Title

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of Suspension, Expulsion and Student Reentry

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Elizabeth Vázquez

2015

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"It's just harder now. It's not the same.":

Striving, Getting By, Resisting and (Dis)engaging:

Students' Perspectives on the Academic and Social Consequences

of Suspension, Expulsion and Student Reentry

by

Elizabeth Vázquez

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor John S. Rogers, Co-Chair

Professor Megan Loef Franke, Co-Chair

The stories that appear in this dissertation present a microcosm of the outcomes associated with exclusionary school discipline policies throughout the United States. Every year, U.S. schools exclude millions of students from school by use of suspension or expulsion. While exclusionary discipline rates have dropped in recent years, quantitative data fails to provide a comprehensive analysis of the context in which students are removed from school and later reinstated. School discipline studies rarely include student accounts; even less is documented about post-exclusion experiences of students who have not been confined or those entering traditional school settings,

particularly expelled students. This paucity in research fails to contribute to our understanding of challenges and successes experienced by returning students at various phases of readmission to school and misses nuances associated with exclusionary discipline.

Acknowledging and effectively addressing the educational needs of returning students requires research such as the present study. This qualitative study adds a new dimension to existing research on exclusionary discipline by documenting the experiences and reintegration processes faced by students who are readmitted into their original district. This study highlights student voice and analyzes the complex outcomes of exclusionary discipline measures, the challenges and opportunities returning students experienced, and how schools might support students during and after expulsion. Symbolic interaction helps us understand how meaning is co-constructed through interaction between individuals; students interpret and define these exchanges. As this study reveals, expelled students had a positive attitude about reinstatement that conditions and a lack of support quickly dashed. Students' narratives illuminate the complex needs and subtle academic, social, and personal consequences of exclusionary discipline. This dissertation concludes with methodological and theoretical contributions. I argue for a comprehensive account of school discipline that includes an examination of the interactive and complex factors associated with student reentry. With specific policy proposals for reform, I hope to aid policy makers, educators, parents, and advocates to reflect on current disciplinary practices and work toward student discipline policies that keep students in school while promoting safe and secure learning environments to serve the needs of every student.

The dissertation of Elizabeth Vázquez is approved.

Todd M. Franke

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University of California, Los Angeles

2015

DEDICATION

Para mis hijos,

Sofía Elizabeth y Carlos Antonio,

mis más grandes tesoros quienes llegaron a mi vida cuando era triste y vacia.

Todo mi sacrificio y arduo labor es por ustedes.

Baby Olds y Pollito

¡Los amo más alla del sol!

Mamí is done with her homework!

To Angel, Cisco, Duane, Eduardo, Isaiah, Joaquin, Pedro, and Vanessa:

Despite numerous barriers, you have and will continue to defy the odds.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I started the PhD as a cheetah, zooming through coursework, qualifying exams, and the proposal. I was told I was "pretty ambitious." Time, life, institutional barriers, circumstances, and other challenges took their course and I am now the snail of my cohort—the last to reach the finish line. But I've made it! According to statistics, I should have dropped out of high school many years ago. I am here today and can celebrate this accomplishment because of the people who have impacted me, helped me thrive, and contributed to my success.

A thank-you is not enough for the many ways that so many folks have supported me through this journey. I hope to continue to pay it forward. If you were part of any of the following, I THANK YOU: *Mil gracias a las personas que me dieron un aventon, un empujón, un hombro en el que llorar, un abrazo cuando más lo nesecitaba.* To those who followed through with their word and offered a helping hand, thank you. If you never offered to help but did so anyway, thank you. If you were understanding and didn't make me feel guilty about missing parties, social gathering, fundraisers, etc., THANK YOU! If you gave me hope when I felt hopeless, returned books for me, prayed for me, made copies for me, cooked for me, cared for my two little treasures, lent me your parking pass, asked about my progress (without being judgmental), allowed me to renew books more than 100 times (yes, this happened), provided access to online books and journal articles, helped me prepare for interviews/defenses, offered a place to stay, gave me a ride, encouraged me to finish "*el pinche papel*," lent a listening ear, took me dancing or for a drink (or both), shared a meal, reminded me of my *chingonaness*, nudged me when I needed it, smiled when I couldn't, consoled me, motivated me when I was running on fumes, embraced my research, or accepted me (flaws and all), THANK YOU!

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Megan Franke and John Rogers, for your patience, advocacy, and guidance. I am forever grateful. Thank you, Tyrone Howard and Todd Franke, for your time and support during the final stretch.

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VITA

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Vázquez, E. (April, 2005). *Schools, Prisons, and the Profits of Control*. Paper presented at the annual meeting for the American Educational Research Association. Montreal, Canada.

Vázquez, E. (April, 2005). *(Mis)Interpretations of The Gun Free Schools Act of 1994: Implications for Practice and Reporting*. Paper presented at the annual meeting for the American Educational Research Association. Montreal, Canada.

Vázquez, E. (April, 2005). *Caught in the Middle: Rising Non-Completion Rates & Declining Opportunities.*Paper presented at the CROSSROADS Conference. Los Angeles, CA.

Vázquez, Elizabeth with Williams, A. Dee. (April, 2002). *Transforming Teacher Participation: The Effects of Authentic Student Dialogue and Relationships in a Shared Space*. Paper presented at the annual meeting for the American Educational Research Association. New Orleans, LA.

Vázquez, E. (May, 1997). *Chicano Student Influences: Going to, or abstaining from, College.* Paper presented at the Annual Pre-Graduate Mentorship Colloquium, University of California. Irvine, CA.

Vázquez, Elizabeth. (May, 1996). *Alternative Education: Looking Beyond High School.* Paper presented at the Annual Pre-Graduate Mentorship Colloquium, University of California. Irvine, CA.

Key Terms:

Expulsion – A measure in which a students are removed from their regular school for disciplinary reasons for the remainder of the school year or longer.

In-School-Suspension (ISS) – A punishment in which a school removes students from their classroom for at least half a day, but remain under the supervision of school personnel.

Out-of-School Suspension (OSS) – A punishment in which a school removes students from their classroom and places them in another setting (e.g., home) for 10 days or less.

Reinstatement – A school district's measure to accept an expelled student back into the district upon end of sanction and fulfillment of district imposed requirements.

School-to-Prison Pipeline – A set of local, state, and federal education and public safety policies that push students out of schools and into the criminal justice system.

Student Reentry (Reentry) – A term borrowed from Youth and Adult Reentry literature that refers to the on-going process and transitions experienced by reinstated students.

Youth Reentry – The process in which individuals age 24 and under leave secure correctional facilities or prisons and return to their communities.

Zero Tolerance[1] – A policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses.

"Kicking somebody out of school is stupid but I guess that's how they do it…. When I came back I was angry with the school."

-Joaquin

"I'm not gonna have no friends, no nothing."

-Cisco

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[1] According to the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) definitions, " a policy is consdiered 'zero tolerance' even if there are some exceptions to the mandatory aspect of the expulsion, such as allowingt the chief administering officer of an LEA to modify the expulsion on a case-by-case basis." Source: http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/2011-12_Definitions.doc

The reinstated students whose stories appear in this dissertation present a microcosm of the outcomes associated with exclusionary school discipline policies throughout the United States. Every year, U.S. schools exclude millions of students from school by use of suspension or expelsion. The U.S. Department of Education's 2009-10 Civil Rights Data Collection reveals that U.S. public schools imposed out-of-school suspension on more than 3.7 million students and expelled an estimated 72,000. This epidemic extends to preschoolers as well as older students. In California alone, 400,000 students were removed from classrooms at least once during the 2009-10 school year. These figures represent a trend that began when suspensions and expulsions increased dramatically after passage of the 1994 Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA). While exclusionary discipline rates have dropped in the last few years, approximately 3.5 million students experienced out-of-school suspension at least once during the 2011–12 school year (Losen, Hodson, Keith II, Morrison & Belway, 2015). The figures do not capture the outcomes associated with removal from school, but evidence suggests absence from school plays a significant role in students' future educational trajectories.

In Chapter One I explore (1) the notion and history of zero tolerance school discipline, (2) the social conditions in the Unites States and federal legislation that shape current school discipline policies, (3) the underlying assumptions, major controversies and trends associated with exclusionary school discipline and trends, (4) current activism surrounding exclusionary disciplinary practices, (5) the significance of this study in understanding suspension and expulsion in an effort to institute meaningful reentry supports for expelled students who seek to reengage in traditional academic institutions, and (6) an overview of the study.

This study adds a new dimension to existing research on expelled and suspended youth by documenting the experiences and reintegration processes faced by students who are readmitted into their original district, including a host of obstacles. It highlights their voices and presents my observations as well as official school documents to portray student reentry as students themselves experience and understand it.

The War on Drugs' Influence on School Discipline Sanctions

Social conditions play a fundamental role in the function and operation of American schools, and the development and goal of contemporary exclusionary discipline policies are no exception. Skiba and Knesting (2001) indicate that the term *zero tolerance* received national attention as the title of an anti-drug program during the '80s War on Drugs. The Reagan Administration implemented a program which required the Coast Guard to seize drug-carrying vessels. Zero tolerance policies had their debut as an approach to drug-related infractions of school rules (Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Skiba & Peterson 1999).

School shootings in the early 1990s played a significant role in the expansion of zero tolerance to school discipline more generally. School shootings in Paducah, Jonesboro, and Columbine raised national concerns about violence in schools. In spite of evidence that violence in schools had not increased (Robers, Kemp, Rathbun & Morgan, 2014), the media's sensationalization of youth-initiated crime coupled with "expert" (See for example DiIulio, 1995 "superpredator" theory) reports on youth offenders created a sense of fear and uncertainty that contributed to a punitive approach to school discipline (Webber, 2003).[2,3]

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[2] The decline in school violence is a refelction of a decline in all violent crime nationwide as documented in the U.S. Census Bureau, Sstatistical Abstract of the United States: 2012 (Table 306 Crimes and Crime Rates by Type of Offense: 1980-2009). Retreived from www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0306.pdf

[3] The superpredator theory took on a life of its own as DiIulio received harsh criticism from academic peers. Franklin E. Zimring, professor of law at the University of California at Berkeley asserted "[DiIulio's] theories on superpredators were utter madness" and his predictions innacurate and at odds with what actually occurred (*New York Times, 2001)*. DiLulio couldn't agree more. In a New York Times article published in 2001, DiIulio recognized both flaws with his theories and its damaging outcomes. Of his

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A Political Response to School Safety

The United States enacted the Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA) in 1994 with bipartisan support as part of the Improving America's Schools Act, making zero tolerance federal policy. The law required that local educationa agencies (LEAs expel, for a period of not less than one year, a student who is determined to have brought a weapon (i.e. firearm) to school as defined under Title 18 U.S.C. §921 and referred to law enforcement.[4,5] Noncompliant state and local education agencies risk loss of federal funds under this Act (*Office of Inspector General*, 2001). The GFSA provides chief administrative officers (e.g. superintendent) the flexibility to modify expulsions on a case-by-case basis, which suggests that zero tolerance may not have been crafted to be, in fact, "zero." The case-by-case[6] provision was designed to allow modifications to the one-year expulsion in when other means of correction are feasible and the student poses no threat to self and others. However, the skyrocketing use of suspension suggests that the language in this legislation seems to encourage a particular mindset that elicits zero tolerance responses. Most schools have treated zero tolerance as such.The passage of the GFSA marked a turning point in school discipline wherein zero tolerance has become the norm in public schools (Skiba, 2000).

Assumption, Trends and Concerns Surrounding Exclusionary School Discipline

As the term zero tolerance phased out of criminal law during the Bush Administration, which identified flaws and modified the law, many school districts adopted the expression and

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conclusions, he said, "Thank God we were wrong." Unfortuntaley, the superpredatot theory influenced juvenile justice, and how youth were perceived, faster than DiIulio could curb its appeal. As a result, legislation called for harsh punishment for juvenile offenses. "If I knew then what I know now, I would have shouted for prevention of crimes," DiLulio said.

