students, African-American's at this new school, I met and quickly became friends with the whole football team, so there was like a lot more people I could hang out with and had a lot in common with. I guess I was still feeling like I wasn't sure how I was going to fit in here. Because most of the high school's that you go to and even the ones that I went to, I was still, there was still only a few African-American's. So I mean, I always felt like that. I've never been to like a big population of African-American students or nothing like that so it kind of always did feel like that to me. And some judgment maybe from teachers, some coaches, some

students because in the whole school there's only two full African-American's, and that's me and my friend who's also another coaches son. So there's just us. I mean there's a couple of kids that are mixed and you can't really tell, but we're the only ones who have to deal with it really. Yeah, we're the only two because the other high school here doesn't have any. So it's just us two. So, yeah, I kind of got that a little bit when I walked in the door. Like, "Uh, oh, here comes trouble." Something like that. So I felt more pressure about stereotyping here. There's a lot more diversity in CA.

That's why I like, I stress on graduating so much because they're gonna always remember me as that black kid who graduated or whatever, and the generations to come, when they come in the high school, they won't necessarily be judged because of what me and my friend did in our high school days. It's so the people who come in the high school will get different looks than I did. People will be looking at them different.

It seems like people just forget that high school isn't easy to pass. It's a lot of work, it's four long years of work and a lot can happen in a short amount of time and people sometimes forget that or sometimes they just take it for granted, they don't take into account that it's a lot of work. There's a lot of situations that come up everyday that you're going to have to decide what you're going to do and they affect you in high school. It could be about peer pressure but not always. It could be anything. And it can make a difference on how you do school. You know, like being willing to walk in the door everyday or not.

I guess every time I meet new people I start to slack off a little bit. And then I try to jump back on the right way after I finish socializing and stuff like that. I tend to

slack off and then work hard and just pull miracles off. That's like the only way I can explain high school for me. Just pulling miracles off that I didn't know I could. But I actually never got in any trouble before here. My troubles with the law all started when I came here. I guess just being in a smaller town, you can't really get away with the stuff you can being in a big place. There's a lot less people here, and everybody knows everybody.

I thought I was doing Ok, but like I said I got behind a little bit, meeting new people and all that. So we had a big meeting with everybody, because everybody liked me including like all the security and personnel and all the teachers and staff. So I had a big meeting. There was about 15 of us in the meeting including the security officers, all the principles, all my teachers, counselors, and uh, some other people, my probation officer. Basically we just thought of ways to see if I could graduate. They asked me what I wanted and I just told them I really just wanted to walk with my class and we tried to come up with different answers. We came up with the solution to go to another continuation school which seemed like the best idea at the time, so I decided to do that so I could try to graduate.

You know I work well under pressure. I have confidence that I can do it if I want. I mean it was always like, I was always told to go to college. I was always told by my family, everybody went to college, so it was kind of like a natural thing just growing up. I wanted to do the college thing and there was a lot of things in life that I wanted to do which I had to go through college in order to accomplish so, I try to make it my goal to get there.

And another thing, my parents weren't the richest people, but they had some money and I was raised up with kind of like good everything, and my parents drove really nice cars and I had a great life. And when my parents divorced, it was kind of like a step, a couple of steps down. So I kind of got a taste of the life I wanted, so, you know, I really don't want to live any other life than that. When you get your education you can live a better life and be able to get better jobs and stuff like that. What typically gets in the way is peer pressure and laziness. Peer pressure in, "Let's ditch class or let's walk some girls to class" and then decide not to go to class. And laziness is about just not putting forth the effort, not wanting to do the work. When most people go to school, well, I shouldn't say most, but when some people go to school, they just want to have fun and they think it's just a game and stuff like that, pretty much. I mean there are some students who just go there and concentrate, but only a few, very few.

Structural Description

P-5 described himself as "unique" and "fortunate." Even though he may never earn a high school diploma, in his estimation he has experienced how high school ought to be and how it ought not to be. P-5 could provide no obvious excuse for his not completing a diploma program in the expected manner. He has had consistent familial support and academic opportunity. He is intellectually capable of completing the requirements; he has been extremely successful socially. In fact, his social intelligence is the only reason he could offer as having been the major distraction competing with his academic progress. P-5 simply found other things, namely

friendships, more interesting and entertaining than school. The importance of "having fun" was simply greater than the promised result of completing high school.

School: The good life. P-5 had an above average beginning to his school experience. He had the fortune to attend a private school for the first six years that catered to his academic and social development. His development also seemed to be above average. P-5 described himself as typically one of the first to understand school work and the one of the main attractions of the school's social scene. An attractive and charismatic individual, P-5 recalls his elementary years as safe, secure, and enjoyable.

P-5 was able to develop a strong sense of self. He has a confidence that generally eludes people of his age. He believes that his experience in school is unique in as an African-America being educated in non African-American majority communities. He has had the opportunity to earn a diploma as well as a step into higher education by following through with the requirements and expectations for a traditional high school track. A talented athlete, P-5 believed that the combination of his athletic skill, good looks, and intellectual ability put him in a position to excel. Success as he defined it included having a leadership role on an athletic team, a full social life which revolved around his likes and dislikes, and an academic load that didn't interfere with either.

P-5 has a dream he has been pursuing and has every reason to believe that he will achieve it. He described experiences as each level of his education where teachers and concerned adults "fell in love" with him and provided him the help and support required to achieve school goals. P-5 has learned that he can "pull off miracles" when

it gets down to the wire. School adults have seemed to have been willing to provide second chances and extra opportunities to complete assignments and course work. P-5 has never been denied access to any program or opportunity that might have supported his school success. His school experience as he perceived it has taught him that there will always be options and opportunities available to him, that it is never too late.

The social side of school life. The personal confidence P-5 has cultivated comes in large part to his exceptional social intelligence. He has a natural ability to understand how best to talk with or approach an individual in order for the relationship to proceed in a desired fashion. He described taking on the characteristics that would be most appropriate depending upon with whom he interacted. This social skill, in part, was enhanced by the need to adapt to the public school environment and the large numbers of students and peer groups he encountered.

Once he began attending public middle school, P-5 experienced a school's academic charge and social offerings as distinct. Throughout elementary school they had both seemingly been woven together; one did school work with one's friends. Pubic middle school for P-5 presented some adjustments which would eventually result in undesirable and unforeseen consequences. Personal image and the perception of others became major factors in how enjoyable being in the school environment was. One was either a "nerd" or not. Being identified as a "nerd" did not allow P-5 the social standing he desired nor the reputation that would garner him a following or circle of friends.

P-5 decided to explore the reputation of the "bad boy" and proceeded to involve himself in behaviors that were disruptive to his personal learning. This choice seemed to provide him the quickest way to be known and seen in the new and strange environment. His academics suffered as he became more entertained by the reputation he had earned among his peer group. While academically he was able to maintain a "C" average, he preferred the position of leadership among his new peer group. He seemed to view the intrinsic rewards of social acceptance and belonging more appealing than academic rewards. It was at this time P-5 was unconsciously making the decision not to dedicate himself equally to both. He seemed to believe that he really didn't need to work very hard at school because it would always work out in the end. There would always be a way out of trouble.

P-5 entered public high school and found greater numbers of potential friends and opportunities for a "good time." He continued to allow his academic standing to decline. It seems that when P-5 began to emotionally mature and contemplate a future beyond school, did he make effort to recover the credits required and did so successfully.

P-5 described thoughtfully the "stereotypical" attitudes he encountered in public high school as an African-American. He described each of the schools he attended as being majority Caucasian or Asian and the existence of the expectation that he talk and act a certain way as an African-American. He described feeling a pleasure in not being what school adults expected and being what he described as an atypical African-American. P-5 did not seem to give much credence to being impacted

as one of the few of his race in each school he attended and downplayed the effect this may have had on his choices. He did acknowledge that he felt a sense that other African-Americans would be judged based on his school performance; therefore school success had become more valued as its end became more imminent. For P-5 it seemed as though having this perception did not hold enough meaning to merit a significant change in his choices regarding his academic performance.

School life: What didn't work. P-5 perceived that the major reason he got off track as a student when he began attending public schools is there was little or no concern about how he used his time or what he accomplished. He described feeling as if no one monitored his progress or prompted him to pay attention and get his work done. Although not blaming the system for a lack of engagement, he does justify his "slacking off" on the fact that there were little or no immediate consequences for his actions.

P-5 attributed his continued distraction from academic concerns on his growing interest in sex, the development of his sexual identity, and his ability to establish and maintain romantic relationships. He admitted to spending time with girlfriends and enjoying social opportunities both on and off campus in lieu of attending class. Again, at the time, P-5 did not appear to give credence to the growing disparity of credits required for graduation and the number of credits he had earned. Exemplary of his self-confidence, P-5 went to a continuation school for a part of his junior year and within one semester had gotten back on track for graduation. His first act back in the public system was to reassert his social standing and leadership skills

and became president of his class. P-5 did not maintain that status and within a year found himself transferring to another school in a different state and again devoting his energy to the creation of a new social network.

P-5 had moved beyond the middle school antics of setting off sprinklers during assemblies, yet found other non-school related activities to occupy his time during high school. Although not explicit regarding drug use, P-5 described his involvement in athletics as being the reason for his limited involvement with the "other crowd" that might use illegal substances.

P-5 is a young man who eventually found school to be the means to gratify his social appetite and with the onset of puberty seemed to never again perceive of school as having equal value to his personal development. With a moderate arrogance he used the school setting to meet and greet with the knowledge that the rules didn't always apply to him. He understood there was a line he would not cross concerning insubordinate behaviors; however, P-5 comes across as having about him an air of superiority and specialness as compared to others. There is a sense that the expectations of public school somehow did not meet his standards and there was always the knowledge that no one would ever deny him.

The "good life" P-5 experienced as a child in private school guided his vision of himself as a student. Public school is typically not about being catered to and P-5 described having experienced a certain lifestyle as a child and wanting to maintain that quality of life. The type of alienation P-5 experienced is unusual in the sense that he certainly fit socially; in fact, he was a trendsetter and leader. He describes his social

influence as broad and deep. P-5 was alienated from the public school's mission which he perceived was more pedestrian than he deserved or was entitled to.

Textural – Structural Description

Transitions between schools. Though P-5 had three major transitions in his school experience, it began in seemingly an ideal fashion. He attended a private elementary school which he described as being relatively small and attentive to his emotional and academic needs. He had been able to spend these formative years in a school environment that emphasized inclusion and mastery. P-5 felt valued and privileged and recalled the experience with fondness.

> It was a private school, so we had to dress up and wear uniforms everyday. It was pretty nice. I got picked up and dropped off every day. Um, teachers, everybody was nice. It was a lot of security.

His sense of security was depicted in being dropped off and picked up from school everyday. To P-5 this meant he was taken care of, watched over and did not have to risk much regarding the unknown. He was in a privileged environment enjoying the attention, protection and the opportunity to build a strong foundation of skills.

P-5 is a gifted individual. He is completely capable academically when he applies himself, but most especially, he is brimming with social intelligence. He left his elementary experience full of confidence in his ability to make and keep friends. In fact he acknowledged being the center of his social circle. The confidence P-5 gathered in elementary school was an asset; the loss of the sheltered private environment was the liability.

After six years in the private school, the move to a public middle school was abrupt and intense. P-5 missed out on the opportunity to experience the transition with his peers and was not prepared to cope with the unfamiliar freedoms of the public school system.

> I got to middle school until the 7th grade, and most people get there in the 6th grade, and um, I moved to [name of place], it was real hot. And, um my middle school, I had to meet new people, but I met them pretty fast. Um, middle school, I started, I had to make the, um, transfer from private school to public school, so ended up getting into a lot of trouble, and, uh, I just didn't make the transfer too well at first. So I got into a lot of trouble out there.

In part overwhelmed by new policies and new expectations, P-5 relied on his social intelligence to pave a path toward predictability and acceptance.

The difficulty P-5 had in explaining his choice to rebel in middle school underscores a young man's confusion concerning success. "I really wasn't ready for it and it took me by surprise." P-5's definition of success appeared to be in terms of social connections and how others may perceive him. Perhaps admiring or desiring the attention an older brother received for "bad behavior" or choosing to deflect some of the negative attention from him, P-5 chose to base his reputation on rebellious behaviors and "pushing the envelope with teachers." Becoming a minimalist with his academics, P-5 cultivated a strong social position he took with him to the next experience: high school.

Another school transition coincided with the move to the next level of schooling. "It was weird 'cause I had to leave behind all my friends and I had to meet all these new people my 1st year of high school." P-5's ability to meet and greet along

with his growing prowess as an athlete allowed him to quickly find a fit. His first high

school experience brought even more opportunity to socialize. "The high school was

really big, which I liked being around a lot of people. It was about 4800 students." A

far cry from his protected beginnings, P-5 was on a fast track to becoming unusually

popular and seemed to reveal in the social standing accorded to relatively few.

Thoroughly enjoying his experience, P-5 seemed to give little consideration to

the academic side of school until his junior year. Typical of adolescent development,

the reality of graduation and the inevitability of post-graduation planning began to

weigh on his mind.

> 9th and 10th grade I slacked. And then 11th grade I decided I'd go to
> a continuation school, kind of like this, but it was a lot different, um,
> a lot more freedom, and uh, there I gained all my credits that I needed
> for 9th, 10th and 11th grade and then I got ahead also in that one year
> and then um, I went back to the regular high school, and continued
> there.

The decision to attend the continuation school was P-5's in an effort to regain credits

so as to graduate with his class. "It was actually my choice 'cause, uh, I wanted to

graduate, and I knew it was the only way I would actually do my work and get my

credits." There had always been a plan to attend a university as an athlete and

graduation was a first necessary step.

Each school transition P-5 endured was precipitated by changes in the family.

Having left and returned to a traditional four year high school he had hoped to

graduate from, he was required to transition to a new high school in a new state to

begin his senior year.

> Over the summer my parents got into a lot of arguments and stuff
> and they decided to divorce and my mom decided to then come out
> to Oregon and have me, well, she gave me the decision to live with
> her or my brother and I decided to live with him.

P-5 had experience with transitioning to new schools, and although this large and involved living apart form his parents, P-5 summoned his talents and began building a new social network.

> Joining a new high school and learning a new system as well as a new cultural milieu was a significant challenge. The priority was creating social contacts; academics would take a back seat.

> [I] met new people again, it was real easy. And then, uh, umm, I
> guess, uh, I guess every time I meet new people I start to slack off
> a little bit. Um, and then I try to jump back on the right way after,
> um I finish socializing and stuff like that.

Overtaken by issues unrelated to school, the likelihood of graduating was diminishing. A meeting of school officials, P-5 and his guardian culminated in one more transition to an alternative setting which would allow P-5 the freedom to retrieve credits at an accelerated pace so as to graduate with his class. He did not achieve this goal in the time frame he had hoped. Lacking so little to complete the diploma requirements, one hopes P-5 will follow through.

Familial/peer influences. P-5 exudes charm and is instantly likeable. He is capable of putting people at ease with his winning smile and attracting attention with his good looks. Much of the success he has enjoyed is related to the relationships he has constructed and he seems to measure success by his ability to be seen and heard by members of both sexes, adults and peers.

P-5 enjoyed the support of his family throughout the majority of his school experience. He has also enjoyed the feeling of being sought after as a friend and team mate. "I usually was always the leader, um, yeah, pretty much, yeah." Regardless of where he found himself he was able to adapt and quickly make connections. "Friends were easy to come by." He takes pride in becoming the "person" he needs to be depending upon the context of a situation in which he finds himself.

> I was always a sweet person to grown ups and stuff like that. I
> kind of put on, not a fake act, but I always had the same personality
> towards grown ups, but like around, school or around friends and
> stuff, I was just a totally different person. So I just kept them separate.
> I made sure I always had respect for my elders, but when I get around
> my friends and all that, it's just a totally different person.

P-5 does not presume to be more valuable than another, nor particularly manipulative or arrogant. It has simply been his experience that people cater to him and he offers a charming and respectful presence as compensation. This "adaptability" has allowed him to typically get his way.

He does not put stock in peer pressure but admits to "adapting" to the new environment regarding dress and speech. As explanation for getting into trouble in middle school he described looking to others for a cue on behavior. "It was probably part of the reason, is the people that were like the closest in age to me were not the best students, and I didn't get the best example from them." P-5, however, also learned to use his social intelligence to get his school needs met when the pressure was on to perform when he hadn't done the work.

> My teachers just fell in love with me and they just helped me out.
> I tend to slack off and then work hard and just pull miracles off.

> That's like the only way I can explain high school for me. Just
> pulling miracles off that I didn't know I could.

P-5 has not always had an easy time of it. He has suffered through some emotionally painful experiences and has learned more about what he hopes to achieve for himself. School is a means to an end; the means to demonstrate his athletic promise to the system of higher education. An older brother has already found a place there and P-5 hopes to follow. P-5 has also experienced a privilege he doesn't want to relinquish.

> My parents weren't the richest people, but they had some money
> and I was raised up with, like, kind of like good everything, and my
> parents drove really nice cars and I had a great life. And when my
> parents divorced, you know, it was kind of like a step, a couple of
> steps down, so like, I kind of got a taste of the life I wanted, so, you
> know, I really don't want to live any other life than that.

Even though P-5 has had opportunity and is capable of doing what is required to complete a diploma program, he has not. He struggles with being accountable, balancing fun and responsibility. He perceives his school experience as having been fun, not substantive.

Factoring in the racial divide. As an African-American, P-5 felt his ethnicity had an impact on how his later school experience transpired, in particular after he moved to Oregon. He spoke of not really being aware of racial tension or prejudice in school until that time. He perceived that the first high school he attended did not set him apart racially or force him to battle stereotypes.

> It seems as if everybody can hang out with everybody and there's
> so many people, so like it doesn't matter, like people really don't
> have groups because everybody can hang out with different races.

In a school of 4800 students located in a more racially diverse setting, he simply did

not have to prove himself or defend himself on the sole basis of his race; his battles

were about winning girls' attention and maintaining his position on the field.

Once in Oregon he was quick to find alliances. "I knew and met, and quickly

became friends with the whole football team." However, P-5 acknowledged feeling

varying degrees of racial tension. "I kind of got that from teachers, some coaches,

students because in the whole of [name of school] there's only two full African-

American's and that's me and my friend who's also another coach's son." P-5 felt a

heightened desire to accomplish certain tasks in order to dispel negative attitudes

toward himself and toward future African-American students.

> I stress on graduating so much because they're gonna always
> remember me as that kid who graduated or whatever, and the
> generations to come, when they come in the high school, they
> won't necessarily be judged because of what me and my friend
> did in our high school days, so the people who come in the high
> school will have different looks. People will be looking at them
> different.

Encountering this additional pressure may have been a contributing factor to P-5's

difficulty in following through with senior year academics. He was unable to "get

away with" things that had not been an issue with him before. "My troubles all started

when I came here. I guess just being in a smaller town, you can't really get away with

the stuff you can being in a big place." Being one of two African-American youths, P-

5 figured it was easy to be recognized and identified.

An integral part of P-5's character is the sincere desire to be perceived of

differently than the majority. "From high school everybody's just stereotypical and

they expect you to be one way, and I'd just surprise everybody and be my way." He

does, in addition, have a particular idea of how he wants to be viewed as an African-

American. "I am not the average African-American, I guess you'd say." Viewing

himself as distinct, P-5 clearly wants to separate himself from the stereotypes

associated with African-Americans believing he will accomplish more and fit in better

if his image is more palatable to the powers that be.

> I know that people, like a lot of people stereotype people, and um,
> a lot of people get surprised when they hear how I talk, and how I
> act and you know, my manners and stuff like that. And that's part
> of the reason why I kind of act a certain way around people and
> parents…

Thus P-5 has incorporated the ability to be all things to all people when it suits him. P-

5 may not yet fully comprehend the last year of his life in terms of race relations, but

he has been able to recognize and impact some of the barriers that have existed in a

school system lacking in racial diversity.

> But out here, everybody's a member of a specific group that they
> stay to, like a specific spot they eat at lunch, and um, hang out with
> their friends and stuff like that. So, that was basically like a big
> difference for me.

> P-5 accepted the composition of the new environment and has made himself

known in it as both famous and infamous. His ability to adapt and find his niche

speaks to the depth of his resilience when confronted with bias and prejudice. Looking

to identify a positive in his experience thus far, P-5 spoke with an attitude of tolerance

and acceptance.

> Just seeing the different lives and different people and how that kind
> of made me realize how I want to be and how I want my life to be so
> I'm just so glad now, like before when I was moving here to there, I

> was kind of mad, but now I'm glad I got to see different lives
> in different states and stuff like that. Because it's a big difference.

Meaning of the experience. It is difficult for P-5 currently to know just how he may contribute in life and impact or influence those around him, but he seems to completely know he will be influential. Of late he believes it will be on a football field, yet somehow his eyes and his actions betray those words and thoughts. He understands that he may have jeopardized that possible future glory by not completing a diploma program. He does, however, have something to say regarding his school experience. Something he believes is valuable for others to be aware of.

> It seems like people seem to forget that high school isn't easy to
> pass. It's a lot of work, it's four long years of work and um, a lot
> can happen in a short amount of time and people sometimes forget
> that or sometimes they just take it for granted, they don't take into
> account that um, it's a lot of work.

According to P-5's perception, high school and earning a diploma were supposed to be easy to do. He was told all he had to do was go to school. Yet his experience belies that fact. He is a gifted individual who having received the support society requires of parents has been unable to capitalize. The pressure that has been building to perform and then to finish has forced P-5 to escape and seek refuge. The refuge has taken the form of rebelliousness, intermittent lawlessness and denial.

It was all supposed to be so simple, but P-5 found school and what is required to be successful quite complicated.

> People assume that it's like, you know, it's just natural to graduate
> from high school, but you know, I don't know, they just, I guess
> they forget, er, times are different. It's not the easiest thing; a lot
> can happen in four years.

He did not indicate he was told erroneously what to expect in high school or that he was mislead, but P-5 hinted that it was unrealistic to assume students should breeze through without being impacted by factors both school and non-school related. "There's a lot of situations that come up everyday that you're going to have to decide what you're going to do and they affect you in high school. School doesn't seem to care about that." P-5 believed that school and teachers in general lacked an awareness of what really happens to students and this lack of interest results in mismanaged school careers. And so he questions: "Why should we ask anybody to go to school?" And so he answers: [To] get your education so you can live a better life and be able to get better jobs and stuff like that. Yeah, right, I wish it was that easy."

CHAPTER NINE

Composite Textural-Structural Description and Invariant Structure

Composite Description

An analysis of the participant's descriptions of their school experiences revealed the experiences as a thematic structure composed of movement along a continuum of school engagement. The movement along the continuum or the degree of school engagement was impacted by substructures comprised of particular characteristics which contributed to the experience's overall theme of alienation. Analysis of the participant's descriptions defined the following substructures as those which contributed to the process of alienation impacting the level of school engagement: (a) multiple school transitions, (b) peer relations, (c) relations with school adults, (d) failure to progress, (e) instability at home, and (e) personal accountability.

Multiple school transitions. An insecurity and distrust of school within the self of each participant developed as a result of a usually unanticipated move from one school to another. These moves impacted the process of alienation from the system. Transitions to a new school environment meant for each participant a period of adjustment which included elements of the other substructures. Large concerns which included identifying possible friends, being invited to join existing peer groups, and determining if teachers and administrators would treat the participant fairly became tantamount to liking or disliking the new school.

Developing a sense of attachment and feeling secure within a new school environment was a predominant consideration for each participant. The concern was not only social, but academic. The transition between schools would impact each participant's academic ability and the degree by which he achieved success. Success was contextual and measured by each individual school's academic standard. Joining classrooms where work was either too advanced or too low was a source of frustration, as was not being able to complete required or elective courses. This resulted in a general lack of progress and gaps in information.

Transitions which occurred within the same school district yielded the same sense of insecurity, distrust, and fear. Participants described their reactions about school transitions as concerning either the social or academic aspects of the transition.

> P-1 I felt as though I wasn't prepared for school because I bounced from like so many schools in elementary. In one school we'd just be starting to read and do math, and addition and subtraction and then, all of a sudden I'd go to another school where they're already in division and stuff and I didn't know, and we were reading novels and so, I felt kind of like, I guess dumb you could say. Because I couldn't keep up.

> P-2 Plus mom put me in a, in a, semi-private school, and the work there was extremely advanced. And I was no where near it, 'cause in CA it was even lower than it had been in elementary school, so I was way behind and I hadn't practiced anything. So I was like, 'No, I can't do it.' And so I started mouthing off to the teachers, having none of my work done. I ended up skipping like a huge proportion of the school year.

> P-3 I looked at [the new school] the same way in, like, the classes were like so boring to me, I couldn't like relate to them at all. I don't know. I just didn't want to go to class. I don't know. It's just there's always so much going on. But like I always had friends.

P-4 I've also made a lot of friends along the way, so on the up side I made a lot of friends. But on the down side I miss a lot of the friends I had. A lot of them I don't know where they are, can't get in contact with 'em, half of them I can't even remember their last names. So, at least I made some friends and I put my two cents. I, uh, kind of influenced their lives.

P-5 I wasn't scared, I was just really mad, really sad to leave all my friends and just did not want to be here at all, did not want to leave my home that I had lived all of my life. It was real hard for me. It was weird 'cause I had to leave behind all my friends and I had to meet all these new people my 1st year of high school. I guess every time I meet new people I start to slack off a little bit. Um, and then I try to jump back on the right way after I finish socializing and stuff like that.

Participant's belief in their ability to manage the transitions was damaged each time a transition was required. Each questioned his ability to make the adjustment and resented the additional pressure and stress. The participants with the largest number of transitions spoke more often and more critically of the impact, yet each participant acknowledged having to readjust to a new school climate made a difference in his ability to "be a student," focus on school work, and experience a stable process of growth and development.