[4] Refer to www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA/sec14601.html

[5] The Act defines *weapon* explicitly as a *firearm* under Title 18 U.S.C. §921. Cap guns, toy guns, bb guns, pellet guns, antique or replicas of antique firearms, gun clips, and ammunition
are not considered a *firearm* under Title 18 U.S.C. §921. Although some states report "expulsion for weapons" for weapons other than *firearms*, such expulsions do not fall under federal law. Rather, they are associated with state law.
(*Office of Inspector General*, 2001)

[6] A case-by-case exception must be in wiritng and may include children with disabilities in order to meet the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilites Edcuation Act (IDEA). Source: http://www2.ed.gov/programs/dvpformula/gfsaguid03.doc

philosophy. The California Department of Education goes so far as to claim, in spite of the language and continued force of GFSA, that "the term 'zero tolerance' does not appear in law" but that it refers to policies that mandate expulsion as the disciplinary response to fighting, drugs, and gang-related activities (Skiba & Knesting, 2001; *California Department of Education*, 2004). Research has documented that some schools have suspend and expell a large number of students for subjective offenses such as disrespect, excessive noise, and defiance (Losen, 2011; Wald & Losen, 2003). In California, for example, 53% of expulsions and suspensions were meted out for "willful defiance" of school authorities during the 2011-2012 school year (Freedberg, 2013). As I'll discuss in more detail below, zero tolerance exclusionary discipline often results in dual penalties; in school (e.g. suspension and/or expulsion) and in the criminal system (Aull, 2012; Browne, 2003; *Browne*, 2005; Vanderhaar, Petrosko & Muñoz, 2013). Data indicate an over-reliance on law enforcement to address school-based offenses.

School exclusion jeopardized students' academic prospects and contributes to a large number of students with few prospects of returning to school to complete their education (Cass & Curry, 2007). To be clear, this study is not an historical analysis of school discipline or zero tolerance. It is important to discuss suspension and expulsion within a zero tolerance context to understand how legislation has impacted school discipline policies and procedures and how this statute has resulted in historically high rates of suspensions and expulsions and other negative outcomes.

Disproportionate Impact

Exclusionary discipline polices disproportionately affect young men and boys of color (Civil Rights Project & Advancement Project, 2000; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Skiba, Arredondo & Rausch, 2014; Yudof, 1975), as does zero tolerance specifically (Gregory &

Mosely, 2004; Losen, 2011; Losen, Martinez & Gillespie, 2012; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002). Losen (2011) estimates that African American students incur twice or three times the risk of suspension of their white classmates. "Suspended Education in California," a report by the Center for Civil Rights Remedies, reveals stark differences in discipline rates by race. Average suspension rates for African American students were 20 percent higher than for white students (Losen, et al., 2012).

Suspending and expelling students may produce the perception of tight discipline (though it may also produce the perception of "dangerousness" especially when all behaviors are addressed with sever and swift punishment) but behaviors and school safety go unchanged (Browne, 2005; Bracy, 2010; Skiba, 2000). Over a decade after zero tolerance became law, Skiba and Knesting (2001) noted, "there is no convincing documentation that zero tolerance has in any way contributed to school safety or improved student behavior" (p. 35). Evidence suggests that removing unruly students from school does not necessarily improve school safety (Martinez, 2009; Noguera, 2003; Skiba & Knesting, 2001) and that a narrow focus on such removals impedes school success in other dimensions (Garver & Noguera, 2012). Noguera (2003) argues "the assumption is that safety and order can be achieved by removing 'bad' individuals and keeping them away from others who are presumed to be 'good' and law abiding" (p. 343). Removing students has become a consistent solution to situations shaped by multiple factors.

Further, removing students from school, particularly struggling students, places them at risk outside of school (Finn & Servoss, 2013) and exacerbates educational challenges (Civil Rights Project & Advancement Project, 2000; Casella, 2003; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Noguera, 2008), which subsequently reduces their learning opportunities and outcomes (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks & Booth, 2011, 2011; Shollenberger, 2013;

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Rausch & Skiba, 2005). Schools punish low achieving students more than their counterparts, though they are not necessarily more likely to misbehave (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Skiba, 2004; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002); depriving such students of instruction contributes to their marginalized status in schooling structures. Zero tolerance has not demonstrated reliable results and has generated a series of negative outcomes for students.

What Happens to Excluded Students?

Students with persistent discipline problems are more likely to drop out of school than their counterparts (Fine, 1991; Rosborough, 2010; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Wu, Pink, Crain & Moles, 1982). Even when alternatives exist, temporary or permanent removal from school makes students likely to disengage from the school environment and therefore fail to complete high school (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2013; Fine, 1991; Civil Rights Project & Advancement Project, 2000). Evidence suggests schools may use school discipline referrals and exclusionary sanctions to push them out (Bowditch, 1993; Feierman, Levick & Mody, 2009; Hyman, 1997; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992), or as Fine (1991) termed it, to "purge" them. Penalties enacted against schools whose standardized test scores do not improve may incentivize removal of students unlikely to perform well, either from a school altogether or temporarily during testing periods through suspension or early dismissal (Advancement Project, 2010; Browne, 2005; Carroll, 2007; Figlio, 2006; Haladyna, Nolen & Haas, 1991; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). A recent example of "high stakes" pressure associated with standardized test scores resulted in the conviction of eleven teachers accused of tampering with students' scores in the Atlanta Public Schools system.

While the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 sharply increased suspensions and expulsions, it set no requirement that affected students receive alternate educational services. Individual states

may require alternative placements for expelled students, but not all states provide funding for such services and less provide standards for the education provided to students (Carroll, 2008; Lewis, 2001)[7]. Carroll (2008) notes that alternative programs are funded under Title 1, but are not required to meet benchmark standards and do not receive sanctions if they fail to show results. "As a result," Carroll adds, "the funding provisions are unlikely to alter exclusionary incentives created by accountability frameworks" (2008, p.1933). Inconsistent funding and the absence of oversight in alternative schools may create obstacles for a population with greater social and academic needs. Additionally, administrators in alternative schools (including correctional facilities) lack the skills, training and competency necessary to ensure success for staff and students in theses settings (Price, 2009; Price, Martin & Robertson, 2010).

Alternative schools are discussed in dropout prevention literature because they have key components to address the challenges of at-risk youth (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Manchester (2013) indicates that class size, high tight supervisions and the ability to develop relationships with students and staff were identified as positive experiences in one alternative school. However, research argues against the effectiveness and success of alternative schools. Optional education programs can serve as little more than daytime confinement (Civil Rights Project & Advancement Project, 2000; Kim, Losen & Hewitt, 2010) with minimal intellectual engagement or learning opportunities (Brown, 2007; Malagón, 2010; Noguera, 2008; Kennedy-Lewis, 2012).

Kelly (1993) notes that while alternative programs are widely implemented, little is known about how they operate. Further, empirical evidence that such schools decrease delinquent behaviors has not emerged, according to a review of over fifty evaluations of

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[7] The most recent Report published by the U.S. Department of Education and the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (Sept. 2010), "Implementation of the Gun Free Schools Act in the United States and Oulying Areas" indicates 14 states state reported that state law requires LEAs to provide educational services to expelled students in an alternative settting during the 2005-06 school year. Other states and outlying areas either "encourage" LEAs to provide services to expelled students, state law did not address the need for educational services in an alternative setting or failed to report a response.

alternative schools (Morrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong & Morrison, 2001). In some U.S. states, legislation does not address alternative educational services for expelled students and not every state that requires or encourages Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to provide alternative education programs to expelled students receives state funding for services (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). These educational settings are not equipped, nor do they prioritize, transitional services for expelled students. Depending on their state of residence, students may experience complete cessation of educational services. University researchers and community advocacy groups concluded that and/or derail them from academics and onto the juvenile justice system (Advancement Project, 2006; Browne, 2003; Casella, 2003; Suitts, 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003).

Students who enter the juvenile justice system as a result of a school-based offense can fare even worse. A recent study conducted by the Southern Education Foundation (Suitts, 2014) notes that state and local facilities fail to provide incarcerated youth with an effective and adequate education. Westat conducted an analysis on the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) Survey of Youth in Residential Placement (SYRP), the first comprehensive national-scale survey to gather information from youth in confinement. Findings reveal that 61 percent of the respondents had been expelled or suspended from school (Sedlack & McPherson, 2010).

The disproportionate use of exclusionary polices against Students of Color renders the ensuing limitation of academic opportunities a means of increasing racial inequities. To the extent that such students are likely to be from under-served communities, they are likely to be unsupervised (because their parents work) and to live in neighborhoods where the streets pose risks of violence and gang involvement (Bowditch, 1993; Rendón, 2014).

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

Reports by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Harlow, 2003) and the National Center for Education Statistics (Chapman, et al., 2011) indicate that dropouts comprise a disproportionate percentage of the nation's prison and death row population. Approximately 75% of State prison inmates, about 59% of Federal inmates, and 69% of local jail detainees are high school dropouts (Harlow, 2003). A report by the Center of Labor Market studies at Northeastern University indicates that during 2006-2007, the likelihood of institutionalization among high school dropouts (ages 16-24) was 63 times higher than among four year college graduates (Sum, Khatiwada & McLaughlin, 2009). Organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) have dubbed the path from school to the juvenile justice system via complete disengagement from school the "school-to-prison pipeline." School policies and practices such as zero tolerance push students away from classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.; Alexander, 2010; Kim, Losen & Hewitt, 2010; Feierman, 2009/10, Wald & Losen, 2003).

Schools increasingly criminalize stuent behaviors and rely on law enforcement to handle school-based infractions that school officials might have handled in the past. Uniformed officers, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras create a the prison-like atmosphere in many schools (Clemson, 2015; Meiners, 2007; Noguera, 2003). In a sign of how commonplace referrals to the legal system have become, a study of Florida's approach to educational infractions reveals that the courts and law enforcement alike have begun to resist, refusing to press charges at the behest of school officials (Browne, 2005). The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) describes "national trend of criminalizing, rather than educating, our nation's children" (n.d.). A report by

the advocacy organization the Sentencing Project suggests that zero tolerance school discipline policies contribute to the striking rise in Black confinement (Mauer & King, 2004).

Fowler, Lightsey, Monger, Terrazas and White (2007) argue that exclusionary discipline leads straight to the juvenile justice system because youth excluded from school have limited options and too many opportunities to commit crimes and because some schools bring law enforcement in to augment the punishment enacted by suspension or expulsion. Entry into the juvenile justice system has far-reaching impact for students socially, academically and economically (Fowler, Lightsey, Monger & Aseltine, 2010; Hirschfield, 2009; Kirk & Sampson, 2013; Sum, Khatiwada & McLaughlin, 2009).

A study on the Juvenile Justice system concluded that juvenile justice schools contribute to recidivism rates and that their low expectations for students' academic performance constrain student achievement (Suitts, 2014). Schools in detention facilities operate without prioritizing the education of youth under their care, the report states that incarcerated youth receive inconsistent educational services, or no education at all. Further, while Feierman (2009/10) posits that children who find themselves involved with the juvenile justice system as a consequence of school-based offenses should have an easy transition back to neighborhoods, this is not the case (Carroll, 2007).

Mobilization and Advocacy Against Exclusionary Discipline: Time for change

Community advocacy groups have taken a lead role in exposing zero tolerance policies' intended purpose, negative methods, and actual outcomes. The Dignity in Schools campaign, for example, advocates for positive, school-wide approaches to discipline. The California Endowment Fund recently granted one million dollars to train and support school districts to prevent misconduct, keep schools safe and keep kids in school (Garrett, 2012). In Michigan, the

Michigan School-Justice Partnership aims to increase graduation rates and reduce juvenile arrests, truancy, suspension and expulsion. Other alternatives to zero tolerance discipline policies include restorative justice, restitution programs, in-school-suspension and school-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

Federal agencies have begun to seek to overhaul harsh discipline practices as well, particularly attending to their racially disproprtionate effects. In 2010, the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division hosted a conference entitled, "Civil Rights and School Discipline: Addressing Disparities to Ensure Educational Opportunity" in conjunction with the Department of Education's Civil Rights Office. Stakeholders including, but not limited to, policymakers, educators, advocates and law enforcement officers discussed the development of strategies to ensure that all children can access a pathway to success, rather than prison.

In service to this, the Obama administration commissioned disparate impact analysis in 2010 to examine whether exclusionary discipline policies disproportionately affect groups of students. The federal government has requested the collection of more robust data in an effort to better understand exclusionary discipline. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called for the strengthening of civil rights data through the collection of additional information including physical restraint and seclusion, in-school-suspension and school-related arrests.

Legislation has also been modified recently to address exclusionary discipline. At the end of the 2012 legislation session, Governor Jerry Brown signed five bills into California law that raise awareness and pave the way for alternative approaches to out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. EdSource contributor Susan Frey notes that Brown vetoed two stronger bills, but

acknowledges a small victory (October 2012).[8] Nonetheless, the more modest bills signal a

significant step in the right direction. More recently, Assembly Bill 420 eliminates "willful

defiance" or "disruption" of school activities as a reason to expel students and prevents

administrators from using that reason to issue suspensions to K-3 students in California (Frey,

2014). These legislative measures underscore the importance of keeping students in school and

on track to graduation.

Medical professionals also encourage the reexamination of harsh sanctions. In a recent

policy statement, the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health (2013)

encouraged schools to adopt alternatives to exclusionary discipline. A policy statement issued by

the Council indicates that the severity of zero tolerance measures requires "periodic review" of

"their application and appropriateness for a developing child" (2013, p. e1000). The Academy's

position echoes statements made approximately a decade ago. The American Psychological

Association (2008), which reviewed literature on zero-tolerance school policies, concludes that

such policies do not improve school safety and student conduct.

School districts are also playing a role in reducing the use of suspension. A recent study,

Keeping California's Kids in School, conducted by researchers at the Center for Civil Rights

Remedies (CCRR) at UCLA's Civil Rights Project, indicates a significant decrease in out-of-

school suspensions in two-thirds of all California districts (Losen, Martinez & Okelola, 2014).

Losen and colleagues analyzed suspension trends in the 745 California school districts that

reported discipline data in 2011-12 and 2012-13. The 500 districts encompassing 4.7 million

students report suspension decreases while 245 districts encompassing 1.2 million students have

continued to increase suspensions. However, the report notes that racial gaps have remained

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[8] For more information see Assembly Bill (AB) 2242 and Senate Bill (SB) 1235 which Governor Brown vetoed. Senate Bill 1088 and AB1729, AB2537, AB2616 and AB1909 were signed into law.

essentially steady within districts. It cites the efforts of the Los Angeles Unified School District and states every district in California should eliminate suspensions for "Disruption/Willful Defiance," because this vague category has been responsible for over one-third of California suspensions.

The decline in suspension obviously represents a step in the right direction. However, the fact remains that there is work to be done. Students continue to suffer the consequences for elevated rates of suspensions, and there are fewer signs of decreasing rates of expulsion. Schools may be less likely to apply suspension ruthlessly, but expulsion leaves students with limited educational options and, like suspension, has a troublingly disparate impact on Students of Color.

Efforts to develop a larger data set by the Office for Civil Rights Data Collection and introduce legislation are timely; however, scholars continue to overlook real-life accounts of the processes associated with suspension, expulsion, and readmission. The current study seeks to fill this gap by focusing on the experiences of previously expelled students who matriculate from expulsion sites to their expelling school district. Research demonstrates the over-representation of youth of color among expelled students (Losen, 2011; Losen, Martinez & Gillespie, 2012; Malone, 2011; Skiba et al., 2002;), their low academic achievement (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Noguera, 2008; Rausch & Skiba, 2005), and attainment (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2013; Fine, 1991; Losen, 2013), and the heightened risk of entering the criminal justice system (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.; Fabelo et al., 2011; Vanderhaar, Petrosko & Muñoz, 2013). It is critical that policy makers, educators and the public-at-large understand how removal from school affects students in order to support returning students (and their families) to improve student outcomes.

Federal, state, and local stakeholders' focus on trends loses sight of other issues in the discussion about changing current school discipline. The current study has the opportunity to influence the collaboration between different stakeholders and those in the legal and educational realms. It will add a new dimension to research about exclusionary school discipline policies by thoroughly examining the reintegration process of expelled and suspended youth.

Federal and local changes in school discipline make this a ripe time to re-examine resources available to readmitted students. Previously expelled students in this study have an individual interest in returning to school; they want to return to school becasuse schooling and an education symbolizes opportunity. Students in this study share details about the challenges they faced from the time they were banished to the time of expected graduation from high school. It seeks to garner from their their narratives insights that can help policy makers and schools alike to help them and that contain information relevant to other groups of disciplined students.Students' testimonies illuminate the weaknesses and strengths of structural and organizational features that hinder or support students' continuation of their education.

The simple exercise of illuminating the barriers students face following removal will make this study valuable to policymakers. Expulsion has a cost, and students' narratives will illuminate these costs as no other approach can.

Significance of Study

For the most part, research on school discipline policies present quantified information in the form of percentages and aggregate data. Several studies have examined student perceptions of school discipline (Brown, 2007; Lemmel, 2003; Simmons, 2004), investigated the relationship between initial suspension and future suspension(s) (Bowditch, 1993; McFadden et al., 1992; Morrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong & Morrison, 2001; Raffaele-Mendez, 2003), and

surveyed suspended students about their experiences (Imich, 1994; Nichols et al., 1999).

Opportunities Suspended (2000), a landmark study of zero tolerance authored by the Civil Rights Project & Advancement Project, lacks a detailed discussion of student consequences as told by students. This study follows the work of **Ellen Boylan,** senior attorney at Education Law Center (2002), which documented three cases of students expelled under zero tolerance. By using a larger sample size, and taking a research-based approach, I intend for the current study to build on and update Boylan's findings as to the devastating impact that punishment under this policy brought about to students and their families. It also follows the work of Brown (2007) and Malagón (2010), who examined the experiences of students who were removed from the educational mainstream and were attending, respectively, an urban alternative school and a continuation school. As a study of students who return to their original school district, the current study complements these studies by providing a look at students whose post-expulsion journeys differ from their respondents.It is important to note, however, that not all expelled and suspended youth attend continuation schools or other alternative placements.

No other study has focused on reinstatment and the critical transitions that follow during reentry (through expected date of graduation). By focusing on these processes, this study will offer insight into the particular restrictions and requirements school districts impose on students during and after the expulsion period. Accounts of what students experience as they reenter traditional school settings within the district that banished them will also provide a particular perspective on the consequences of removal from traditional school settings and the way these consequences make it difficult for reentering students to reconnect with, adjust to, and succeed in the school environment.

The young people in this study were removed from their schools on the basis of behavior that included arson and drug possession. But they are entitled to an education as well as the other benefits that come from learning (and being) in a supportive community setting. Students' narratives and official school and district documents explore structures and practices that support or hinder students' progress during and after expulsion. My study differs from others in that I was able to trace why students were removed *and* follow their reentry paths through high school. I was able to capture how exclusion from school influenced their ability to re-adapt to the expelling school district and subsequent outcomes.

Student perspectives continue to be absent from the larger debate about expulsion and suspension within a zero tolerance landscape. The Office for Civil Rights has expanded its categories of analysis of the effects of school discipline, but our knowledge base of how exclusionary discipline affects students and their academic pathways remains incomplete. By talking *to* young people instead of only *about* them, this study will expand our understanding of the (latent) impact of (immediate) exclusionary measures. Interviews illuminated suspension, expulsion, and the reentry process and provided an understandning of how policies and practices support or hinder students who complete their punishment. Removal from school is an event while reentry is a process in which students must adapt to social and academic demands of the expelling district. Students' narratives illuminate their challenges; their systems of support, both real and wished for; and the coping mechanisms they used during their transition. By studying student reentry, I expose the complexities involved in this process and document the long-term academic and social effects resulting from suspension and expulsion.

I chose to focus on previously expelled and suspended students for a number of reasons. First, the trend in research on suspended and expelled youth tends to focus on students who have

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dropped out or enrolled in a non-traditional school system. Students readmitted constitute a particular at-risk group. Second, some students that have returned to school may not complete high school and/or may ultimately complete it in in an alternative school setting and tracking the reentry process will illuminate these outcomes. Third, these students often face criminal penalties in addition to school sanctions that impose an array of requirements such as anger management classes, restitution, and legal fees. By focusing on students who seek to fulfill these requirements and reenter their former school district, this study will provide a particular lens on them.

In sum, selecting this group provides (1) a mechanism to receive input from students who are the cusp of continuing or leaving their studies; (2) a comprehensive picture of suspension and expulsion which extends beyond the simple act of removing a student from school; and (3) insights into possible interventions that might aid such students' reentry and school completion. Better understanding the school experiences of reentering students can empower policy makers, educators, and other stakeholders to reexamine and change the policies and practices that generate inequitable results and lead to dropping out or further struggling in school. Because of the scarce research in this area of exclusionary discipline, I turned to Youth Reentry research for insight, and I found many parallels between transitions faced by readmitted students and reentering youth.

By looking at an understudied group of students who return to school and engage in a system that pushed them out, this study attempts to examine how students cope with suspension and expulsion and also draw conclusions about ways to support reentering students. All students in this study returned to their home district, but not all stayed. The statistics would not illuminate the factors that led to these outcomes. Students' narratives provide a window into their academic trajectory and into a critical juncture in their lives. Moreover, this study asserts that expulsion

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and suspension are not just punishments; latent consequences, some school officials and some they do not, attend these measures. This research will suggest that exclusionary discipline has lasting effects that ultimately shape how students navigate the educational system from reinstatement to high school completion.

<u>Overview of Study</u>

This study takes the importance of creating a school environment free of disruption and violence as a given. However, it also recognizes the enormous costs of school discipline policies and a lack of evidence that they enhance school safety. Existing research on suspension and expulsion provides evidence for these negative results as well as disparate impact of zero tolerance exclusionary discipline measures, but fails to incorporate the voices of students. By focusing on the experiences of students who navigate a system that places them in danger of dropping out and/or engaging in criminal activity upon returning to school, it illuminates these experiences in service to developing positive comprehensive alternatives to the current system.

Research Questions

By answering the following questions, this study begins to fill a void in school discipline literature. In particular, questions were crafted to help our understanding of subsequent consequences, whether positive or negative, previously excluded students who seek to continue their education face:

1. Why did students choose to return to school?
2. How do expelled students experience school reintegration?
3. According to students, what is the impact of their previous expulsion on their academic progress, their school activities, their relationships with teachers and peers, their relationship with their families, and their future aspirations?
4. What systems of support, if any, do students report during reentry?
5. In what way do school practices discourage or support the reintegration of expelled students?

Theoretical Framework

Scholars have proposed explanations of why societies respond to unwelcome behavior as they do and how those who are the targets of those responses make sense of those reactions. I draw from symbolic interaction theories, also called symbolic interactionism, to examine the empirical data. Symbolic interaction looks at small-scale structures, specifically on how interactions influence people's actions and meanings derived from those interactions. Symbolic interaction, formulated by Blumer (1969), consists of three core tenets:

1. action depends on meaning;

2. different people assign different meanings (labels) to things; and

3. such meanings are not static.

Symbolic interaction is sometimes criticized for prioritizing interactions between individuals. This study is concerned with individual experiences; symbolic interaction helps to interpret students' narratives and meaning-making derived from those experiences.

I used this theory to help interpret students' understanding of exclusionary discipline and reintegration into the expelling district. As Chapter 3 lays out in more detail, symbolic interaction also sheds light on the significant (and long-lasting) impact on students' academic outcomes and social development of exchanges within institutional structures.