A decline in motivation and attitudes toward school were described by each participant as a result of school to school transitions. Attention was given to issues of greater import such establishing new friendships and adjusting to new home environments. Participants indicated that the size of the school, the reception they received from teachers and administrators, the social and economic composition of the school, and the academic fit were major factors in the anxiety level and length of adjustment. Participants also indicated they felt alone and isolated in the process of transitioning.

Peer relations. Participants described reacting to their insecurity, distrust and growing fear of failure with behaviors designed to align themselves with peers and peer groups who would allow them access. Peer acceptance in any form would alleviate their fear of isolation. They believed in this way they could blend into the existing school climate and control their level of anxiety about social fit. They discovered that the groups who exhibited anti-school and anti-establishment attitudes and behaviors would accept them more readily. Typically all that was required of the participant was to exhibit the same attitude and behaviors. In this way each participant cultivated a broader anti-school orientation. While each participant applied much the same technique in order to establish rapport with possible allies, the objective once access was gained tended to be two-fold. Some were looking to re-attain the social status he had achieved in the previous school.

> P-2 It just felt like that's where I belonged because my friends they accepted me right back into my fold, you know. My pack or whatever, as soon as I got there. I got many new friends, I fit in perfectly. It was great.

> P-3 And I was like friends with a lot of different people from different groups. Not friends with whole groups, but just certain people and stuff that I grew up with. I was friends with everybody. Not everybody liked [me], but everybody knew [me].

> P-5 I knew and met, and quickly became friends with the whole football team, so there was like a lot more people I could hang out with than just, had a lot in common with.

And others were simply hoping to find a fit that may or may not have resembled their peer attachments from a previous school, but allowed them a sense of security by being on the inside rather than out.

P-1 I didn't feel too welcome there because it was a new school and new schools bring new kinds of people. And so immediately I start looking for kids like me. So I hung out with like virtually the same 5 people that I have for like the same 10 years.

P-4 I came back and that was a hard fall. It was, if you go somewhere and you're like a green horn and you go off and go to do something hard and come back to that green horn state with what you learned, people are going to look at you different. Then I kind of softened up and started like joining the choir and stuff like that, softened up and became who I am today.

Each participant clarified that he had adjusted his personal style in order to make social connections. Each participant acknowledged that peer pressure was a significant force in particular regarding the decisions he made about how much time and attention was paid to academics. Peer influences became a path on which each participant withdrew further from the "acceptable attitude" and "appropriate behavior" while at school. The sacrifice for those choices was academic progress toward graduation.

P-1 And at the end of freshman year I started smoking cigarettes, and sophomore year, I got introduced to marijuana and smoked that, you know, just doing high school things, just going to class high, whatever, you know.

P-2 I liked going to school, but I always went for people and for not the actual place. I always went to see my friends and talk to people I usually don't get to talk to.

P-3 I was always the joker, trying to make people laugh. So I'd get in trouble just so I'd get kicked out and they'd make me go down to like the detention room or whatever for the whole class period or whatever.

P-4 At some point in time, other people's impressions of you or what they had to offer became a little more important than what your folks were offering.

P-5 It was probably part of the reason, is the people that were like the closest in age to me were not the best students, and I didn't get the best example from them.

Participants had made decisions they hoped could alleviate the fear and hurt of social rejection. They elevated the fearful implication of not being socially acceptable over that of academic failure. They believed the consequences of choosing social acceptance and belonging over academic progress was the less hurtful of the two options. No participant really expected to fail high school. There had always seemed to be another educational option or alternative available. In fact, each participant continues to believe that he will earn a diploma or GED through alternative placement. Establishing and managing successful peer relations was the overwhelming priority when considering functioning in school.

Relations with school adults. Participants experienced varying degrees of affinity with school administrators, faculty, and staff. Each participant expressed both a genuine like of certain school personnel and an alternate and sometimes intense dislike of others. Participants perceived that school adults wielded the power to both instill the participant with a sense of genuine regard for their person and the power to penalize, castigate, and humiliate. Each participant also expressed experiencing a general lack of regard or concern on the part of some school adults for their learning and overall sense of safety and welfare. As a result of the varying degrees of regard the participant's felt were extended to them, they found it difficult to trust those charged with the disposition of their education.

Participant's acknowledged their parents as being incapable of managing their education outside the school system, so they had to rely on the school adults. They clearly wanted to be a part of the program: to be capable academically as well as respected socially. They understood the societal rewards of achieving both. However, each participant found it impossible to balance these two forces. Because they acknowledged their inability to achieve this balance, they conceded the goal of graduation and traded it in for the pursuit of social goals and affiliations. They wanted to avoid making themselves the object of teacher and administrator scrutiny and the object of ridicule or disdain by students who had managed to find the balance. Each participant revealed that the level of school engagement he felt was impacted by the nature of the relationship he was able to maintain with school adults.

Each participant found at least one school adult he could speak highly of; a person who seemed concerned for his school progress and developing self-esteem. These positive descriptions included only teachers, and almost exclusively elementary school teachers.

> P-1 And when, I don't know I had good experiencing with teachers and teachers were nice, but they weren't just academically strong there.

> P-2 Most of my teachers I get along really good with. But Miss. S, was a really good teacher. But I knew her outside of work, so my family and her family were actually pretty good friends, so it just seemed like it was more a friend go to school, and they'd just kind of help you out and then you'd go home.

> P-3 I remember one teacher. My 4th grade teacher is the only teacher that I ever liked in that school. She was NICE. She like, understood me better and stuff. Like how to deal with what I was doing and stuff in school, you know and she just like, I don't know what it was about her.

P-4 Oh, yeah, teachers were my best friends.

P-5 It was a private school, so we had to dress up and wear uniforms everyday. It was pretty nice. I got picked up and dropped off every day. Um, teachers, everybody was nice. It was a lot of security.

Participant's described a contentious relationship with at least one school adult that further alienated the participant from the system. This relationship was one of the most predominant factors in the participant's decision to leave school before diploma completion. Most often the participant felt persecuted and misrepresented by the school adult.

P-1 Well, this teacher was here at [name of school], was treating me like the dumbest piece of crap in the world.

P-2 Yes, there was definitely Mr. W. He, uh, he always had a huge problem with like, from the moment we set eyes on each other I could tell he didn't like me and I just didn't like him either. I don't know why, I just didn't like him. And the first chance he got, he gave me a referral. Second chance, gave me another referral.

P-3 They just never seemed interested in what I had to say really. But like my shop teacher, he was a dick, sorry, but, he was so mean. I came back, I was sitting there one day at [school] and he's like, 'So, you don't go to school here anymore.' And I'm like, 'Yeah, I'll come back next semester.' And he's like, 'Why, so you can just get kicked out again?' Like three times he's like, 'You're not going to do good here.' Just like being an ass.

P-4 Like my principal, I actually wanted to kill him, cause he would not leave me alone. And he still doesn't leave me alone. And I don't know if that's a rough way of caring, I don't know.

Two of the participant's felt that school adults treated them differently, ostracized them or misunderstood their needs because of racial prejudice and stereotyping.

P-2 I think it was because, actually yeah, when I first met him, I was talking in Spanish to my mom so, I think he probably took that and decided, 'Ok, this kid's Mexican, I don't like him. Not to mention, this kid fights my power, so he's out.'

P-5 Yeah, I kind of got that from teachers, some coaches, students because in the whole of [name of school] there's only 2 full African-American's and that's me and my friend who's also another coaches son.

Each participant found the relationships they were able to form with school adults a primary determinant in their willingness to engage in school and make effort to gain or regain academic standing. Each classroom teacher sent non-verbal messages which the participant would perceive as either welcoming or rejecting. Administrators did the same regarding the school in general. Once attending at the secondary level, participants seemed to learn that their ability to remain in school depended on the attitudes of the school adults. They learned that if the participant looked differently or acted differently than the school adult wanted, there would be a problem. The struggle to engage positively with school administrators was especially difficult. Each participant perceived he was disapproved of in some fashion that made him an undesirable element to have in school. Each participant felt he was either encouraged to leave the high school by means of mistreatment or officially removed by means of expulsion or alternative placement.

Each participant lost the battle to manage working alliances with school adults, had to seek other educational opportunities or leave the system all together. Each felt a combination of rejection, inferiority, humiliation, or resentment. They each had failed to navigate the system, felt they had been unjustly treated, and were abandoned as "high school dropouts" with few options.

Failure to progress. Participants hoped that each time they transitioned into a new

school, made new friends, and discovered how they would be perceived and treated,

they would find a way to make it all work. Much as students in general are filled with

a renewed sense of optimism at the beginning of each school year, each participant

hoped that the next school would yield results yet unattained. A common thread

among the participant's school experience was the difficulty maintaining academic

parity with their peers and making adequate progress toward diploma completion.

Whether because of a recent school transition or trying to gain ground that had been

otherwise forfeit, each participant struggled to gain an equal footing and get back on

track for graduation.

> P-1 It's just dumb to me like why I have to work so hard, like harder
> than other people it seems to get this little piece of paper that says I'm
> smart. Even though I know I'm smart because I've been in school for
> high school for 5 years. I've taken classes over, so I'm pretty sure I'm,
> I know it. School. It's just a pain.
>
> P-2 I was always getting bored and then I'd get frustrated because I
> wouldn't really be thinking about what I was doing, so like say in
> Math, I wouldn't like pay attention and add up the numbers wrong or
> whatever and then I'd get mad because I thought I was dumb and then,
>
> I'd realize that, well, I'm just bored of this Math so I'm not paying
> attention anymore and I'd have to refocus myself, but…In high school,
> like during my freshman year, I had to focus a lot on 'I can', just to
> really stay in school 'cause I skipped a lot, but I had to focus on 'I can
> do it, I can, this is easy.'
>
> P-3 Oh, well, like, I never had any GPA, not a good one at all. I don't
> even think it was 1.0, I thought it was like lower than that, they would
> just pass me along through it.
>
> P-4 I came down to OR school and I thought it was going to be easy
> like it was, like it was in elementary school, 'cause that's what I really

remember and middle school kind of. I just came back and it got so hard, and now I'm falling behind.

P-5 And then 11th grade I decided I'd go to a continuation school, kind of like this, but it was a lot different, um, a lot more freedom, and uh, there I gained all my credits that I needed for 9th, 10th and 11th grade and then I got ahead also in that one year and then um, I went back to the regular high school, and continued there.

Some participants felt this struggle as early as elementary school, describing a frustration with teachers or with the system in general. They indicated teachers did not recognize their individual needs or that the participant may have required a differentiated approach.

P-1 I remember I didn't like that at all 'cause it was so much homework, tons of homework and it was just that I felt I couldn't keep up 'cause I wasn't good at multiplication, wasn't taught it very well, and then like, every other day we had a multiplication test and I always failed it, and uh, there was a teacher there that didn't like me, and uh, I didn't have recesses and stuff like that. So that's when I started disliking school and alienating myself from everybody else and I just did my own thing.

P-2 Like I've always felt kind of out of place, with just everything feels different to me. Like they'll be going through Math problems or whatever several times a day, and I'm like, 'well, I get this, why do I have to do it again.' All the other kids just put their head down and start writing and me, I have my head up, and I'm like, 'Why do we do this?' 'I don't want to do this.' So I was always questioning a lot of things about school, and school environment.

P-3 Teachers need to pay attention more, 'cause I was on an IEP through all my schooling and like, Ok I'm supposed to get extra help, get into middle school and, I mean middle school was a little different, like they had a little more help, but I still failed all my classes and get to high school and no teachers recognize it. It's just like, 'Oh, wow, you're just another student in my class.

The failure to make adequate progress impacted each participant's degree of engagement in a unique way. Often disguised as boredom with the subject matter or a

lack of relevance to their current lives, participants became stagnant in their learning.

Participants could no longer find value in what they were being required to do and had

moved past the point of being compliant just to keep the peace with school adults.

This degree of disengagement resulted in grade retention, failure to pass required

courses, and involuntary enrollment in courses designed for students who were credit

deficient. Each found a behavior or behaviors which disguised the fear and failure and

distanced him from school.

> P-1 Well, freshman year I did really good. I got easy classes and I was
> on the wrestling team and had some friends, and then sophomore year
> was just, kind of like I went from freshman to senior within a year. I
> was tired of being, there, school is so long; it's such a long process in
> life. It is, it's crazy and sophomore year I just kind of, not gave up,
> but slacked definitely. Kind of like I've already done what I needed to
> do. My grades didn't suffer horribly, but they did suffer. I was doing
> other things, hanging out with friends, skipping class, smoking weed
> and what not, just being a teenager.

> P-2 And then I got back into my old habit of not doing homework, and
> not doing the next night's homework, 'cause I didn't finish that last
> night's homework and then after a while I didn't finish like 15
> assignments 'cause I didn't start the first one so I just like 'Screw it,
> I'm not even going to try anymore.'