Qualitative Study

This study provides rich student accounts of exclusionary school discipline policies and student reentry. Student narratives present descriptive accounts of exclusionary discipline measures and outcomes. I used student interviews, document analysis, and classroom/school observations to examine exclusion as a punishment with far-reaching consequences.

I selected 15 previously excluded students enrolled in a variety of school settings (e.g., comprehensive high school, charter school, and alternative school). As time passed, some of the students opted to drop out of the study, relocated, or were referred to other school sites. The final sample included eight students, of which seven experienced expulsion. Each had, following an expulsion, ultimately enrolled in a specific school (within the expelling district) decided upon in collaboration with district personnel. I used interviews to investigate students' paths from expulsion/suspension to reentry. Documenting students' experiences entails an understanding of contextual factors. For this reason, I shadowed students at school and in social settings. Document analysis addressed district and school discipline policy, reports of students' (mis)behavior, individual students' discipline histories, and their academic progress through high school (non)completion. I triangulated data from school documents with interviews and observations. In brief, the methods used to conduct this study provide real accounts of young people who return to a school system that once banished them entirely.

<u>Mapping the Dissertation</u>

In this chapter, I presented a context and overview of current disciplinary trends and research, laying out how current school discipline measures have produced significantly high numbers of expulsions and suspensions meted out to students (especially low-income Students of Color). I presented research on expulsions, suspension, and other forms of punishment schools use to address student misconduct and examined efforts to curb current discipline measures at federal, state, and local levels. I also shed light on how community organizations, legislators, and legal scholars are advancing research to provide a more complete account of expulsion and suspension. Lastly, I argued for a comprehensive account of school discipline that includes an examination of the interactive and complex factors associated with student reentry.

Chapter Two is divided into two sections. First, I provide an extensive review of empirical studies on exclusionary discipline. This review of the literature will examine how exclusionary punishment, in a zero tolerance context, has shaped the discipline landscape. The second section of Chapter Two includes a discussion about youth reentry; the reentry of minors into their communities following confinement. While none of my respondents were incarcerated, at the time of this study (though some had been in juvenile hall as an outcome of their school-based offense), youth reentry literature addresses school reentry as part of its subject. The academic and social challenges formerly incarcerated minors encounter during this critical transition resemble those students experienced. I access this literature because a narrow body of research accounts for the experiences of students like my respondents. Chapter Three focuses on the theoretical framework and includes the methodological approach used to conduct this study. I discuss how I identified and recruited students, describe how I collected and analyzed data and also reveal some of the difficulties in conducting this type of research. Chapter Four introduces the study participants to the reader and includes accounts of why students were expelled/suspended and explore why students returned to school and the requirements they had to complete to be eligible for reinstatement. The last section describes students' school enrollment during and after expulsion/suspension. The purpose of this chapter is to detail participants' schooling experiences, family life, and circumstances related to their dismissal from school; the chapter provides a glimpse into the lives of the eight study participants.

Chapters Five and Six present the findings and analysis. They address how students made sense of their exclusion from and return to school and how they navigated new educational settings. Chapter Five presents the social challenges associated with student reentry and begins to construct and document the dynamics associated with exclusion and reinstatement as informed

by students' narratives. Chapter Six details how social exchanges students experience inform and influence their relationship to their school environment and academic development. I explore students' perspectives and provide detailed accounts of their transitions, ensuring that student narratives are the primary source detailing the reentry process. The end of each of these chapters provides a cross-case analysis of students' narratives. Each focuses on specific themes that emerged from students' stories. Taken together, they illuminate the subtle academic, social, and personal consequences of both expulsion and suspension. Chapter Seven provides analysis based on a broad view of the data and develops implications for this study. I analyze the complex outcomes of exclusionary discipline measures, the challenges and opportunities returning students experienced, and how schools might support students during and after expulsion. With specific policy proposals for reform, I hope this conclusion will aid policy makers, educators, parents, and advocates to work toward student discipline policies that promote safe and secure learning environments to serve the needs of every student.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines the difficult process encountered by previously expelled and suspended youth. Resuming one's education and recovering from exclusionary discipline is a tough task that is often compounded by labels, educational challenges, and, sometimes, criminal records. In this chapter, I review empirical studies of exclusionary measures and youth reentry, specifically focusing on their impact on students. The overarching goal of this chapter is to show readers that a wealth of research demonstrates that current school discipline policies and practices have resulted in negative outcomes for students disciplined through exclusion. Understanding current literature is important to build a case for developing more productive and common-sense approaches to school discipline, and for developing a system of support for students returning from expulsion.

Research solidly demonstrates a serious problem with exclusionary discipline. Schools increasingly purge students, often denying them of rich educational opportunities, adequate resources, and positive outcomes. The literature review is divided into two parts. Part one presents what we know about suspension and expulsion within a zero-tolerance context. The purpose of this section is to document how these exclusionary tools have been altered by zero tolerance and to shed light on concerns about their use. The second part of this review presents research on youth reentry. Juvenile justice literature is important to this study because it provides a glimpse into the critical transitions experienced by reentering youth. I draw from juvenile justice studies because youth reentry experiences overlap with those of expelled students seeking to reintegrate into mainstream schools.

Legal scholars have taken the lead in conducting qualitative analysis of processes related to youth returning to their communities upon being released from confinement and those who have experienced expulsion, whereas education research tends to center on statistical analysis. Scholarly works that include student narratives and insight present experiences of students in "last chance" type alternative schools (see Brown, 2007; Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Malagón, 2010). This literature review illustrates a critical need for a study such as this one, which identifies factors that contribute to student reentry and provides firsthand accounts of those who have intimately experienced exclusion and school reentry—the students themselves.

Part I: Suspension and Expulsion at a Glance: What We Know

Prevalence

Almost four decades ago, legal scholar Mark Yudof (1975) researched reasons for and solutions to the disproportionate exclusion of black students from public schools. Yudof expressed concern over the magnitude of punishment imposed on students of color. Black students were suspended and/or expelled at rates almost twice their enrollment. Yudof declared that schools have yet to learn how to deal with behavior problems, "and their only response is the age-old one: banishment from the institution" (Yudof, 1975, p. 380). As troubling as it may seem, Yudof's concerns continue to have relevance in current conversations and research about suspension and expulsion.The U.S. Department of Education's 2009-10 Civil Rights Data Collection reveals that over 3.7 million students faced out-of-school suspension while an estimated 72,000 were expelled. In California, 400,000 students were removed from classrooms at least once during the 2009–10 school year. Most recently, the California Department of Education (CDE) announced a 20 percent decrease in the number of students expelled and a 15.2 percent drop in the number of suspended students during the 2013-14 school year (California

Department of Education, January 2015). According to the CDE, this is the second year in a row with declines in both areas. The decline is great news, but raw numbers indicate that over 329,000 students were suspended and 8,200 expelled during the 2012–13 school year. These figures do not capture the outcomes associated with removal from school. Studies conducted within the last decade (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Losen, 2011; Losen, Martinez & Gillespie, 2012) reveal that poor students of color, particularly males, continue to receive harsher punishment than their white classmates.

Research also reveals the stark differences in the frequency and severity of punishment meted out to students of color in comparison to their white classmates (see Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Losen, 2011; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). A second key finding is that suspension and expulsion contribute to school abandonment (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000; Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2013; Bowditch, 1993; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Fine, 1991; Orfield, 2004; Rumberger, 2001, 2004; Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Collectively, research findings document a pathway followed disproportionately by young men of color: from suspension to dropping out of school. Analysis of pre- and post-zero-tolerance expulsion rates reveals significant changes in expulsion recommendations (Morrison & Skiba, 2001).

Morrison and Skiba (2001) note that prior to zero tolerance, recommendation for expulsion did not always result in an expulsion. Their analysis also concluded that students punished by expulsion tended to have poor academic performance and were not necessarily students who posed a serious threat to the school environment. The authors attribute soaring expulsion rates to the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act (1994), and assert that expulsion

appears to place students at risk for school failure and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Morrison & Skiba, 2001). Despite the known negative outcomes associated with suspension and expulsion, especially in a zero-tolerance context, these procedures are supported by key decision-makers in education.

Disparate Impact: The Overrepresentation of Poor Students of Color

Racial disparities in disciplinary action are part of a larger discourse that examines racial and socioeconomic biases in educational opportunity along with issues such as tracking (Oakes, 1985) and lack of resources (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991). The discrepant application of exclusionary school discipline measures on students of color has been documented for decades (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). McFadden, Marsh, Price, and Hwang (1992) documented differentiated discipline measures applied to particular students after a referral was made through an analysis of 4,391 discipline files representing grades K–12. Findings from this study reveal racial disparities in both the referral process and selected discipline measures. Black students received more referrals (36.6 percent) than would be expected for their school population (22 percent). White pupils comprised over half of the schools' population (57.9 percent) but only accounted for 46.1 percent of disciplinary referrals. White students had higher rates of in-school suspension (59.1 percent) and lower percentages of both corporal punishment (33.1 percent) and out-of-school suspension (35.0 percent) while their black counterparts accounted for higher rates of corporal punishment (54.1 percent) and out-of-school suspension (43.9 percent) and had lower rates of in-school suspension (McFadden et al., 1992). Hispanic students had a lower referral frequency (15.8 percent) than expected for their overall group (18 percent). Although the study drew attention to harsher punishment applied to black students, the authors did not investigate and explain causes for variances in referral rates (McFadden et al., 1992).

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The authors suggest "some form of bias" rather than student conduct accounts for the type of punishment meted out to African American students and requires further exploration (McFadden et al., 1992, p. 144). Findings also indicated that student punishment did not curb undesirable behaviors; there was a high recidivism rate, with only 31 percent of students grouped as one-time offenders. McFadden et al. argue that careful examination of teachers' actions is warranted to ensure their actions are not unintentionally (or deliberately) contributing to student misconduct. According to Nichols, Ludwin, and Iadicola (1999), being young, male, working-class, and minority "serves as a four-fold precipitator of possible disciplinary inequity in the public school setting" (p. 54).

The causes for repeat offenses and continual "offenders" have also gained attention in school discipline research. The notion that disciplined students are labeled and targeted is associated with the reconceptualization of students as troublemakers undeserving of school resources (Bowditch, 1993). McFadden and colleagues also suggest that disproportionality begins in the classroom through the use of referral, creating a vicious cycle for students. Classroom management (or lack thereof) was also associated with the high incidence of disciplinary problems (Nichols et al., 1999). As evidence for this claim, the authors present data indicating that four teachers were responsible for 75–80 percent of the discipline referrals in a particular school. Moreover, Skiba (2001) suggests exclusion from school is a two-step process in which "racial disparities in discipline . . . could originate at either the classroom or the office level, or both" (p. 180). Discipline referral studies suggest that teachers' perceptions of students influence referral rates, documented infraction, and punishment. It is critical, then, to provide teachers, chief decision-makers, and all stakeholders, for that matter, with unequivocal research

that points to the weaknesses and negative outcomes resulting from zero tolerance. The effectiveness of zero tolerance is questionable, but its outcomes are not.

More recent innovative school discipline research includes never before used data sets. Findings indicate the continued overrepresentation of students of color in discipline rates, and also shed light onto additional areas of concern, including dropping out and involvement with law enforcement. Though areas have been researched in the past, recent studies include the use of broader data sets.

It is often difficult to track students once they have been removed from school, but a recent study in Texas approached the problem from a different angle by analyzing multidimensional longitudinal data on student exclusion. A report[9] by the Council of State Governments Justice Center, in partnership with Texas A&M University, tracked approximately one million seventh graders for six years. "Breaking Schools' Rules" has three major findings: (1) an over-reliance on suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement to address student behavior; (2) the disproportionate impact of such practices on minority students and students with disabilities; and (3) the increased risk of juvenile justice involvement for students who are suspended or expelled (Fabelo et al., 2011).

Data indicate that 60 percent of the students were removed from class at least once and 15 percent had 11 or more suspensions or expulsions between seventh and 12th grade. It is important to note that only 3 percent of these disciplinary actions were in response to conduct for which suspension or expulsion is required by state law.

African American students were 31 percent more likely to receive discretionary discipline compared to their white and Latino classmates. One of the most disturbing findings is

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[9] The report "Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement" will be referred to as "Breaking Schools' Rules" going forward.

that students expelled and suspended for subjective violations were nearly three times more likely to come into contact with law enforcement within the subsequent academic year, after controlling for school and individual student characteristics. Discipline practices have consequences beyond school grounds and increase the likelihood that a student will have a criminal record. This is troubling because research suggests that removal from school, school-based arrests, and contact with the juvenile justice system have negative social, educational, psychological, and future outcomes for students (Sweeten, December 2006; Holman & Ziedenberg, 2006). Sweeten (December 2006) found that a student arrested in school is twice as likely to drop out, and four times as likely to drop out if the student appears in court.

"Breaking Schools' Rules" (2011) is a groundbreaking study for a number of reasons. As outlined in the executive summary:

- The study examined individual school records and school campus data pertaining to all seventh-grade public school students in Texas in 2000, 2001, and 2002.
- The analysis of each grade's student records covered at least a six-year period, creating a statewide longitudinal study.
- Access to the state juvenile justice database allowed the researchers to learn about the school disciplinary history of youth who had juvenile records.
- The study group size and rich data sets from the education and juvenile justice systems made it possible to conduct multivariate analyses. Using this approach, the researchers could control for more than 80 variables, effectively isolating the impact that independent factors had on the likelihood of a student's being suspended and expelled, and on the relationship between these disciplinary actions and a student's academic performance or juvenile justice involvement.

Zero-tolerance opponents represent a broad base that includes education scholars, health practitioners, advocacy groups, and the legal community. We can agree that students deserve to be in safe learning environments. We also can agree that keeping kids safe may require schools to take appropriate disciplinary actions from time to time. Our public school system is facing a

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discipline crisis in which students face harsh discipline for both minor and major infractions. Legal scholars, researchers, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders insist that zero-tolerance policies are ineffective and inefficient, and fail to make schools safer; instead, these policies push students out of schools, decreasing educational and social opportunities for youth. The consequences of exclusionary school discipline have come under increased scrutiny. As noted in "Breaking Schools' Rules," removal from school increases the likelihood of school abandonment and legal troubles.

(Dis)Engagement From School

According to the Center for Civil Rights Remedies, "Policymakers have been reluctant to change this harsh approach to school discipline, in part because the social costs have been hidden and in part because effective alternatives have taken time to develop" (2013). In April 2013, two major reports about exclusionary discipline were released, both of which were presented at Congressional briefings. The first report, "Closing the School Discipline Gap: Research to Practice" highlights 16 studies that extend and corroborate earlier research about the growing use of punitive measures and effective alternatives. The second report, "Out of School and Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools," co-authored by Daniel Losen and Tia Elena Martinez, is a national report on secondary school suspension. These reports, and the research that they draw upon, discredit the notion that punitive disciplinary measures are needed to ensure school safety.

In an eight-year longitudinal study tracking 181,897 ninth graders in the State of Florida, Balfanz, Byrnes, and Fox (2013) found that being suspended or expelled from school predicts school dropout. Twenty-seven percent of that cohort was suspended at least one time in ninth grade. It was also found that being suspended once in ninth grade was associated with a 32

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percent risk of dropping out in comparison to a 16 percent risk faced by non-suspended students. For students who were suspended twice in ninth grade, the likelihood of dropping out increased by 42 percent. Most students who were suspended experienced attendance and academic challenges. Balfanz et al. (2013) assert that efforts to reduce exclusion should be coupled with ways to boost attendance and academic performance. Time outside of class was also linked to risky behaviors, underscoring the importance of attendance initiatives to that keep students in school. The interactions between missed days in school and other factors reveal an increased chance of troubled situations.

Finn and Servoss (2013) merged data from three national surveys to address questions about school security measures, suspension rates, and student misbehavior. It was found that out-of-school suspensions were implemented at a higher rate in schools within higher-crime neighborhoods. The authors suggest that suspended students are placed in environments that are counterproductive to positive educational or social outcomes. Pushing students out of school and into unsafe neighborhoods was noted as an unintended consequence of out-of-school suspension and increased use of high-security measures.

Losen and Martinez (2013) used U.S. Department of Education data on over 26,000 U.S. middle and high schools. "Out of School and Off Track" provides detailed data from 20 U.S. cities, and, using the civil rights data collection (2009–10), disaggregates suspension rates in secondary schools by race, gender, English Learner, and disability status. This study found that over two million secondary students, or one in nine, were suspended during the 2009–10 academic year. Research shows that being suspended even once in ninth grade is associated with a 32 percent risk of dropping out, and twice that of non-suspended students. This comprehensive study also found "hot spot" schools (schools where 25 percent or more of students are

suspended) and numerous low-suspending schools where no group has above a 10 percent suspension rate. The authors conclude that, in many districts, effective options exist.

Losen and Martinez's study complements earlier research about suspension, repeat suspensions, and school completion. For instance, Raffaele-Mendez's (2003) longitudinal study examined student demographics and investigated possible predictors for suspension rates and their impact on students' future academic success and school completion. According to study findings, out-of-school suspension in the primary and middle grades predicts further suspensions, and contributes to school failure and grade retention. Poor African American males in special education were suspended at a much higher frequency than expected for their overall enrollment. Raffaele-Mendez observed that previous suspensions predicted further exclusion for most students and concluded, "suspension does not teach most suspended students appropriate behavior" (p. 28). Moreover, separation from school may increase the risk of school disengagement. Raffaele-Mendez's work provided an initial discussion about longstanding outcomes associated with removal from school and has catapulted further exploration into the latent effects of exclusionary discipline practices. These studies document a pattern of repeated suspension and a higher incidence of school abandonment for students punished through removal from school. With such a high number of expelled and suspended youth, there is a need to provide educational options for removed students. The need to keep students connected to schooling is of utmost importance given the negative outcomes resulting from missed time in school.

Educational Losses and Alternative Placements

Out-of-school suspension and expulsion has created a high demand for alternative education programs, especially in states where such placements are mandatory. A recent report

on national estimates on alternative education placements indicates that 646,500 students were enrolled in alternative schools and programs for at-risk students within public school districts during the 2007–08 school year (Carver, Lewis & Tice, 2010). Approximately 87,000 students attended alternative schools and programs administered by another entity. As noted in the previous chapter, alternative education placements are not required in all states and those that exist are questionable.

Vanderhaar, Petrosko, and Muñoz's (2013) longitudinal investigation examined several factors to determine how placement in alternative settings between grades three and 12 is associated with risk of future confinement in juvenile detention centers. Results indicate that approximately one in 10 students entering third grade were placed in a disciplinary alternative school by their senior year (12th grade). Research was conducted in a district with a policy of no expulsions. As in earlier studies, marked racial differences were present. Thirteen and 4 percent of African American and white students, respectively, experienced placement in an alternative setting. Seventh grade appeared to have the highest risk of placement in disciplinary alternative schools, with a slight decline in ninth grade followed by a drop in 11th and 12th grades; the authors attribute this dip to a greater incidence of dropout.

Several factors such as special education status, school mobility, grade retention, race, and out-of-school suspension were related to the likelihood of being placed in an alternative school. Of students placed in such settings, half of elementary school students and 43 percent of middle school students experienced subsequent detainment in juvenile detention centers within less than four years and within less than two years, respectively. Moreover, there was a high incidence of reentry into alternative settings, also referred to as the "cyclical nature" of such placements. According to the authors, the relationships between out-of-school suspension,

placement in disciplinary schools, and subsequent detainment in juvenile centers call into the question the efficacy of a system that uses out-of-school suspensions and disciplinary alternative schools to reduce delinquency and provide support for students deemed unruly (Vanderhaar et al., 2013). Among the recommendations for further research offered by the authors is the qualitative investigation of a student's experiences before, during, and after placement. This dissertation study addresses this particular gap in research.

It is unclear whether alternative schools meet the academic and social needs of students placed in them. There are no requirements to examine post-expulsion paths of students. Consequently, little is known about efforts to educate this student population. Kennedy-Lewis (2012) initiated this conversation by examining teachers' practices and student experiences in an alternative school setting in a California community day school (CDS).[10] The author implemented a case study approach and a pastoral care framework that "[identifies] how schools can meet the needs that students have . . . through casework, curriculum, and classroom management" (p. 6). Teachers' success in CDSs is dependent on their ability to implement all three areas. The overall assessment of this particular school is that teachers' practices were not aligned with the challenges of the specific school context and student population.

Kennedy-Lewis (2012) explains that CDS teachers do not receive special training and therefore need access to professional development designed for CDSs to help them develop and implement effective classroom practices. Classroom management, curriculum, and casework reinforced each other, in the particular school studied. Unlike most professional development, which addresses one area, CDS teachers can benefit from training that accounts for all three

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[10] In California, legislation has been passed that dictates the use of exclusionary discipline and provides for the placement of expelled students in community day schools. California Assembly Bill 922 (AB922) became law in 1996. California Education Code Sections 48660–48667 describe curricular, structural, and funding requirements for community day schools (California Department of Education, October 2012). Additional sections, such as 17285 and 17292.5, have information related to community day schools.

areas simultaneously. Building relationships and establishing rapport was not sufficient for teachers, especially when weak curriculum development and delivery and ineffective classroom management surfaced.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Suspension, Expulsion, and the Criminal Justice System

Legal scholars and advocacy groups have been at the forefront of qualitative studies that examine the growing use of law enforcement in school disturbances and the criminalization of school-based offenses—a phenomenon that policy advocates along with legal and education scholars have termed the school-to-prison pipeline and schoolhouse-to-jailhouse track[11] (Browne, 2003, 2005; Wald & Losen, 2003). Youth referred to law enforcement may experience additional negative long-term consequences: A criminal record may resurface as they transition into higher education or the workplace. The school-to-prison pipeline is viewed as a path that criminalizes rather than educates students.

Research shows connections between exclusionary discipline, referrals to law enforcement, dropping out, and subsequent involvement with the juvenile courts (Aull, 2012; Browne, 2005; Cass & Curry, 2007; Noguera, 2003). The school-to-prison pipeline is initiated when school administrators contact law enforcement to handle school-based offenses.

Legal scholar Judith Browne argues that an inflexible zero-tolerance approach has derailed the educational process, modifying schools into "'holding facilities' [filled] with law enforcement professionals . . . [wrapped] in security procedures that make major airports seem almost benign" (Browne, 2003, p. 9). Browne's work provides an initial examination of the schoolhouse-to-jailhouse track and the consequences faced by students in and out of school long before referrals to law enforcement were recorded nationally. Browne studied zero-tolerance

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[11] The former and latter terms will be used interchangeably in this paper.

policies in Miami-Dade, Palm Beach, Baltimore, and Houston public schools and found that

arrests for nonviolent behaviors were commonplace. In Miami-Dade, Florida's largest school

district, student arrests nearly tripled between 1999 and 2001 from 820 to 2,435 arrests. Of those,

the top three offenses were drug violations (16 percent), "miscellaneous" (28 percent) offenses,

and simple assaults (29 percent) (Browne, 2003).

"Arresting Development"(2006), a collaboration between The Advancement Project, The

Florida State Conference NAACP and The NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund indicates

that arrests by district police rose 11 percent between 1999 and 2001, resulting in 1,286 arrests in

Palm Beach County. African American students account for 30 percent of the school population

and 65 percent of school arrests. Despite efforts to reduce student arrests, Florida referred 26,990

school offenses to the Florida Department of Justice during the 2004–05 school year

(Advancement Project et al., 2006). Over three-quarters (76 percent) of the referrals were for

offenses such as disorderly conduct, trespassing, and schoolyard fights. Over 441,600 out-of-

school suspensions were meted out the same academic year. Florida's stance on juvenile justice

is troubling because Florida is one of several states in which juvenile records are considered in

adult sentencing. The connections between exclusionary discipline and the criminal justice

system and life outcomes suggest a negative pattern.