> P-3 They gave me so many more freedoms 'cause I was always
> breaking the rules in middle school. Always. Always in trouble.
> Always doing whatever I could. And in high school, I could get
> away with it.

> P-4 I used to sell cigarettes at school and, you know, just to make
> money so I could do something with my friends or go buy a skate board
> or something to skate board for the summer. That's what I loved the
> most was skating. That's what kept me off a lot of stuff, but, uh, I'd sell
> cigarettes you know. And skip school.

> P-5 Academics were decent. C average probably, um, I didn't enjoy
> going to class, so I just did enough so I could get by and have fun,
> pretty much.

Participants described their inability to progress academically as the first factor in cultivating a defeatist attitude toward school. It had evolved in to a "me vs. them" struggle. Each participant knew that he would never be powerful enough to have school change for him, and each participant knew that if there was going to be a loser in the situation, it would be him.

Whether early or later in their school experience, each participant was confronted with the reality that he would not be earning a diploma in the typical four year cycle. Each participant could identify a particular point in time when he knew he would not be able to earn a high school diploma in the typical four year time frame.

> P-1 Maybe in middle school, freshman year 'cause you had to do Speech classes and everything, and I was like, 'I'm never going to do that. Ever. I'm not going to get up in front of the classroom and speak about something that I don't really care about.

> P-2 I joked about it as soon as, at the end of my 8th grade year during the summer. I was like, 'Oh, dude, I doubt I'll graduate.' But then it really hit me that I'm not going to be able to graduate after my 1st semester in high school.

> P-3 Except when most of the time when I did need help, teachers didn't take me seriously, wouldn't, then like get into high school and it's all over.

> P-4 The day I met my principal at [name of school]. Sad to say. Getting back more to it, but, I knew I wouldn't graduate the day that my, that my Creative Writing teacher got in my face.

> P-5 I went to [name of school] my senior year, I was doing Ok, but like I said I got behind a little bit, meeting new people and all that so, um, I knew this was the only way. Like we had a big meeting with everybody, 'cause everybody liked me over there including like all the security and personnel and all the teachers and staff. So I had a big meeting.

While for some participants it has been easier to relinquish their family's and

community's expectation of earning a diploma with a specific high school's name

upon it,

> P-1 I mean they screwed me over so many times that I should just not even care. But at the same time, I do all of these yrs of school, right? Just for a piece of paper to tell me that I have equivalent learning, that I've learned enough. And it's just so dumb that I can't go out and get a certain job because I don't have diploma. But a diploma, it's really confusing me how like a piece of paper can mean so much and I have to work so hard for it.

> P-2 I guess if I knew what a GED was in elementary school, I probably would have told you I was going to get my GED way back then. I don't know, I've never really felt attached to school. It's never been a big thing for me. It's been on the back burner all my life.

the others were not ready to concede earning the diploma even if remaining in an

alternative program one or two years beyond the norm were required.

> P-3 Just like, 'Wow, I'm going to be a sophomore again,' but it's still like the next year. I went and did the same thing. Well, I figured I'll get there anyway so it really doesn't matter. In fact, I know that's what I'll do like if I have to stay in high school for as long as it takes that's what I'm going to do.

> P-4 Yeah, and when I graduate from high school, I'll go away for 6 months and then go back to school again for about 4 years and that'd be college.

> P-5 I mean it was always like, I was always told to go to college, but um, I mean, I was always told like my family, everybody went to college, so it was kind of like a natural thing and um, just growing up, I wanted to do the college thing and there was a lot of things in life that, um, I wanted to do which I had to go through college in order to accomplish so, I try to make it my goal to get there.

Each participant, whether choosing a diploma or an equivalency degree, has

unequivocally stated that not completing high school is not an option. Each absolutely

believes that his life will be enhanced by completing a diploma program. Each

understands the difference in career earnings over the lifespan when comparing levels

of education and each has a personal life goal which includes attaining at least a high

school level of education. Each participant understands that whether he is able to

complete a diploma program or not will permanently impact his life in some fashion.

Instability at home. Participants described some form of instability at home as casual

for some of the frustrations experienced at school. None of them described

experiencing high quality relationships between school and home, and when the two

were mentioned in conjunction it pertained to a parent reacting to a disciplinary issue.

Participants revealed that school often served as a solace for tension at home though

home was never mentioned as a solace from the frustrations of school. The emotional

uncertainties, confusion and hurt regarding the shifts and changes in the family system

lead each participant to question his personal commitment to the educational process.

Each feared the consequence of school failure and the emotional strain that failure

would place on family relationships.

> P-1 I kind of feel like I alienate myself from my friends sometimes,
> because to finish school. They'll be like, 'Oh, let's go party.' And I'll
> be like, 'No, I got to go home, so I can get up and go to school.' I
> mean, school is important to me, to my mom.

> P-2 I wish I could have done the whole diploma thing. Because I know
> like on an application it does look a little bit better than a GED. But, I
> wish, honestly that I wouldn't have moved to CA because that totally
> put two left feet on me. I don't know who I was anymore. I was totally
> confused.

> P-3 I mean like my mom and my step dad would always say, 'Just get
> your GED, and get it over with.' I'm like, 'No, I'm not getting my
> GED, leave me alone.'

P-4 I might not be able to walk with my friends and graduate. I'm
going to graduate late. And they're going to be disappointed in me
and I hate, I, the disappointing my parents 'cause I feel like crap.

P-5 I mean it was always like, I was always told to go to college, but
um, I mean, I was always told like my family, everybody went to
college, so it was kind of like a natural thing and um, just growing up.

Participants were confused and shocked by family events including sibling issues and

the deterioration and loss of their primary family system. Parental attention and

inattention vacillated as the family broke apart and rearranged itself into a new

configuration that included new additions in the form of step-parents and step-siblings.

Each participant suffered the loss of innocence and a carefree attitude as they coped

with grief and loss of the family unit. This was done simultaneously with adjustments

to new school climates and relationships.

Participant's lives were irrevocably changed by parental decisions to divorce,

remarry, and relocate. Each participant wanted to have reciprocal relationships with

both parents and struggled to find opportunity to include both parents in their lives.

Non-custodial parents did not always remain in touch. Those participants who moved

to be with the non-custodial parent, who in each case was the father, suffered highly

emotional episodes ranging from rejection to tolerance; each moved back to live with

their mothers within one year. No participant described being able to reconnect with

his father in the manner he had hoped before the separation and divorce.

P-1 I [always] had problems with my father.

P-2 My dad just, he was really, his parenting style was like, basically
I'm an adult. He's like, well, you can handle your own business, that's
your business. So I was out, just doing whatever I wanted for the
greater part of the day.

P-4 My dad is still kind of, I did some things while I was up there, and
I kind of made him mad.

Relationships with the mothers also suffered. Each participant described tension in the

home associated with mothers who were less available than before, had less money, or

whose behaviors they disapproved of.

Searching to find stability after family break ups took a different personal toll

on each participant. Some became more extroverted and others introverted, however

each participant demonstrated self destructive behaviors. These behaviors did relate to

family discord and change in family composition, but each participant explained that

these behaviors also related to school stress and frustration. The combination of things

not going well at home or at school intensified the feelings of insecurity and anxiety.

These were accompanied by bouts of self-doubt, self-loathing, and low self-worth.

The contextual nature of each participant's difficulties have manifested in depressive

and defensive personality traits and antisocial behavior. The desire to create or

maintain these primary relationships overwhelmed the importance of academic

continuity.

The difficulties at home became more impactful and complex as participants

experienced adolescence. Each participant's life was complicated with feelings

surrounding parental abandonment, remarriage and blending of families. There was

tension associated with sibling issues and economic challenges associated with

becoming a one income family. Each participant struggled through these episodes

without having yet developed the tools to cope with such major life changes. Each

suffered through periods of confusion, frustration and depression. While each

participant described the distinct challenge in the home, each lamented the reality and

braced for the inevitable conflict.

> P-1 Every time I would come home from school to my mom's house.
> There'd be something that she'd complain about. I'd have to go do
> something. She'd like alienate me from my friends, 'Oh, they do drugs.
> They're horrible people. You're not like that.' I'm like, 'Whatever.' So
> I'd constantly be doing something that wasn't in my interest, you
> know, not enjoyable to me. And it's just always been that way.

> P-2 I don't remember exactly when, but, around those years my mom
> had been, like, not exactly an alcoholic, but she was a pretty heavy
> drinker, all my life, until those couple of years and then she found
> religion and she threw out everything all at once, and she like,
> everything about her 180'd, and I didn't know who she was by the time
> I got back up. It was extremely difficult. I don't feel me and my mom
> have the relationship we had when I was a kid.

> P-3 Just at my house. It felt like you were walking into a war zone or
> something.

> P-4 My freshman year was alright, you know I was getting pretty,
> pretty darn good grades [because] my dad was really hammering me on
> grades, uh, my step-mom as well.

> P-5 And then, um, over the summer my parents got into a lot of
> arguments and stuff and they decided to divorce and my mom decided
> to then come out to Oregon and have me, well, she gave me the
> decision to live with her or my brother and I decided to live with him.

Participants were faced with difficulties that they were ill-equipped to handle

emotionally. Each felt powerless in these situations. As they approach adulthood the

disconcerting realization dawns that they will continue to be impacted even after they

turn eighteen.

Personal accountability. Each participant described how schools, meaning teachers

and administrators, could have been different increasing the probability they would

have been able to graduate with their respective classes. There was a sense of

resentment as well as sadness as each described how they were impacted by school

conditions such as crowded classrooms and overworked, uncaring or incompetent

teachers.

> P-1 'Cause I wasn't doing well in school and like, it's really hard to get help in school, no matter what anybody says, no matter how much they change the schools or whatever, it's still hard in a public school for a kid to get help. No matter what. No matter whether you're dumb, smart, you know. When you put like 50 kids in a classroom with one teacher, those kids are not going to get what they need.

> P-2 The school mindset of like, you know, you go, you do homework, you turn it in, you talk about it, it just, it doesn't suit me. I think a lot of it has turned me into more of an adult life than most kids my age would have to live. Just the way my teachers treat me, they ways that kids at school treat me, the way I've been to 5 different schools, and just all that thrown together has made me mature a lot quicker than a lot of people I know.

> P-3 I think they shouldn't of done something earlier so I would still be at [name of school]. They let me get away with it for so long. Like the whole school system. And then all of a sudden, they're like, oh, you have so many absences, you need to leave … they're losing money now.

> P-4 That's how school needs to be. It needs to be a nurturing place, at the same time it needs to be an educational place, and a recreational place. A place to have fun, a place to learn.

> P-5 … private school, you, everybody had a specific class they're supposed to be in and you had to be there. And in public school, I uh, basically was on my own; I didn't have somebody on my back. It was I did or it wasn't going to get done.

The examples given regarding how school did not do its job related to personal

experiences with specific teachers and administrators. Underlying the narratives is a

sense of uncertainty about how things got so bad and an incredulousness that seemingly no one recognized their condition or did anything to make it different.

Yet, insofar as each participant admonished schools for not doing well enough by them, each also acknowledged that he could have been a different student. Each participant was very willing to recognize, in retrospect, how he could have been different and how that difference may have allowed him to graduate. In part, this accountability was accompanied by feelings of shame and embarrassment. Recalling the entirety of their school experience evoked a sense of newness about the experience. Participants objectified their attitudes and behaviors and were able to see patterns of behavior and identify more clearly both the cause and effect of certain behaviors. Feelings of guilt seemed to overwhelm participants as they described their choices to avoid school. The shame and guilt were associated with perceptions their families and society would have of them were they not to complete high school.

> P-1 So I wasn't too far behind. But, once again, it comes back on me, slacking off again. It happens every other year kind of thing. I'd probably pay more attention in classes. I'm not saying that I didn't, I'm just saying that I'd pay more closer attention and not slack off so much so that I wouldn't have had to have done an extra year of high school.

> P-2 My freshman year at [name of school] I think was one of the worst times… well, some of the worst decisions I made for myself. I do have a lot of stress than a normal high school student, they don't have to work. And I know I created that stress for myself, but like I said, I have a little resentment, but I'm ok.

> P-3 I think it could have been a lot better. Like looking back, I don't know, they, don't know about them, 'cause I could have tried a lot harder also. I mean, it wasn't like. 'Oh, it's all the school's fault.' I had issues and stuff and I just, I don't know, I could have done better and not be in the position I am now.

P-4 I just didn't learn to do my work. I goofed off in class. I talked too much. They'd always constantly have to get me to work and I wouldn't work. Eventually I got my stuff done, but I didn't do enough to get on to 3rd grade, so they held me back a year. And that's where I am today. I'm always falling back. So, I'm not where I should be.

P-5 I tend to slack off and then work hard and just pull miracles off. That's like the only way I can explain high school for me. Just pulling miracles off that I didn't know I could. It's all sue to peer pressure and laziness.

The accountability the participants take for their school outcome is partially due to their perception that there is something not OK about them. The idea that school could not help them because they were beyond help or their personal circumstances took them out of the running seems to be an unspoken truth for them. Participants described their school experience more in terms of unavoidable negative events and harmful relationships rather than learning and preparation for adulthood. Having fun and doing well in school seemed to be mutually exclusive.

Summary. Participants described an evolution in their attitudes toward school. In elementary school they were more engaged, more willing to trust the adults in the system, and more passionate about the process of learning. As they began to grow and transition, the process of disengaging from one school in order to engage with another became burdensome. They lost trust and resisted the change because they could not predict with any degree of certainty how they would be able to manage the next. Participants described adapting certain behaviors whereby they could escape the humiliation of being academically behind or lacking common learning experiences. Participants described being fearful of being rejected by peers and adapted destructive behaviors that seemed to gain them a social acceptance in certain circles. Participants

felt their progress was thwarted by uncaring or incapable school adults. They felt that school somehow did not offer them what it was they needed. They feel regret for their current circumstance because they believe they were not the students they were supposed to be. They judged their overall school experience as a failure in that they were unable to earn a diploma in the traditional time frame and were alienated from and by the process.

Invariant Structure

Phenomenological research begins with the assumption that an essence, or invariant structure, exists within each lived experience. The purpose of this study was to discover the invariant structure within the perceptions and experiences of students who had completed the lived experience of feeling alienated from school.

While individual participant descriptions varied, they revealed common themes through out the structure of their school experience. These themes were repeated in the substructures and were viewed in terms of movement along a continuum of school engagement. The themes were: (1) participant's need to achieve peer acceptance despite negative consequences, (2) participant's loss of trust in school and school adults, and (3) participant's fear of failure and of disappointing family and society. The researcher analyzed these interrelated themes and distilled them into an invariant structure, which was the essence of the school experience of the participants in this study.

The invariant structure (essence) that emerged was the interrelationship among the constituents of peer acceptance, trust, and fear of failure and disappointment.

Peer acceptance. Children's and adolescent's interactions with peers are crucial for optimal development and social and emotional competency (Berndt & Ladd, 1989). Many experts agree that peers are an important influence in how kids turn out, but some even argue that they are the most crucial influence (Harris, 1998). This assertion challenges the bedrock premise of childhood development, based on Freudian theory, which holds that a child's relationship with his or her biological parents shapes him or her for life.

Hymel, Wagner, and Butler (1990) suggested that children and adolescents are well aware of their social status. Not only do children seem aware of their own status, but they also know the status of classmates. This awareness goes across classrooms and in smaller schools, this knowledge is school wide. Negative social experiences impacting that status may include sudden and forced changes brought about by external causes such as moving to a new home or to a different school (Richaud de Minzi & Sacchi, 2004). Most authors agree that adolescence is the most vulnerable stage in connection with these changes. On one hand, it entails separation from the previous peer group and, on the other, it requires joining a new, already existent group whose members may enjoy picking on nonmembers. Exposure to the values and attitudes of a new peer group combined with the pressure to adapt to it usually results in rejection of parental influence and an increase in tensions within family and school systems (Gander & Gardiner, 1981).

When participants were faced with the task of re-socializing they were subject to the idiosyncratic nature of school climate and expectations for conformance. Their

awareness of the possibility of rejection heightened participant's fears that they would be socially outcast or isolated. This fear constructed from the lack of familiarity with school norms and an inherent need to belong facilitated unanticipated results. Participants joined peer groups whose common bond was rejection of authority to varying degrees. This common bond allowed for greater solidarity and a sense of companionship. The developmentally appropriate adolescent behavior of striving for autonomy provides the rationalization for linking with peers who rejected school authority and engaged in anti-social behaviors such as substance use.

Peer groups provide students with the safety of an identity and an indication of who their friends are; the people one looks to for support, for understanding, for help making decisions. Identification with a group provides a sense of belonging. The perception an individual has of his or her value within a group fosters behaviors of attachment or rejection (Swaminathan, 2004). When participants felt their status was challenged they experienced higher levels of stress, distress, depression, disconnection, and isolation. The sense that participants had of how they fit in school was the determining factor in maintaining a healthy self-concept.

The influence of peers, whether positive or negative, is of critical importance in a student's life. The need for acceptance, approval, and belonging is vital in particular during the teen years. Teens who feel isolated or rejected by their peers, or in their family, are more likely to engage in risky behaviors in order to fit in with a group (Hawkins et al., 2000). In such situations, peer pressure can impair good

judgment and fuel risk-taking behavior, drawing the student away from the family and positive influences.

Trust. Because of its scope, the concept of trust is limited to its relevance to the participants in this study. While Webster's dictionary defines trust as being a condition in which one is free from doubt, Rempel, Ross, & Holmes (2001) defined it as the confidence one will act in ways that fulfill one's basic need for self-acceptance and identity. Healthy trust relationships between students and school adults "act as facilitators of positive meaning for adolescents by fostering a sense of identity and self-acceptance" (Stancato, 2003, p. 20). Distrust, on the other hand, tends to provoke fear, causing students to feel unworthy or ill at-ease. Students who do not trust school to provide a sense of emotional safety and opportunities in which to explore identity and self-acceptance will seek meaning in anti-social attitudes and acts (Stancato.)

A study of the helping qualities in adults preferred by adolescents (Martin, Romas, Medford, Leffert, & Hatcher, 2006) revealed a list of 12 qualities. Of these 12 the most often recorded were respect, openness, freedom, recognition, and like/dislike. Students are asked to trust in people they do not know without evidence or data denoting these people as trustworthy. When feeling disrespected, unattended to, overlooked, or disliked, students withdraw and become alienated. If this feeling is perceived as coming from "the school" there remains little hope of keeping students connected.

According to the participant's in this study, trust is defined as a condition where there is a belief that one does not abuse or take advantage of another. Each

participant described feeling disliked and disrespected by adults because of the identity each displayed: those of a freak, a Mexican, a lost cause, an African-American, and a slacker. They were unable to manage the power differential through their actions and felt weak, vulnerable, and powerless.

May (1953) postulated that person's feelings of helplessness comes from their feeling "…that they are powerless to do anything effective about their lives or the world they live in" (p. 24). Consequently persons conduct their lives in an ongoing struggle to manage problems, maintain a sense of control, and avoid feeling powerlessness. Students are purposefully put into a powerless position; they are dependant on the school adults to protect them from physical and emotional harm. The literature does not evidence the effects of the harm endured by students who feel betrayed and victimized by those very same adults.

Participants acknowledged the loss of trust stemmed from the abuses they endured by school adults. Abuses were described as yelling, condescending, humiliating, embarrassing, persecuting, disdaining, and disapproving. Participants were disturbed because their negative interactions with these school adults interrupted the process of identity development and educational progress. One implication of losing trust was participant's fear of being cast out or having some character flaw that made them socially undesirable. Another fearful implication of losing trust was their support system at school was negligible or non-existent. Home was not a sanctuary from school distress; therefore participant's had little recourse in school thus jeopardizing their education and future place in society.

Fear of failure and disappointment. Children learn early about the school's and society's expectation that they move up yearly in grade level and ultimately graduate. They learn this expectation typically has a time limit attributed to it. Along with earning a driver's license, voting, and reaching legal drinking age, graduation from high school is considered a fundamental right of passage into adulthood. The literature espousing the negative impact on students who do not met this societal expectation is well documented. This knowledge does not elude students nor are they comforted by it. This knowledge is a heavy burden to those students who have a potential to fail.

The adverse impact of non-completion both on the individual and society has long been recognized. Multiple studies have shown that non-completers are more frequently unemployed, welfare recipients, and prison inmates. The factors that are frequently accorded to an individual student's negative school experience are low grades, disciplinary problems, frequently changing schools, grade retention, and absenteeism (NCES, 2005). The process of alienation from school consequently collides with increased potential for self-harm and violence against others (Hawkins et al., 2000; Siebel & Murray, 1988).

The potential for failure in children and adolescents creates in them a vulnerability. This vulnerability manifests a pattern of seeking escape from painful situations (Siebel & Murray, 1988). If rejected by peer groups or feeling isolated and alienated, these students come to view themselves as disappointments. They view themselves as disappointments to their families and "pariahs in the community"

(Siebel & Murray, p. 49). The vulnerable youth get stuck in their pain and frustration. They turn to self-destructive, anti-social behaviors and attitudes.

The sense of futility that the participant's in this study attributed to the lack of academic progress was overwhelming. They discounted the opinions of teachers and administrators as biased and judgmental and contributory to their failure. They believed that without the diploma they would have little value. They also believed themselves as failures for not completing the process as they were supposed to, in 12 years and with a cap and gown. The potential to become a failure in life weighed upon them as they described the emotional consequence of failing their family and their community.

Participants feared experiencing judgment and rejection by their peers, families, and community, however, their greater fears were of the probable lifelong personal consequences of school failure. They feared being unable to attain autonomy; they feared being relegated to a life of poverty and mediocrity. Their fear of failure and disappointment has left them feeling unsure, skeptical, and powerless. Even the prospect of obtaining a diploma beyond the "acceptable" time frame or pursuing an equivalency diploma has resulted in a lowered sense of individual worth.

Summary. The invariant structure of the experience of alienation from school that emerged from participant's descriptions was an inseparable interrelationship among the constituents of peer acceptance, trust, and fear of failure. Each constituent always existed in the context of the other two. Participant's defined their level of peer acceptance in terms of their ability to join an existing peer group and establish

camaraderie. They struggled to do so at the cost of adhering to school expectations for their behavior. Meeting their social and emotional needs at the expense of achieving academic success deepened the rift between their perceptions of school and the school adult's ability to care for them. They feared having to acknowledge their weakness and inability to measure up to the expectations of family and society.

Leaving the school system before diploma completion was an acknowledgment participants made that they had failed. They were alienated from not only school and their peers, but of their community and greater society. This acknowledgment damaged their sense of self-worth as competent people. Being alienated also carried the perception of being judged and the stigma of being misunderstood and discounted.

CHAPTER TEN

Discussion

The decision to leave school before completing a diploma program was the climactic moment in an experience that began when participants first perceived their school experience was somehow different than that of most other students. The focus of this research project was to investigate the perceptions and meaning the participants derived from their experiences of feeling alienation from a school system. Those experiences in the school setting and those related to primary family relationships provided the context of the experience. When these experiences and perceptions were put together, they provided a holistic understanding of the participant's experience of alienation. In the discussion portion of this study, I will first summarize the steps taken to complete the study, consider the possible limitations, elaborate upon and differentiate the findings from previous research, contemplate future research options and directions, and conclude by discussing the research outcomes in terms of social meaning and implications.

Summary of the Study

In chapter one, the focus was to provide the reader with a framework of information gathered from foundational and current literature regarding (1) the construct of adolescent alienation, (2) how schools may contribute to the process, (3) the potential results and outcomes of alienation, and (4) the role school counselors and counselor educators play in identifying and advocating for alienated students in schools.

Both anecdotally and theoretically, the literature portrayed adolescence as a stressful and critical time in terms of lifespan development (Calabrese, 1987; Gullota, 2001) and that the school environment often played a critical role in a student's decision to leave school before diploma completion (Wehlage, 1989). The literature also revealed a dearth of qualitative research on this topic or of literature highlighting student voice in regard to marginalizing forces such as school setting, language, gender, poverty, and ethnic prejudice (Finn, 1996).

It was concluded in chapter one that this study would utilize a phenomenological research design in order to investigate the school experiences of young men identified as non-completers. The general question of this study was: How do male students who leave school before diploma completion as a result of alienation perceive their school experience and how has that experience impacted their lives?

In chapter two, a review of the literature explored the conceptual areas that were relevant to the study of alienation in the school setting. The conceptual areas included: the phenomenon of alienation and disconnectedness, academic failure in public high school, risk factors that contribute to youth alienation, specific school factors that contribute to youth alienation, failure of the school system to address student needs, and the role school counselors and counselor educators have in advocating for these students. The conclusion section indicated that a student's perceived degree of alienation from school appeared to be a significant factor in that student's willingness to find relevance in school academically and to cultivate a rewarding social attachment.

Chapter three was an examination of the phenomenological research design employed in this study. A definition and explanation of the basic tenets of phenomenology were shared followed by a discussion of the fitness a phenomenological research design had with the goal to provide students the opportunity to voice, explain, and make meaning of their experience. Accordingly, attention was given to the role of the researcher and researcher ethics, researcher as instrument, and the researcher's personal narrative and assumptions. Procedures for conducting the study were detailed including sampling, data collection, data analysis, verification procedures, and measures to ensure confidentiality. Together these procedures generated a description of the essence of the experience of alienation.

Chapters four through eight housed the textural, structural, and textural-structural descriptions created for each participant. These descriptions were created as a result of following the phenomenological design steps to first horizonalize the data and arrive at the invariant constituents. The invariant constituents were the essence of the participant's experience and constituted the framework for all three levels of description. Imaginative variation was included to create the structural and textural-structural descriptions.