Findings from Shollenberger's (2013) review of the National Longitudinal Survey of

Youth 1997 are consistent with previous research indicating, "suspension has become a common

feature of the U.S. schooling experience" (p. 2). Key findings indicate a strong correlation

between suspension and negative educational and juvenile justice outcomes. For instance, in

terms of suspended and non-suspended students, the former are less likely to obtain a high school

diploma and to obtain a bachelor's degree by their late 20s, but they are more likely to be

arrested and confined to a correctional facility in comparison to their non-suspended peers. Shollenberger notes that racial disparities in suspension persist and cannot be attributed to student behavior.

Shollenberger (2013) also notes that among "boys suspended for 10 total days or more, less than half had obtained a high school diploma by their late 20s; more than three in four had been arrested; and more than one in three had been sentenced to confinement" (p. 2). The author suggests that data should encourage policymakers to find alternatives to suspension while future research should consider the possibility of a causal relationship between suspension and subsequent outcomes with a focus on missed instructional time, reduced connectedness to school, and labeling. An investigation into connectedness found that academic disengagement triggered aggressive behaviors and delinquency (Toldson, 2013). The association between school infractions and involvement with law enforcement continues to be a motivation to disrupt the criminalization of school-related offenses and removal of students from classrooms nationwide.

Student Reentry and Institutional Practices

In examinig re-enrollment challenges of adjudicated youth with school-based infractions, Feierman, Levick, and Mody (2009/10) note that the "pipeline" is not one-directional, yet most research places emphasis on increased rates of disciplinary infractions, and less attention has been paid to challenges faced by reentering students, specifically youth who seek to attend public schools in their communities. As Feierman et al. (2009/10) argue, "impediments to re-entry magnify the effects of the school-to-prison pipeline; they heighten the likelihood that children will find themselves returning to the justice system they just exited" (p. 1116). Of the many obstacles that can decrease successful reentry, Feierman and colleagues indicate that schools may be hesitant to admit students for reasons ranging from students posing a safety threat to

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worries that incoming students will perform poorly on standardized tests. Clerical errors add to difficulties of reenrollment.

Enrollment documents may be incomplete or late in arriving to a student's new placement. Credits completed while in custody may not be transferable. Some schools, the authors found, denied mid-year reenrollment. These circumstances make it difficult for youth to reenroll in school and may push them to drop out. This particular article was the most closely aligned with my study findings, but it differed in that it provided a legal perspective. For instance, Feierman and colleagues provide a discussion on due process for expelled youth.

The authors suggest that the courts have deemed that education is not a "right"; therefore, procedural safeguards and due process protection require a balance of individual and community interests. Procedural due process protects students from automatically being denied enrollment by granting them the opportunity for a hearing, but the clause does not give students the right to enroll in school (Feierman et al., 2009/2010). In essence, due process for reentering youth seems to be more of a formality than a guarantee.

In addition to procedural changes, the authors recommend amending the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Reentering youth frequently experience academic difficulties, and school officials are hesitant to enroll them since their percentage of "proficient" students will decrease. Feierman and colleagues assert that schools exclude students via expulsion or refuse enrollment in order to avoid penalties associated with unmet adequate yearly progress (AYP). Echoing research findings discussed in previous sections, Feierman et al. indicate that detained youth lose valuable time in school or receive a lower-quality education in juvenile detention centers. The obstacles faced by students along with the role of standardized testing divert reentering youth from traditional school settings. Feierman and colleagues assert that changes to No Child Left

Behind and state policies can counteract exclusion tied to incentives and deal with other negative school outcomes.

Feierman et al. do not provide a comprehensive discussion of state statutes but list promising models that include, but are not limited to, transition planning while the youth is in custody, communication and collaboration between stakeholders, and inter-agency transition teams to facilitate enrollment and placements in appropriate educational settings. Strong academic programs in juvenile detention centers would also facilitate the transition for youth and would likely help reduce school abandonment. Florida's statutes require standards of education appropriate for a smooth transition back to school. The home school district holds the responsibility of maintaining academic records for students while they are in confinement and must count credits completed during detention. A coordinator position also exists to address reentry issues and serve as a liaison between the juvenile justice system, home school boards, and other stakeholders and decision-makers. Regulations in West Virginia also address education standards and hold home school districts accountable for student records. Additionally, state regulations require an "aftercare plan" for returning students. The coordinated efforts of several stakeholders can ease the transition from placement to home and school.

To summarize, school discipline literature reveals how suspension and expulsion negatively impact thousands of school-aged children nationwide. Whether motivated by perceptions, actual behaviors, or ambiguous definitions, racial disproportionality is evident when examining suspension, expulsion, and school-based arrests. Data suggest that zero-tolerance policies and procedures have little impact on school safety. Instead, their implementation is responsible for the removal of an unprecedented number of students from school grounds. School discipline literature documents how zero tolerance has altered exclusion practices and is

responsible for the criminalization of students. Research suggests that once students are removed from school they are at higher risk of further discipline challenges and disengagement from school, including complete school abandonment. But what happens to those students who are "invited" back to school? How do they experience reentry? Do they have an easy transition? Scarce data exist on this topic.

Post-detainment experiences of juveniles describe multiple (and often simultaneous) events associated with youth reentry and help us think about exclusionary discipline not just as a reactive remedy with immediate consequences but also as one with long-term consequences. Specifically, youth reentry research addresses the different stages and respective challenges that shape the journeys of adolescents attempting to reintegrate into their communities, families, and schools.

Part II: Youth Reentry

A Difficult but Possible Transition

Studies such as "Breaking Schools' Rules" incorporate data on juvenile records to solidify the links between school discipline and the juvenile justice system, and Feierman et al. (2009/2010) detail how reenrollment in comprehensive high schools is complicated for students with juvenile records. Because qualitative research about students' post-exclusion experiences through high school completion has been overlooked in educational research, I draw on studies of post-detainment of youth to gain initial insight into this phenomenon and to fill some existing gaps in school discipline research. Robert G. Schwartz, Director of the Juvenile Law Center (2009), notes that there is federal policy on school exclusion but no federal statute on school reentry. States like California where expelled students are guaranteed enrollment in an educational setting and the opportunity for readmission, however, do not guarantee transitional

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services to facilitate successful student reentry. Youth and prisoner reentry literature indicates that reintegration into schools and communities is difficult but not impossible. With the right transitional support in place, individuals returning from confinement have a greater chance of achieving full integration.

Prisoner reentry research reveals the complexities and multidimensionality of reentry that shape individual success or failure (Visher & Travis, 2003). Youth and young adults who have spent approximately one-third of their lives in confinement are less likely to hold a high school diploma, to have ever held a job, or to have lived on their own (Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004).[12] The same youth often return to communities distressed by poverty, crime, and scarce resources, raising policy questions regarding the magnitude of youth reentry challenges. While much has been said about adult reentry, less is known about positive transitions of juveniles and young adults.

Concerned about the cyclical removal and return of large numbers of young people, several scholars (see Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Feierman, Levick, & Mody, 2009; Mears & Travis, 2004; Snyder, 2004; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004; Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004; Sullivan, 2004) studied the challenges of reentry faced by juveniles, their families, and their communities. The Youth Reentry Roundtable recognized that psychological development in adolescence differs markedly from that of adults experiencing reentry. Unfortunately, the "boundary typically drawn between juvenile and criminal justice systems obscures the fact that individuals do not, from a developmental perspective, suddenly become adults" by virtue of their chronological age or their transfer or prosecution in the criminal justice system (Mears & Travis,

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[12] Nellis and Wayman (2009) note that youth adjudicated in juvenile court are assigned to a variety of placements including boot camps, residential treatment centers, training schools, state juvenile correctional facilities, and group homes. The authors use "out-of-home" placements to include all such placements.

2004, p. 3). Confinement can add challenges to an already difficult phase. Research provides a glimpse of the challenges faced by youth returning home after confinement. Their experiences reveal the difficulties of transitioning back home to their families and communities.

Roundtable findings continue to play a significant role in how to best support reentering youth. Similar to the study on alternative education placement, the juvenile justice field has identified pre-release planning, active case management, and access to service as promising practices for reentering youth (Nellis & Wayman, 2009). According to reentry theory, when offered support and resources, "juveniles can be discharged from secure placement and reintegrated back to family residences" in order to be socially included and partake in meaningful education and employment (Nellis & Wayman, 2009, p. 25).

An Empirical Portrait of Reentering Youth

Snyder (2004) argues that offending youth should be targets of reentry endeavors for a couple of reasons. First, because of past actions, youth are perceived as a threat to public safety and are less likely to make a successful transition back into their home communities. Second, it is assumed that previous confinement may hinder their ability to transition and function in their communities. Snyder describes the difficulty in providing an exact portrait of reentering youth. According to Snyder, the Bureau of Justice Statistics' (BJS) Annual Survey of Jails provides very limited information on juveniles in custody but none on released juveniles. Snyder encourages researchers to expand this area of inquiry to include the scope of the problem and current evidence-based treatments.

According to Steinberg et al., psychosocial capacities are influenced by the context or domains in which development takes place (e.g., community, school, and home). Altschuler and Brash (2004) describe seven domains that play a significant role in the adjustment processes of

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released youth. The domains include family and living arrangements, peer groups, employment, substance abuse, health, leisure/recreation time, and education. Each domain presents opportunities and challenges. Of importance to this dissertation is a discussion on school systems and education. Altschuler and Brash argue that zero-tolerance policies limit successful reentry by "making it difficult, if not impossible, to admit or readmit juvenile offenders" (p.81). Confined youth may face greater reentry challenges as an outcome of negative perceptions held by institutional agents (e.g., school administrators, school board, teachers, etc.).

Sullivan (2004) describes the youth reentry process and presents contextual factors that influence this experience. As Sullivan explains, because schooling is "sequentially structured . . . and age-graded, disruptions resulting from secure confinement are often severe" (p. 60). This is especially true for previously detained youth attempting to finish a secondary education. More serious, perhaps, is the dual challenge faced by these young people: readmission into school and meeting educational (grade-level) expectations. Sullivan describes a process of "accumulating educational disadvantage," which intensifies preexisting academic difficulties (p. 61). This process begins with arrest, disruptions (due to court appearances), followed by potential school removal or transfers. Confined adolescents are more likely to have a history of school discipline and may be stigmatized once released (Sullivan, 2004).

Sullivan (2004) suggests the developmental patterns of disadvantaged communities where most committed youth are drawn from are far different from other communities providing fewer resources, which poses barriers to successful reentry. Social context and youths' developmental stage may hinder the transition and subsequent progress. Transferring into a new school (new context) and being with a new group of peers may increase the risk of further problems.

Sullivan asserts youth reentry is interwoven " . . . with developmental transitions that are more rigidly sequenced" than those in adulthood (p. 67). For youth, the reentry process may be far more complex than that experienced by adults; youth are transitioning back into their communities, back into school, and into adulthood. Youth reentry entails complex needs that require further exploration.

Educational challenges surface as youth attempt to reenroll in school, but returning to school should continue to be a high priority for reentering youth. According to a report by the Youth Reentry Task Force, attendance at school is a strong protective factor against delinquency for reentering youth (Nellis & Wayman, 2009). School attendees are less likely to commit a crime in the short and long term. The authors note that despite strong connections between school (dis)engagement and delinquency, some schools continue to place obstacles to reenrollment for those viewed as "difficult to manage" or low-performing. Along the same lines of research mentioned in previous sections, the authors indicate that some schools do not count courses completed in detention.