Chapter nine represents the final step in the data analysis process which was to create a composite textural-structural description inclusive of all five participants. The composite left out the specific details of the experience reported by the participants, and centered instead on those aspects of the experience that were "transsituational"

and descriptive of the experience in general. The invariant structure or the essence of the phenomenon was derived from six interrelated substructures.

The substructures, or the thematic structure, derived from the participant's lived experience of alienation were identified and discussed. They were: (1) multiple school transitions, (2) peer relations, (3) relations with school adults, (4) failure to progress, (5) instability at home, and (6) personal accountability. The essence of the phenomenon of alienation that emerged by analyzing in-depth descriptions of the substructures was the interrelationship among the invariant constituents of peer acceptance, trust, and fear of failure and disappointment.

The final chapter of this dissertation is a summary of what has been discovered about the participant's experience of alienation in a public school setting and its relevance to the field of counseling and education. It will include a critique of the methodology and procedures by discussing the limitations of this research design. It will also include the research findings as distinguished from previous research and the possible avenues which may be undertaken for future research. This final chapter will close with a discussion of the research outcomes in terms of social meaning and implications for our students, professional school counselors, counselor educators, and in the interest of shared knowledge.

Limitations

This was a qualitative study of the phenomenon of alienation as experienced by young men, aged 16 – 19, who failed to earn a high school diploma in which I examined their understanding of their school experiences and the meanings they

attached to these experiences. Through semi-structured interviews, narrative and open-ended questioning techniques were used as the primary method for investigating the complex understandings participant's had about their school experiences. While the uses of methods that focus on providing great breadth such as surveys are advantageous in quantifying an experience, this in-depth interview method was used more appropriately over an extended period of time with a small number of participants to elicit deeper and more complex understandings. This study focused on an in-depth examination of the understandings students had about their school experiences and for this reason was limited to five participants. Of the participants recruited these five participants were those that had both a willingness to participate in this study and fit the criteria required.

This was a study of alienated student's experiences. It was not a study of institutions, programs, curriculum, or academic disciplines. The in-depth nature of the study and the small number of participants necessarily limited the degree to which the findings might be generalized to alienated students as a whole. The findings in this study reflect the student's recollections of their school experiences and therefore carry all the limitations of any self-reported data.

A possible limitation of this research could be its subjective nature. Further, researcher subjectivity presupposes that participants would express an alienated perspective of a school or schools where they had not been successful. This research approached data collection from an individual perspective rather than a systemic or societal perspective. Some researchers such as Grossman (1999) view youths' turmoil

and violence as resulting from the ills of society for example television, movies, and video game violence. The present research does not include these types of cultural concerns of society on a macro level.

Confirmatory and comparative analyses from the perspective of actual school personnel and family members described in the interviews would have been desirable, but limitations of time and focus dictated that this study be restricted to the participant's perceptions of their school experience and its meaning. Although the findings are based on the perspectives of a subgroup of 16-19 year old adolescent boys, this study laid the groundwork for a more extensive investigation of the identified substructures.

Findings

Findings in this investigation supported the assertion that multiple factors impact a male student's decision to leave school before diploma completion (Hawkins et al., 2000; Mau, 1989, 1992; Roberts, 1987; Williamson & Cullingford, 1997, 1998) and the decision to leave school originates from an accumulated sense of alienation that develops from an interaction of family background (or home environment) and school experiences (Wehlage, 1986). This study revealed a relationship between six separate, but interrelated substructures each of which had significant impact on the participant's experiences. The six interrelated substructures were: (1) multiple school transitions, (2) peer relations, (3) relations with school adults, (4) failure to progress, (5) instability at home, and (6) personal accountability. Each structure both enabled and supported the existence of the others. The invariant structure or essence of the

phenomenon of alienation for these participant's is composed of three invariant constituents: (1) participant's need to achieve peer acceptance despite negative consequences, (2) participant's loss of trust in school and school adults, and (3) participant's fear of failure and of disappointing family and society. These substructures and the invariant structure are composed of participant's lived experiences both at home and school.

In terms of the school experience, Mau suggested that four dimensions of alienation exist in school: (a) powerlessness, the inability to control the forces that surround one's life, (b) meaninglessness, the inability to see purpose in one's life or work, (c) normlessness, the refusal to accept life's societal restrictions, and (d) social estrangement, the separation from significant others. Participants in this study experienced each of the four dimensions of alienation, validating this concept. They each described similar episodes of feeling unable to control their life circumstances and being at the mercy of school officials and arbitrary or subjective disciplinary policies. Participants spoke frustratingly of school classes and programs that did not seem to have much value in the context of their current worlds and how this prompted each participant to deviate from expected student behavior such as attending class, being on time, completing homework, and being subordinate. Participants also described in detail the degree of social estrangement they felt in terms of school attachment or peer group attachment.

Within the four dimensions of alienation exists the underpinnings of the substructures and invariant constituents. Participant's described feeling powerless.

They were subjected to multiple school transitions and suffered the consequence of academic failure as a result. They viewed much of what was required of them academically as meaningless, prompting them to disengage and incur further academic indebtedness resulting in growing conflicts with school adults over non-compliant behaviors and attitudes. Inherent in non-compliance is the dimension of normlessness; participants engaged in defiant behaviors such as insubornation and absenteeism stemming from, in part, a sense of disconnectedness. As a result of loosing connection with school, participants suffered varying degrees of social estrangement within the context of school. The concern for peer acceptance, mistrust in school adults to respond to their needs, and their growing fear of failure was the consequence of becoming further and further alienated from the typical school experience.

As noted previously, literature identified alienation among adolescents had been primarily attributed to school organization (Rafalides & Hoy, 1971) and the adolescent's home environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1986). In terms of family background, research indicated that some of the family factors that impede school success include (but are not limited to) parent criminality, poor family management practices, poor family bonding, and family conflict and parent-child separation (Hawkins et al., 2000). Each participant described a degree of family dysfunction which they acknowledged impacted their ability to connect in school whether the impact was attributable to frequent school transitions, perpetual family conflict and dissention, or both. In conjunction with poor family management, community and neighborhood factors such as poverty, community disorganization, the availability to

drugs, the exposure to crime and all forms of discrimination combined to alienate participants from the potentially protective and nurturing environment of a school. The resulting substructures of multiple school transitions and instability at home verify the power and importance of the home on student's failure to progress and sense of personal accountability.

School climate, according to the literature, appears to have significant impact on a students' perception of their sense of belonging, contributing to either a feeling of "place attachment" (Swaminathin, 2004), or one of alienation. Research generally supports the hypothesis that low bonding, defined as a low commitment to school, low educational aspirations, and little connection to either academic or extracurricular programming, is a predictive factor of lower academic performance, alienation, and eventual non-completion (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). Participants were particularly vocal about the lack of connection they felt with school in general and attributed this lack to three causalities: (1) the multiple transitions they experienced, (2) the constant concern for and fear of peer rejection, and (3) the nature of the relationships formed with school adults.

The major consequence of multiple school transitions as described by each participant was the inability to identify and bond with a school and its community, thus the emergence of alienated feelings. Participants also described being preoccupied with gaining and maintaining friendships to the exclusion of academic performance, leading to academic failure and non-completion. Participants detailed how teachers, administrators, and other staff impacted their willingness or ability to

not only bond to school, but receive fair treatment and be accepted for what they

brought with them.

Researchers have suggested that adolescents from broken homes, low

socioeconomic environments and from culturally underrepresented environments are

prone to become alienated and feel marginalized (Calabrese & Raymond, 1989).

Racial and ethnic youth are particularly at risk for academic difficulties as a result of

low bonding to a school system (Erickson et al., 1996). The two participants who

identified as being African-American and Latino indicated a definite tension ranging

from awkward encounters to charged confrontations which they attributed to

prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory acts on the part of school adults and other

students. Mistrust of school adults and a consistent concern for peer acceptance was a

consequence of the prejudicial attitudes they encountered. These participants

described feeling afraid of failure because they would be seen by society as yet

another "black kid" and another "Mexican kid" who had failed. They also feared being

a failed role model for other Latino and African-American students who would follow

them. Fear of failure and disappointment existed at a deeper societal level than for the

white participants.

What is alienating will also depend on the context and the circumstances, as it

is not a static phenomenon (Cumming, 1996). While all adolescents experience

potentially alienating contexts, there appears to be a threshold to which some

adolescents are no longer able to tolerate what is happening to them, and they exhibit

behaviors commonly associated with alienation (Tripp, 1986). The literature suggested

that before ultimately failing and leaving the system, students, and in particular boys,

exhibit alienating behaviors such as poor attendance and truancy, feeling a lack of

control over their own situation, being unable to keep class or school rules, not having

a sense of belonging, or a combination of these and other behaviors. Participants in

this study identified feeling alienated from school and behaved in ways that fostered

that process. Participants provoked conflicts with school adults because they felt

ashamed or humiliated about failing and being set apart from their peers. They were

reacting to the sense of feeling personally accountable for their circumstances. They

had not maintained their grades, believed they were going to fail and exacerbated the

tension by rejecting standard school behaviors of compliance.

The context of alienation differed with each participant, yet manifested

similarly. Prior research has minimized the importance of student's perceptions of

their own contribution to the process of alienation. Participants in this study, however,

judged themselves as ultimately responsible and accountable for their school outcome

identifying specific behaviors they wished they had employed before it was too late

such as paying attention, doing homework, and going to class. Participant's felt that

while there was much they did not control regarding school, however, they did believe

they controlled how much effort they themselves put into academics and making

progress toward graduation. Findings indicated that participants seemed to discount

the degree by which family instability may have impacted their school process or their

failure to progress academically. Being personally accountable for their failure as

more palatable than believing family dysfunction or societal injustice held some degree of responsibility. The consequence of making themselves personally accountable was the resignation of normalcy and the capitulation to the minimalizing forces they encountered. As men they were not strong enough to resist; they felt like failures and disappointments.

Participants were able to identify ways in which school could be different such as providing additional learning support and how that may have helped them navigate the educational process more successfully. However, participants were quick to personalize their experience in terms of how they did not fit into an existing system. Rather than believing the system had an obligation to adjust or accommodate their unique qualities, they assumed a lack on their part was responsible for their failure. While researchers have attempted to identify which specific factors contribute to youth alienation, they have not investigated the student's perception of how he or she may have been impacted by each factor. This finding is important for understanding the complexity of student's perceptions of school and the alienating factors that influence their experience. Participant's mistrust of school adults, mistrust in the system, and fear of failure emerged because no one, not family or school adults, honored them as capable of overcoming obstacles such as school transitions, unstable peer relations, or instability at home.

Research indicated that being retained a grade, especially in the early grades, increased the likelihood of academic failure (McMillan, 1992) and that being behind in grade level was one of the strongest predictors of non-completion (Clark, 1995).

Research regarding at-risk youth has not fully contemplated how students themselves decide when and how to engage in learning. Findings in this study indicted a willingness on the part of participants to sacrifice academic standing in order to find social fit. Participants recognized the limitations of their personal resources and opted for social acceptance or the semblance of acceptance. This finding is valuable in that it indicates students may not perceive they receive the necessary school support or resources to be successful both academically and socially. Participants described feeling they had to choose between making friends and passing classes; by high school the two seemed mutually exclusive. The value of being accepted by peers was greater than passing classes. The opportunity to make friends was also greater than opportunities to pass classes. According to participants, teachers and school officials offered only one way to avert failure; their way. Participants chose the path more likely to lead toward an emotionally fulfilling outcome, friends over school.

Participants in this study judged specific school adult characteristics as influential only as they contributed to participant's feelings of acceptance or rejection. Participants described acceptance as taking the form of helping pass a class or having knowledge of the adult's personal world. Rejection was more influential and took the form of intense struggles for power. Findings in this study indicated that feeling judged or humiliated by a school official or teacher was an act that pushed beyond the threshold of tolerance. Reactions to this feeling included continued acts to purposefully engage the adult negatively, suspensions, or expulsion. Participants who engaged in these intense power struggles described feeling victimized and subjected to

unjust treatment. They described the school adults as being malevolent perpetrators of unkind acts which in turn forced them to react. The mistrust which developed based on this mistreatment impacted participant's willingness to engage in class and appropriate on-campus social behavior. Feeling unwelcome by school adults contributed to participant failure and feelings of disappointment. Failing school limited the options for social interaction raising the concern of being outcast. This finding is important in that little literature exists which has investigated the motives of school adults in their treatment of students.

This study adds to previous investigations of youth alienation. Whereas other studies have isolated and decontexualized selected factors in their attempts to empirically explain student's experiences, this study employed a naturalistic approach that was sensitive to the participant's experience. Participants described their perceptions and experiences of school. Themes and meanings emerged from each participant's idiosyncratic description of their experiences. This study's qualitative approach provides a meaningful contribution to the body of research devoted to understanding the phenomenon of youth alienation in school.

Future research

An outstanding feature of the design of this study was that I, the researcher, am a woman. While this is not necessarily a limitation, and in fact, one participant regarded it as an asset, it did influence the participant's perceptions. A study in which a man conducted interviews on this topic might yield different or additional data. In

addition, alienation is not a masculine phenomenon; therefore, it is essential that research be conducted to include females.

In this study, data was obtained during individual interviews. Varying the form and format of the data collection might yield differing findings. By design, the participants in this study did not interact with one another. The lack of contact was pointed out by several participants. These participants expressed a curiosity about the perceptions, feelings and attitudes of the other participants. A study that included a group interaction might evoke reactions and trigger responses that in-depth individual interviewing did not.

While the participants in this study attended schools primarily located in the Pacific Northwest, three of the participants attended schools in other geographic locations, two for a period of less than six months and one for an extended period. Conducting a phenomenological inquiry specific to participants educated solely in one geographic area and compared to studies from other geographic areas might evoke different findings associated with school transitions, peer relations, instability at home, and personal accountability.

This study was conducted seeking, by design, male non-completers between the ages of 16 -19. Similar phenomenological studies that focused on other demographics such as age, SES, ability, citizenship status, sexual orientation, and family circumstances would reveal different aspects and facets of the phenomenon of youth alienation.

The combination of my own research with any of the above mentioned studies would offer a broad phenomenological perspective of the experience of alienation from the point of view of those most directly impacted by it. What was critical to the process and outcome of this study was the emphasis on the subjective perspective (Moustakas, 1994). The recommendations for future research do not alter this fundamental focus.

Research outcomes

The insights and understandings that have emerged as a result of this study have tremendous potential value for use on personal, professional, and societal levels. Specifically, this study points to the following outcomes and implications:

1) That the alienating substructures which interfere with the schooling process are significantly intertwined and interrelated and manifest uniquely within each student to undermine his ego and self-concept. An example is how school transitions had direct impact on participants' ability to bond and remain so with friends and with a particular school. As a result participants' anxiety was raised concerning finding peer acceptance at the next school. Transitioning had a direct impact on participants' failure to progress. The inability of participants to make adequate progress fostered the fear of failure and compelled them to question their own ableness. Was failure a result of their intellectual inadequacy? Or were they responsible because they chose friends who encouraged anti-school attitudes and behavior? Instability at home also undermined the participants' focus on school resulting in lowered expectations, failures, and a growing mistrust in the school's ability to help. By sacrificing academic progress for

social fit, participants encountered difficulties with school adults. Ultimately, the substructures gained depth and became increasingly enmeshed as participants matured.

2) There is a dynamic process that occurs in alienating a student from school. It requires more than one incident and one "bad" teacher. Students reach the point of non-completion after years of feeling less familiar, less considered, less teachable, and less likeable. Alienation leading to non-completion is an accumulation of substructures that interact and interrelate as indicated by the invariant structure. Alienation, as discussed in the literature review, is attributed to both school and home environments. Participants clearly described how each impacted their ability to participate fully and freely as students.

3) That students come to recognize early in their schooling process whether they will be successful in the system or not. Participants perceived receiving messages beginning in the primary grades which indicated they would not receive the attention and support other students received. One form of attention was that of peer acceptance. By virtue of transferring and having little or no social connection to others, they were less involved with their peers socially. Participants reported being preoccupied with fitting in, making friends and having received little to no support from school adults in cultivating those social connections. Another form of attention and support was that of not forming trusting relationships with school adults. Participants described teachers and administrators as recognizing fault rather than virtue, and having little or no interest in their welfare. Attention was received for

misdeeds instead. Participants described failing academically because teachers were either unwilling or incapable of differentiating the learning to help them catch up or catch on. These messages were internalized as their emotional development was not capable of discerning a systemic lack or failure from a personal lack or failure. The sense of not belonging was personalized and lead to greater risk taking on the part of a student to connect.

4) That each student struggled in terms of identity formation and definition of self. It is clear from the participant's descriptions of their experiences that their increased awareness of powerlessness and meaninglessness within the educational setting decreased their sense of connection to that setting. Their growing detachment was validated at each stage by the perceived lack of effort on the part of the school to accept, include, or support them. For example, participants whose experience included classes or programs designed for "failed" students suffered a greater degree of humiliation and shame increasing their animosity and disengagement from school. Being designated as a "loser" gave cause to heightened feelings of mistrust, failure, and disappointment. Participants described finding the greatest degree of acceptance with those peers whose behaviors and attitudes were non-conformist. They entered into these relationships even though they were aware of the sacrifice such an association would require: skipping class and using drugs equaled failing school. The identity of outcast was at least an identity that commanded some attention from both peers and school adults. All these aspects of participant's perceptions contributed to

how they defined themselves as students. They perceived feeling left out and discounted diminishing their sense of self.

5) Students tend to find fault within themselves for their failure to navigate the school system. While it is a cultural value of this society to teach students to assume personal responsibility and while most students want to exhibit such a mature attitude, they are not responsible for the mismanagement of their family situation or a school's lack of resources to provide appropriate or timely interventions. Participants in this study described feeling responsible for their failure to earn a diploma. Had they been different, their outcome would have different. Each participant in turn described bearing the ultimate responsibility for failing high school. They acknowledged that attending many different schools, having difficulties with peer relations, encountering inflexible school policies and adults who enforced them as influencing their desire to do school, yet each insisted he could have done better had he been more willing. Participants indicated that instability at home which forced school transitions and exacerbated the sense of disappointment in their school failure was not reason enough to fail school. They could have done their homework, gone to class, not mouthed off to school adults, not done drugs, not failed classes. Participants ultimately concluded that it was possible to graduate, and they just didn't or, at least, haven't yet. They insisted on shouldering the personal accountability for their failure.

6) School counseling programs designed to target alienated and marginalized populations can positively impact student outcome. Participants in this study related that teachers and other school adults who took a personal interest in them, helping

them to feel included and valued, were more willing to attend class and follow through with class requirements. By constructing developmentally appropriate school counseling programs that foster, for example, trusting adult relationships and peer acceptance, more students faced with alienating substructures can graduate. Participants described feeling left out of consideration or unaware of how to form positive peer alliances in new school settings. Had a program been in place to connect students new to school or those as identified as having difficulty fitting in, participants may have experienced less anxiety concerning peer acceptance leaving more attention to focus on academics. For example, participant five had an identity which allowed him immediate social standing and fit with little need to prove himself, the football team. He was also a very capable student. However, as one of very few students of color in the new school, he continued to feel set apart and misrepresented by both peers and adults. He continued to feel mistrust in and a tenuous level of acceptance by some of his peer group and school adults. He participated in activities which brought him negative attention, and eventually cost him enrollment in the regular school program. A trusted adult or a group of peers with whom he felt capable of sharing his experiences may have alleviated some of his fear and counteracted his choices and eventual failure to graduate.

Proactive programming is essential to counteract the negative effects of multiple school transitions or family and community factors which impede progress. School counselors need to implement programming which targets students new to the school, achieve less than satisfactory grades, are identified as being under or over

socialized, and give indications of dysfunction at home. Enhancing the assets that have

been proven to lead to positive student outcomes need to be the core function of

today's professional school counselor. School counselors must examine their

behaviors and accept the responsibility to work towards the common goals of

eliminating the achievement gap and assure all students equity in educational

opportunity and access.

7) Counselor education programs which emphasize skill development and training in

advocacy and multicultural competence are critical to effecting change within the

school counseling profession. Participants not only described the positive impact

caring adults had on them, but also the negative impact uncaring or under trained

adults had. When participants spoke about their school counselors, they did so in

mostly unflattering terms. They felt no sense of support or genuine concern from the

counselors in the regular setting. They indicated counselors either provided them a

way to avoid being in class or made it difficult for them to meet graduation

requirements. Participants described being given unreasonable schedules or being

treated as incompetent or beyond redemption. The only school counselor that received

a positive report was one from an alternative setting who was described as being

genuinely concerned about the participant as an individual, non-judgmental, and clear

regarding options for academic advancement.

School counselors are in the position to implement comprehensive

programming as well as lead schools toward student-centered reform. The emphasis

on standardized education has undermined the time and energy school counselors have

to consider student's individualized academic, career and personal/social needs. The growing body of research in schools indicates that comprehensive, developmental school counseling programs guided by the principles of social justice effect school reform and serve all students, in particular those who are most in need. Counselor education programs must support this effort by offering an academic experience which provides knowledge, skills, and awareness of best practices in the professional school counseling field.

Counselor educators which emphasize to their counselors-in-training the interrelatedness of structures which foster alienated feelings in students create professionals who can recognize and combat these structures. Coursework and internship experiences which focus in part on what factors relate to school non-completion, toxic school climates, and value students' perceptions of their own experience will produce professionals who encourage inclusion, recognition, and student-centered decision-making. School counselor educators must be taught "specific skills in advocacy, leadership, teaming, collaboration, counseling, consultation, and use of data" (Education Trust, 2003). In this way school counselors can recognize and target the specific and specialized needs of students who have attended multiple schools, struggle to relate to peers and school adults, have a record of academic failure, and instability at home. School counselor educators can provide leadership ensuring counselors-in-training the access and opportunity to identify, advocate for, and document the progress of students considered at risk of failure.

Indeed, this argument can be made as well for those who educate teachers-in-training and administrators-in-training.

8) That the social conscience be raised concerning what happens to many students in school as the system currently exists. Every student, regardless of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, religious affiliation, sexual orientation or ability is entitled to a successful school experience that will ultimately increase their economic potential and positively impact their quality of life (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). Participants in this study described feeling ill-considered by the greater society because of their positions as minors and as potential "high school drop-outs." The stigma of non-accomplishment is a heavy burden to place on children and adolescents as it will impact their sense of belonging and trust to their native and adoptive cultures. An educational system that insists on merely doing the same thing for all students doesn't mean it has achieved equity. Some students have greater need than others. All adults must work for systemic change to give individuals the most that need the most (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). Participants described feeling misunderstood by school adults, their parents, and society at large for not being able to fit in or achieve educational parity with their peers. They perceived their school experience as being more difficult than adults would acknowledge or concede. Students whose school experience consists of alienating substructures such as multiple school transitions, instability in the home, poor peer and adult relations develop a basic mistrust of systems as they fail school. The impact of failed students on society is not an unknown. Realizing the intense experience of alienation from school, what alienation

means to the failed student, and the meaning he gives his future as an alienated individual has a societal consequence as well. The interrelatedness is systemic. An individual impacts a system which in turn impacts another system which in turn impacts an individual.

9) Participants had the sense that what they said did not matter and conveyed that feeling alienated was, in part, about being powerless. Participants in this study were incredibly grateful, if at first somewhat incredulous, that someone, an adult, wanted to listen and hear what they had to say; that someone was interested in their perspectives and experiences. The sense that research and the research outcomes are far removed from them was a further indication of how alienated they have felt from society as a whole. The meaning they constructed from their school experience relates to belonging, trust, and self-worth. These are constructs we want each student to cultivate and incorporate into their way of being. The essence of the experience of an alienated student is the antithesis: feeling outcast, distrusting, and fearful of having nothing to offer.

The current direction in the professional school counseling field to measure program accountability is reasonable and wise for reasons of professional growth; however we must not exclude students' perceptions, their experiences, and their voice in seeking proof of effectiveness. The following quote addresses the idea that research encompasses more than outcomes and implications:

> Addressing the relevance of the process also has implications for society, especially in terms of the methods that a society utilizes to conduct scientific research and the regard that science has for the truth of self-search and self-disclosure of the constituents of experience. In

> this context, it is useful to offer one more example of knowledge and
> understanding gained through a process that is congruent with the inherent
> dignity of the experiencing person, and the right of persons to be heard
> and believed… (Schneider as included in Moustakas, 1994, p.171.)

In other words, as adults and as researchers, we must consider the value of the

experience and the voice of the student and the student collective in our decision-

making. There is more than one way to be, there is more than one way to research, and

all are worthy of being expressed and valued.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Sample district recruitment letter

February 12, 2006

4120 NW Pinecone Way #2
Corvallis, Oregon 97330
(541) 752-0817
schulzl@onid.orst.edu

[Name,
position and
address of district
contact.]

Dear [Name of District Contact],

My name is Lisa Schulz and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision department at Oregon State University. I am also a school counselor on a leave of absence from the [Name of District] school district in [Name of City], OR. As you may be aware, part of the requirements for the Ph.D. program is to conduct research for my dissertation. I am very excited to begin this phase of my education!

My research topic is the phenomenon of alienation in a public school setting as experienced by males, ages 16 – 19, who have left the system without completing a diploma program. Specifically, I am studying each individual's experience of alienation in a public high school setting. My research questions will include how each participant believes school did or did not impact the experience and what meaning the experience of alienation in school has on his present life. If you are interested in reading my proposal, I would be happy to share it with you. The study is a qualitative study, and I will be conducting semi-structured interviews with the former students.