What Works? Program Effectiveness and Youth Reentry

Spencer and Jones-Walker (2004) note that while sociologists, psychologists, and social workers have conducted extensive research on the juvenile justice system, less attention has been paid to interventions and services accessible to reentering youth. Previous research emphasized recidivism rates rather than whether (or when) a juvenile makes a successful transition into other contexts (e.g., school, peer group, community, etc.). Juvenile reentry literature recognizes that reintegration outcomes are influenced by contextual factors such as community, school, and family (Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004). Comprehensive interventions with a dual focus (on youth *and* the settings they will return to) are more effective.

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Community-based interventions that meet the specific needs of reentering youth can also decrease the continuation of criminal activity. Having transitional support systems in place may also facilitate school reenrollment and/or job training. Transition services for youth are provided in aftercare programs that tend to resemble adult parole supervision and fail to recognize the unique needs and challenges of youth. Spencer and Jones-Walker (2004) suggest that effective intervention programs should be modeled after a comprehensive aftercare program with transitional services that include, but are not limited to, the following:

1.   Practice new prosocial behaviors in increasingly difficult situations and reward improved competencies;
2.   Train significant others, such as family and friends, to provide reinforcement for prosocial behaviors; and
3.   Provide booster sessions to offenders after they have completed the formal phase of treatment.

(Gendreau, 1996, p. 125, cited in Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004, p. 92)

Pre-release planning and aftercare models that address educational, employment/skills training, counseling, and cognitive-behavioral needs can lead to post-release success. Comprehensive case management that provides youth with skills and resources proves to be most effective (Nellis & Wayman, 2009). According to Nellis and Wayman (2009), pre-release planning ("discharge planning") allows the case manager and youth to locate resources to assist with educational placements and public benefits available, such as health insurance, for reentering youth. Nellis and Wayman (2009) share that the Intensive Aftercare Program (IAP) requires services over three stages: pre-release/institutional planning, a reentry preparation stage, and post-discharge community-based services. Ideally, these services would also account for cultural and gender differences. Effective programs can decrease risk factors, serve as a safety net for youth returning to less than ideal contexts, and deter further criminal activity. It is

suggested that planning over three distinct phases can reduce overall reentry barriers and increase stability for reentering youth.

According to Mears and Travis (2004), effective youth reentry requires that policymakers, practitioners, and the research community have a clear course of action that accounts for community and family resources when thinking about how to develop interventions that cater to adolescent needs. Given what we know about suspension and expulsion and the complexity of juvenile reentry, the research community must advance studies to include successful school reentry experiences.

Youth reentry literature describes many factors associated with successful transitions (e.g., positive home environment, supportive school environment, good skill set, etc.) and underscores the complexities involved in the transition from a juvenile detention center back home. Court appearances, reacquainting oneself with the community, and school reenrollment are all part of the reentry process. As Nellis and Wayman (2009) note, "youth should not be expected to pick up where they left off . . . " (p. 40). This is also true of expelled students. Similar to health professionals concerned about the impact of zero tolerance, youth reentry scholars underscore the importance of including youth development when creating systems of support for reentering populations. Although the paths are not identical, youth reentry literature provides a comprehensive discussion on the different factors affecting reentry at multiple stages and provides direction on service components that can lead to successful reenrollment and school completion.

Like reentering youth, study participants undergo a series of complex transitions resulting from exclusionary discipline measures: pre-expulsion/suspension, expulsion/suspension, reinstatement, and reenrollment. These stages are affected by social, familial, and individual

interactions as well as school policies and institutional practices. Youth reentry, then, is a first step to understanding how young people navigate school systems, address disruptions in their education, and cope with arising barriers during reentry. Youth reentry literature also hints at ways to develop sound discipline policies. Youth reentry literature helps us to begin to think about effective systems of support that address the social, academic, and developmental needs of returning students.

Together, this literature provided a reference point that allowed me to examine how students reintegrate after suspension and expulsion and how multiple factors and social context shape the success or failure of these students. In this study, I sort out the explicit punishments meted out to students (e.g., suspension and expulsion) and unravel circumstances and hidden penalties that have a significant impact on student reentry. Youth reentry literature indicates that reentry itself is intertwined with factors and circumstances in and out of school. Like reentering juveniles, previously expelled and suspended youth must address a series of challenges and identify opportunities as they attempt to reestablish themselves. Current research about exclusionary school discipline measures has contributed to our understanding of who is removed from school, at what rates, and for what reasons. However, these studies rarely include student accounts about school discipline; even less is documented about post-exclusion experiences of students who have not been confined or those entering traditional school settings. This paucity in research fails to contribute to our understanding of challenges and successes experienced by returning students at various phases of readmission to school and misses nuances associated with exclusionary discipline. Together, the blended literature provides a canvas for the study at hand.

In this study, I sort out the explicit punishments meted out to students (e.g., suspension and expulsion) and also unravel circumstances and hidden penalties that have a significant

impact on student reentry and school completion. Youth reentry literature indicates that reentry itself is intertwined with factors and circumstances in and out of school. School discipline studies pay attention to suspended students, expelled students in alternative placements, or those with juvenile records. Most studies continue to be quantitative or void of student narratives. These studies, while valuable, miss the many nuances and meaning making associated with exclusionary discipline policy, process, and outcomes. Critical transitions of readmitted students are missed when solely looking at numerical figures. My study takes a broader approach to school discipline by including the perceptions and examining the trajectories of students who return to their expelling school district; data detail factors that determine why some students stay at the comprehensive high school and others leave.

It has been suggested, "The emphasis of the analysis is placed on out-of-school suspensions, rather than expulsions, in part because the numbers of suspensions dwarf the numbers of expulsions" (Losen, 2011, p. 2). But the fact is that expelled students have a more difficult time being readmitted into traditional school settings. If the youth has a court record, matters are made worse. Expelled students may encounter complete cessation of educational services. What happens to them during expulsion? What are the implications of a suspended education? These particular students have different educational needs and social challenges. Expelled students fall somewhere in the middle of the exclusionary discipline spectrum, with those facing out-of-school suspension on one end and those reentering on the other. Expelled and reentering students are marginalized in school discipline research.

This study contributes to current school discipline literature by examining immediate and latent effects of expulsion and suspension during student reentry. This study is based on the narratives of eight previously expelled/suspended students of color. Their narratives illustrate

how expulsion and suspension are much more complex than simply removing a student from

school.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In Chapter One, I described the current state of suspension and expulsion, as well as ways in which these discipline strategies remove students from mainstream educational settings. In Chapter Two, I highlighted the work of researchers who've investigated the nature of exclusionary school measures, its application and outcomes. These studies attempted to explain racial disparities by examining several stages of school discipline ranging from the classroom referral to punishment meted out to students. This body of research also problematized the effectiveness of exclusionary discipline measures and highlight advocacy efforts to improve exclusionary school punishment.

This study seeks to add to our current understanding of suspension and expulsion by closely examining students' experiences with school removal and reentry. Numbers alone do not provide a comprehensive description of exclusionary school discipline policies and subsequent outcomes, nor do they describe how students make sense of their circumstances. By documenting and analyzing lived experiences of excluded students, we gain a better understanding on how to create systems of support that reinforce pro-social skills, remedy academic obstacles for successful reentry, and inform efforts to develop alternative forms of discipline that keep students in school.

Expulsion and suspension affect multiple areas of students' lives. I begin this chapter by revisiting the research questions and providing a synopsis of symbolic interaction. This framework was used as a conceptual tool to help us understand how students experience and interpret school discipline practices, specifically as they relate to student reentry. Next, I present my methodological approach and outline how a (qualitative) case study research design, tied to

symbolic interaction, appropriately answers the research questions proposed in this study. This section details how I carried out this study and how study participants were selected and recruited. I then explain data collection methods and provide and in-depth analysis of and draw conclusions from primary themes that surfaced from interviews, observations and document analysis. I explain how I conducted member checks and discuss limitations I encountered throughout this study. I conclude this chapter by offering a discussion on my role as a researcher.

Research Questions

In order to ascertain how students experience school discipline and reentry, the following questions guided this study:

1. Why did students choose to return to school?
2. How do expelled students experience school reintegration?
3. According to students, what is the impact of their previous expulsion on their academic progress, their school activities, their relationships with teachers and peers, their relationship with their families, and their future aspirations?
4. What systems of support, if any, do students report during reentry?
5. In what way do school practices discourage or support the reintegration of expelled students?

Theoretical Framework

Scholars have proposed explanations of why societies respond to unwelcome behavior as they do, what they think will happen as a result of those responses as well as how those who are the targets of those responses make sense of their circumstances. In this study, symbolic interaction is useful in identifying how students interpret their experiences with suspension and expulsion. This theoretical framework was used to help interpret the students' reentry experiences and coping strategies used during this process. I draw from this framework as an analytic tool to help me interpret empirical data I collected and analyze findings.

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Symbolic Interaction

Born out of a sociological tradition, symbolic interactionism seeks to understand how it is that people make sense of themselves and the world in response to their social interactions. Symbolic interaction posits that interactions with others (and things) impact one's self-definition (e.g. interpretative process) and meaning-making process, which influence subsequent actions (Blumer, 1969). Simply stated, symbolic interaction directs attention to how individuals "size up" or appraise situations (or interactions) and respond accordingly (Prus, 1996). This framework helped me to understand individuals' interpretations of institutional rules, regulations and respective outcomes and assisted in my analysis of their beliefs and experiences related to reentry. Because students' interpretations are influenced by past and on-going exchanges with peers, family members and institutional agents it is imperative to link what Mead (1934) refers to as "gestures" (e.g. interactions and actions) to the larger context in which exchanges occur. Accordingly, I sought to link institutional procedures, individual actions, and multiple actor interactions to present how students' meaning making is constructed.

Processes and interactions shape perceptions. Labeling theorist Ray Rist (1977) asserted that when students are made aware of labels and differentiated expectations, students might begin to (un)consciously carry out those expectations. The self-fulfilling prophecy results from "an expectation which defines a situation [that] comes to influence the actual behavior within the situation so as to produce what was initially assumed to be there" (p. 153). Expectations develop through actual interactions or assumptions and can have negative or positive consequences for students. Moreover, expectations that school personnel have of students (and vice versa) influence future contacts, reinforcing or bring the initial expectation to fruition. As such, the lens

of symbolic interaction proved useful in examining how students made sense of their experience with school discipline and student reentry.

With its focus on interactions as the source of individual actions, however, symbolic interaction is limited by its failure to account for pre-existing (and oftentimes socially constructed) conditions that shape such exchanges. Social interactions cannot be viewed as occurring in a vacuum when they are inevitably influenced by different dimensions (e.g. policy, home, community, school, etc.), power differentials and instructional differences found in structures navigated by students. In other words, students and school personnel have different roles in school and with those roles come different experiences, expectations and different ways of knowing. By documenting student reentry, we can identify situations and actions that were previously dismissed as defiance.

The dominant pattern of thinking around punishment and student misconduct is limited by its failure to scrutinize how school policies and practices may actually contribute to oppositional behaviors. When children do not meet academic or behavior standards "the failure is shouldered by them rather than by the system" (Watkinson & Epp, 1997, p. 191). By using symbolic interaction to compliment this qualitative study, I am able to extend the conversation from focusing on individual student responsibility (micro) to include potential systemic dimensions (macro) otherwise absent exclusionary school discipline research. This extension is important because it accounts for the nuances associated with action and decision-making during student reentry. This approach conceptualizes student misconduct and school violence, at least in part, as byproducts of poorly organized schools (Epp & Watkinson, 1996; Noguera, 1995).

This lens allows for an in-depth analysis of removal and reentry, from the perspective of students, and permits me to problematize and address the barriers and opportunities students

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encounter during exclusion from mainstream educational programs and throughout the process of reentry. Additional, these lenses assist me in understanding how institutional policies and practices have a significant (and long-term) impact on students' emotional, academic, social development and self-perception. Symbolic interaction narrows the gap between micro and macro theories by providing a broader understanding of how students are impacted by, and respond to, exclusionary discipline before and after reinstatement.