I am asking for your help. I would like your administrative and/or counseling staff at [Name of schools] high schools to identify potential participants that have left, either voluntarily or involuntarily, the [Name of district] district in the past eighteen months. I have enclosed a document I will provide your staff explaining my participant profile and the exact nature of their role in identifying possible participants. Below I have identified the basic involvement required:

❖ Firstly, your personnel will first need to identify potential participants based on the criteria I have provided.

❖ Secondly, I will need to meet with school personnel directly to further narrow the focus. These discussions with the school personnel will only relate to identification of potential participants. It is my hope that each school will provide between five and ten names.

❖ The last phase of the recruitment process your staff will be involved with will be to contact the former student, receive and document permission for me to initiate contact or provide the potential participant with my information in order that the individual contact me.

This is the extent of involvement I am requesting from your district. What I have described above is only a proposed means of identifying potential participants. I am very amenable to other options and suggestions your district may have. The results of the study will be available to you once the dissertation has been completed this coming September. If you are willing to allow your school personnel to help me in this study by providing access to names of former students, I request that you e-mail me stating that intention. I must provide the University physical evidence of your willingness to support my effort.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact either myself or my faculty advisor at OSU, Dr. Deborah Rubel. I eagerly await your response.

Lisa Schulz
Doctoral Candidate
Oregon State University
 (541) 752-0817
schulzl@onid.orst.edu

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Corvallis, OR 97331
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APPENDIX B

Criterion for recruitment

Dear Colleague,

Thank you so much for assisting in this dissertation research project. Your help is essential in identifying potential participants who can provide some of the longed for answers regarding a student's experience of alienation in school.

The current project title is:
The experience of alienation among males ages 16 – 19 from public high school in the Pacific Northwest: A phenomenological inquiry.

A **phenomenology** is a qualitative study which concerns itself with the nature of the experience of a phenomenon for an individual, in this case alienation. I am not looking to quantify the experience by seeking to know how many, I am hoping to have each young man provide a detailed and rich description of how and what it was like to be alienated in school.

By **alienation**, I mean a student who has experienced a "separation or distance involving a sense of loss or anguish, resulting in a student viewing life and school as fragmentary and incomplete" (Brown, Higgins, & Paulsen, 2003, p. 4). These alienated students come in many forms: Some just sit in class and stare at us, as if staring right through us. Others climb the wall (literally and figuratively), verbally abuse us, disrupt class, avoid class and school work, and when it gets to be too much, they drop out. Some leave for a little while; others leave forever.

If you can think of a former student who may have said that he felt like he "didn't belong or fit in school", "was only here because my parents made me or had nothing else better to do", "school didn't have anything to do with the real world," or "didn't have any real friends or connection to school" then that is a student I am interested in.

The criteria listed below will help you narrow the focus of potential participants:
1. Participants will be males between the ages of 16 and 19;
2. Participants will have either voluntarily or involuntarily left school in the past eighteen months;
3. Participants will agree with the definition of "alienated" and be able to clearly articulate their thoughts and feelings regarding their experience of alienation;

4. Participants will be available and agree to meet a minimum of three times for the purpose of data collection; and
5. Participants will identify either English or Spanish as their first language.

Once you have identified 5 – 8 potential participants, I would like to meet with you to discuss their fitness to the project and details of their participation. Once the participants have been identified, contact will need to be initiated. Following are the options:

1 – The school district allows you to provide me with names of former students without making student contact. Your involvement ends.

2 – You call the former student providing details about the research project (a phone script will be provided). If the student indicates an interest, you will give me the student's name. I will then contact student. Your involvement ends.

3 – You call the former student providing details about the research project and give student my contact information. Your involvement ends.

As a professional school counselor (currently on leave of absence), I know how chaotic and unpredictable your days can be. I am truly grateful for your willingness and effort to help identify potential participants. I also know that the more we understand about how student's experience school, the better we can advocate for them. If you have other thoughts and suggestions about how to identify and contact potential participants, I gladly welcome them.

Again, thank you, and please do not hesitate to contact either myself or my faculty advisor, Dr. Deborah Rubel. I am eager to get started!

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APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Document

Informed Consent Document

Project Title: The experience of alienation for males ages 16 – 19 from high school in the Pacific Northwest: A phenomenological inquiry.
Principal Investigator: Dr. Deborah Rubel, College of Education, Teacher and Counselor Education
Co-Investigator: Lisa Schulz, Doctoral Candidate, Counselor Education and Supervision

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

You/Your child is being invited to take part in a research study designed to investigate the experience of being alienated from a public high school. Alienation means that you/your child has had feelings of not belonging or fitting in school, of being isolated or feeling alone, of not fitting in, feeling powerless and that school really isn't that important and being unwilling to stay in school. Understanding these feelings from the perspective of a student who decided not to stay is the purpose of this study. It is likely that the results will be used to publish articles and professional publications. We are studying this because there is not a lot of research that looks at the experience of alienation for young men this age and we believe it important that adults begin to understand these school experiences and how they have affected your life.

WHY AM I OR WHY IS MY CHILD BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You/Your child is being invited to take part in this study because you/your child has been identified by school personnel as a student who left high school before completing a diploma program because you/he felt alienated while working within that school system.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?

This consent form gives you the information you will need to help you decide whether you/your child would like to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer and/or parent of a volunteer, and anything else that

is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you or your child wants to be in this study or not.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY AND HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

If you choose/If you allow your child to participate in this study I (Lisa) will ask to meet with you/him four (4) times during the next two months. We will meet at a location that is convenient for you and allows for privacy during the interview. The first three meetings will focus on you/your child's experiences in school, the forth will allow you/your child to review the information that has been collected and make any changes or clarify any points or issues. Each meeting will last about 30-45 minutes. If you/your child agree(s) to take part in this study, your/his involvement will last for about eight (8) weeks. Each meeting will be two weeks apart. During the time between meetings there are no other obligations.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THIS STUDY?

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the study may include an emotional or psychological discomfort. All of the interviews will be conducted in a way that should not inflict any harm. However, the interview questions do ask for you/your child to be reflective of your/his experiences and that may be uncomfortable. If you/your child feel(s) like talking about your/his experience is too difficult, I will stop the interview and talk with you/him about your/his emotional distress. I am a nationally certified Professional School Counselor and feel very qualified to help you/your child through any emotional distress. If at any point you/your child wish(es) to leave the study you/he may, and if a referral to counseling is needed I will work with you to find someone in your area. If at any point you decide that you no longer want to participate or have your child participate in the study, you/he can leave the study. I believe the risk of emotional distress becoming severe is minimal. In fact, the experience of talking about what it was like to be alienated from school might be good for you/ your child.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

We do not know if you/your child will benefit from being in this study. However, we hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study. As counselors and other school personnel learn about your/your child's experiences they will be able to help other students who may share some of the same feelings and experiences and know better how to advocate and offer support.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

You/your child will be paid for being in this research study. Each participant will receive $50.00 for his full participation, completing the four meetings. If a participant decides to withdraw from the study after the third interview, he will receive $25.00. If the participant decides to withdraw from the study after the second interview, he will receive $10. If the participant decides to withdraw after the initial interview, he will receive $5.00.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?

The information you/your child provide(s) during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies involving human subjects) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. It is possible that these records could contain information that personally identifies you. The only other time you/your child's identity would be revealed is if during the interview you/your child tell(s) me something that by law I must report. Instances of abuse, thoughts of harming himself or someone else must be reported to the proper agencies. One aspect of this study involves making audio recordings of the interviews. The recordings are being made so that I can make sure that I get everything you/your child says on record. This will help me as I go through and analyze the information I receive from all of the participants. After each interview I will transcribe the interview, double check the transcription against the audiotape and then destroy the audiotape. You have a legal right to review the transcripts of your/your son's interviews. The researchers are the only ones who have access to the tapes. To help protect your/your child's confidentiality, we will destroy all of the audiotapes made during the interview once they are transcribed. Your consent forms and any other identifying information will be kept separate from the data. Your/your child's name will not be on any of the data. All of the data will be kept in a locked cabinet in the department of Teacher and Counselor Education on the Oregon State University campus for a period of six years. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you/your child cannot be identified. When this study is published in my dissertation, or in a professional article there will be no identifying information printed.

DO I/DOES MY CHILD HAVE A CHOICE TO BE IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part/If you decide to allow your child to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer/really want your child to volunteer. You/Your child will not lose any benefits or rights you/he would normally have if you/he choose(s) not to volunteer. You/Your child can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you/he had before volunteering.

You/Your child will not be treated differently if you or your child decides to stop taking part in the study. You/Your child also has the option of skipping any question that you/he does not want to answer. If you or your child chooses to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you/your child and this information may be included in study reports.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Lisa Schulz @ (541) 752-0817 or schulzl@onid.orst.edu. You can also contact my faculty advisor Dr. Deborah Rubel @ (541) 737-5973 or deborah.rubel@oregonstate.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at (541) 737-3437 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed):
_____

_____   _____
(Signature of Participant)   (Date)

_____
(Name of Parent/Guardian or Legally Authorized Representative – Printed)

_____
(Relationship to Participant - Printed)

(Signature of Parent/Guardian or Legally Authorized Representative)
_____
(Date)

APPENDIX D

Phone script for schools

Hello, my name is **[Name of school person]** and I am a **[occupation of individual]** at **[Name of institution]**. I am calling to ask if you/your son would be interested in participating in a study conducted by Oregon State University. Lisa Schulz, a school counselor working on her PhD to become a counselor educator, is doing a dissertation study on the experience of alienation or the feeling of not belonging from high school for young men who left early. I am calling you because I believe you/your son may be someone who may have had the kind of school experience she is looking for. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of young men like yourself/your son so that people who want to be counselors and counselor educators can understand what unique issues and experiences you/your son may have had. I would like to invite you/you son to participate in this study. If you agree to participate/allow your son to participate, you/he will agree to meet with Lisa four times in the next two months. The first three meetings will be interviews that focus on your/his experience in school. During the fourth meeting, Lisa will share the information she has collected with you/your son to make sure she understood your/your son's experiences accurately. The meetings will last about 30-45 minutes each time. Lisa will be audio taping the interviews to help collect the information, but once the tapes are transcribed they will be destroyed. If you decide to participate/allow your son to participate, you can decide to stop the participation at any time during the study without any penalty or harm. Lisa would like to compensate you/your son for your/his participation. You/Your son will receive $50 if you/he completes the four meetings, $25 if you/he decides to stop after the third interview, $10 if you/he decides to stop after the second interview and $5 if you/he decides to stop after the first interview. If you would like to participate/your child to participate, with your permission, I can give Lisa your name and number so that she can contact you or I can give you her number so that you can contact you. Thank you.

[Lisa's contact #'s: 541-752-0817 or 503-984-0978]

APPENDIX E

Researcher phone script

Hello, my name is Lisa Schulz and I am a doctoral student at Oregon State University. I am working on my PhD to become a counselor educator. I am working on my dissertation study on the experience of alienation from high school for young men who left early. I received your/your son's name and number from the [**name of school personnel and participating school**]. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of young men like yourself/your son so that I can teach people who want to be counselors what unique issues and experiences you/your son may have. I would like to invite you/you son to participate in this study. If you agree to participate/allow your son to participate, you/he will be interviewed three times in a two month period with a forth meeting to verify the accuracy of my understanding. The forth meeting would be a time about two months from now where you/your son and I can get together to talk about their experiences in the study, and for me to share my findings with you/your son to make sure I understood your/your son's experiences accurately. During the interviews I will ask you/your son some questions about his experiences with alienation. The interviews will last about 30-45 minutes each time. I will be audio taping the interviews to help me collect the information, but once the tapes are transcribed they will be destroyed. If you decide to participate/allow your son to participate, you can decide to stop the participation at any time during the study without any penalty or harm. I would like to pay you/you son for your/his participation. You/Your son will receive $50 if you complete the four interviews, $25 if you/he decides to stop after the third interview, $10 if you/he decides to stop after the second interview and $5 if you/he decides to stop after the first interview. If you would like to participate/your child to participate I would like to set up a time when we can meet to talk about the study more, and if you/your son agree to participate, I will have some forms for you/your son to fill out.

APPENDIX F

Interview questions

Using Seidman's (1998) the three-interview series structure, the interviews in this study will also follow an interview guide approach (Patton, 1990). This approach will allow the researcher the freedom to build the interview within pre-determined subject areas, and word questions spontaneously in a conversational style. The subject area in these interviews will include the participant's pre- and post-session experience, interpersonal perceptions and experience within the three sessions, and other perceptions and experiences relevant to each session. The following questions are designed to focus the interviewee on the pre-determined subject areas:

<u>Initial Interview</u>
1) How do you believe your experience in school makes you a good fit for this study?

2) How is that you came to leave school early?

<u>Second Interview</u>

1) What specific events in school contributed to your feeling of alienation?

2) Tell me about a typical day in your school life.

<u>Third Interview</u>

1) How do you think your school experience has affected your present life circumstances?

2) Given what you've said about your experience in public high school, where do you see yourself going in the future?

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park,   CA: Sage.

Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (2nd ed.). New York: Teacher's College Press.