Informed by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective on human development I sought to balance my analysis between individual action and institutional cultures. Notably, students' experiences called for this approach, since they are individuals undergoing a process affected by past and on-going exchanges with peers and adults in different settings.

The overarching goal of this study was to better understand suspension, expulsion and reentry from students' perspectives. I provide an in-depth look at how students made sense of their experience with exclusionary school discipline measures and the process of reintegration at their home district. I report the different ways in which suspension and expulsion played a significant role in students' return to Nación School District schools and reveal academic and social barriers and opportunities within the reentry process. Through this study, I also sought to understand how students cope with the challenges and achievements resulting from suspension, expulsion and reintegration.

Qualitative Methods & A Case Study Approach

A strength of qualitative methodology is its ability to provide and insightful way of understanding the particulars of human experience (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Stated differently, qualitative research provides insight into "how [people] make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). A case

study approach was particularly appropriate for my study because it provides an in depth understanding of suspension, expulsion, and reentry from the perspective of readmitted students. Without documenting students' actual experiences, we cannot judge the overall effects of suspension and expulsion. Qualitative methods address this issue by focusing on "experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or undergone'" (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p. 7).

Interviews delved into the sacrifices and consequences that zero tolerance in general and suspension and expulsion, in particular, inflicted on the lives of study participants. Part of documenting a particular experience entails an understanding of contextual factors. For this reason, I shadowed students at their school and at off-campus events when students (or their parents) invited me. I reviewed official district and school documents to analyze district and school discipline policy, school accounts of a students' (mis)behavior and students' discipline records. Together, these qualitative data sources enabled me to craft *thematic* case studies of previously excluded youth. Yin (1994) argues that evidence extracted from multiple sources is often regarded as "more compelling" while the overall study is considered to be "more robust" (p. 45). Thematic cases are meant capture the multidimensionality of experiences. Special attention was given to opportunities and barriers resulting from suspension and expulsion. In sum, qualitative methods provide a huge piece missing from the debate on school discipline-the accounts of young people who return to a school system from which they were banned. As indicated in Chapter One, previous studies revealed racial, economic and gender disparities in exclusionary punishment. Quantitative data alone failed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the context in which students are removed from school and later reinstated. Moreover, numerical data miss nuances within particular cases.

Case Study Method

In addition to providing a general landscape of exclusionary discipline policy and practice, this study sought to gain a better understanding of how students interpret their removal from and return to Nación School District. Since this study sought to understand *why* students are expelled and/or suspended and *how* they make sense of their experience(s) related to school discipline measures, case study is an appropriate method for this investigation. Yin (1994) states that: "in general, case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed (p. 1). Furthermore, Yin (1994) defines case study as part of the research process in which a contemporary phenomenon is investigated "within its real-life context" (Yin, 1994, p. 13). Though defined differently by Merriam (1988), a case study can also be viewed as an end-product, "an intensive holistic, description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 21). In this study, the student (*unit of analysis*) is navigating a specific social context. Reentry (the *phenomenon*) is described thoroughly in this study. The unit of analysis, as characterized by Merriam (1998) is "fenced in" or bounded (p. 27). This study, then, is bounded by the social context (schools), unit of observation (reentering students) and time spent at each site and with each student. Students' interpretations also bind this study. Secondary data sources such as academic records and discipline files supplement the analysis and understanding of expulsion, suspension and the reentry process.

As Yin (1994) so aptly indicates, case studies are suited for situations in which separating the phenomenon's variables from the context is impossible. Separating expulsion and suspension from reintegration would result in an incomplete and inaccurate study. Given the similarities and divergences found within and between experiences with school discipline and reentry multiple cases are intended to unearth individual pathways. Miles and Huberman (1994) propose that " by

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looking at a range of similar or contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying *how* and *where* and, if possible, *why* it carries on as it does" (p. 29). Miles and Huberman argue that the multiple-case method can increase generalizability or external validity; yet, generalizability is not central to this study. Instead, multiple cases were developed to compare and contrast student experiences and convey information about a general phenomenon. Moreover, the goal is to understand a range of experiences endured by reentering students and to gain a theoretical understanding of the processes involved in exclusionary school discipline policies and the practical implications that shape students' opportunities and barriers during reentry.

My interest in understanding students' experiences with exclusionary discipline measures in a zero-tolerance era and within a specific district, call for a methodological approach that accounts for actions and meaning-making within specific settings. Oakes, Welner, Yonezawa and Allen (1998) argue that schools are often treated as isolated institutions when in fact they are institutions impacted by external (societal) factors. School discipline policies exemplify a strategy directly influenced by social beliefs. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, zero tolerance school policy was created in response to public concerns about school violence. Value-laden policies in schools are a mere reflection of societal values and beliefs. Reentering students must negotiate and mediate situations that are byproducts of societal beliefs about punishment and second chances. Case studies capture students' interpretations of lived experiences.

My interest in understanding reentry and the educational and social processes experienced by students requires methods that account for interactions within specific contexts. Case studies are aligned with ecologically valid research. Borrowing from the work of Urie

Bronfenbrenner, Michael Cole (1996) presents the idea of ecologically valid research. According to Cole,

> Ecologically valid research… must fulfill three conditions: (1) maintain the integrity of the real-life situations it is designed to investigate; (2) be faithful to the larger social and cultural contexts from which the subjects come and (3) be consistent with the participants' definitions of the situation." (p. 226)

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model accounts for inaccuracies found in controlled laboratory settings by borrowing from other disciplines (e.g. anthropology) researchers can observe development in real-life settings. This approach proved useful in documenting the social process of reentry into Nación schools ("context"), allowing me to document students' understanding of expulsion, suspension, and reentry ("participant's definition"), and helped to uncover how interpretations are derived from norms, values, beliefs and interactions in educational institutions encountered by study participants ("real-life situations)".

Bronfenbrenner's framework examines areas missed by one-dimensional approaches (e.g., socio-structural macro analysis and individual micro analysis) in research.

<u>Negotiating Access</u>

I chose to focus my study in Nación School District[13] because I am very familiar with the district, its schools and several employees. I believed my ties to the district would provide me a great deal of access; however, this was not the case especially since my study focused on minors with a discipline history. I made an appointment with the principal at Nación High School in order to explain the purpose of my study and my desire to document and improve the educational experiences of students on the margins. Although the principal seemed quite enthusiastic about

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[13] Pseudonyms were used for district, school, study participants and other individuals.

my study, he encouraged me to meet with Mrs. Salinas, the district administrator in charge of student services.

I placed several phone calls to Mrs. Salinas and sent several e-mails to her and her assistant along with a précis of my research study in order to set up a meeting with her. Over a month went by before I received a call from her assistant. I was informed that Mrs. Salinas was in meetings throughout the day. I interpreted this as a "gate keeping" strategy; thus, I headed to the district and waited to be seen. I did this for several days for over a month and was never received. After approximately three months or so of leaving messages and not receiving any calls back, I received a phone message from Mrs. Salinas' assistant indicating that I had approval to conduct my study in the district. I immediately called the district and explained that a written approval notice would help me gain entry into district schools. This request was denied. I was informed that "Mrs. Salinas doesn't write letters"— this called for a lot of groundwork to be done.

I arranged meetings with several Nación District principals in schools where I thought reinstated students might be enrolled. Some principals and assistant principals did not meet with me before verifying that I had district approval; others took my word for it. After compiling a list of potential study participants (see next section for further information on this process) I telephoned Mr. Maje, the person responsible for Nación School District expulsion hearings in hopes that he would help me locate students on my list. Seemingly irritated by my request, Mr. Maje practically shouted that the district had "leaked information" and that student identification numbers should not be accessible through the district's website. I explained that this was public information and that the district followed this process for years. As I began to explain that I received approval

from the University of California, Los Angeles Office for the Protection of Human Subjects (UCLA-OPRS) and his supervisor Mrs. Salinas, Mr. Maje cut me off stating that it didn't matter who had approved my study. With his hand over the telephone receiver he asked his assistant, Mrs. Robinson, if student identification numbers were available through the district's website "Yes," she continued "its public information." Disturbed by his demeanor and unwillingness to hear and accept my explanation, I hung up and never called him back. I continued to meet with school administrators and complied with their request that I complete a district volunteer form. This required fingerprint clearance, a background check and a cleared tuberculosis test. Because I had previously worked as a classroom teacher, I was aware of these requirements and had completed them beforehand. I turned in a volunteer form/packet to each school site I visited, even schools unattended by study participants. As part of the UCLA-OPRS guidelines, I requested a letter from each school administrator. The letter required school administrators to provide assurance that study procedures would follow UCLA-OPRS guidelines.

Reinstated students weren't necessarily enrolled in schools where I gained administrative support; when this occurred, I moved on to the next set of schools. This process prolonged my study but I was lucky enough to gain the trust of several administrators who personally searched for students in the district's database. One principal volunteered a staff member to search for students, their status and location. As a "thank you" for their time and assistance, I compensated staff members with money, gift cards, coffee or snacks. I offered to tutor students, help with academic intervention programs or clerical work when needed; this became my customary approach at every site.

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Method of Participant Identification and Recruitment

Initially, I thought about using purposeful sampling but given the nature of the recruitment process, specifically the challenges I faced in accessing and retaining potential student participants, I dismissed that particular method. I established a selection criterion to have a pool of students who could potentially take part in the study (LeCompte, Preissle & Tesch, 1993). Because probabilistic sampling is not a goal of qualitative research, and certainly not a goal of this study, non-probabilistic sampling was used to select "information-rich" cases (Patton, 1990). Chein (1981) compares this to consulting specific individuals whom, because of their knowledge and skill, are best suited to solve a particular problem. Established criteria ought to reflect the purpose of the study; thus, I selected students that had undergone a particular experience. In essence, I combined purposeful and random sampling methods for this study.

Selection Criteria

Inclusion criteria included attendance at one of four types of schools in the Nación School District. I determined student eligibility by school enrollment and a history of suspension and/or expulsion within the district. All 7-12 graders who were suspended or expelled within three years of the study were eligible.

I chose to focus on expelled and suspended students for a number of reasons. First, the trend in research on suspended and expelled youth tends to focus on students who have dropped out. These studies, though valuable, fail to include in depth accounts of factors leading to school abandonment. By focusing on reinstated students, we can learn more about their reentry experiences and begin to identify systems of support that are either available and/or necessary for this particular at-risk group. Second, while these students have returned to school, we cannot assume that they will stay in school and/or in the traditional school setting. Third, aside from

school removal, these students may face criminal penalties. In instances where school offenses are criminalized, students and/or their families must fulfill an array of requirements ranging from anger management classes to restitution and legal fees. Depending on their schools' reaction to their offense, students may be over-surveilled and stigmatized. The narratives of reentering students can shed light on the complexity of expulsion and suspension and identifies how school removal shapes their educational trajectory. In sum, selecting this group provided (1) a way to get input from kids who are "on the edge", (2) a comprehensive picture of suspension and expulsion which extends beyond the simple act of removing a student from school; and (3) insights into possible interventions that might aid such students' reentry into schooling and prevent them from dropping out in the future.

As noted earlier, I identified students with the assistance and recommendation[14] of school administrators and by using a public list of students who were reinstated into the school district. The list used indirect identifiers (e.g. student identification numbers). Identification numbers were retrieved from the Nación District Board Meeting Documents "public site" website. I reviewed Board Meeting Opening Procedures; Section C (Closed Session-meeting notice) to gather information about the following school board procedures: Expelled, Suspended Expulsion, Considered for Expulsion and Considered for Reinstatement. I collected available date from meetings that took place between March 14, 2005 and December 2007. Board notes included meeting dates, student identification numbers and corresponding disciplinary action taken by the school board (e.g., expulsion, suspended expulsion, etc.). At one point, I had a list of over twenty students but that number decreased due to a variety of reasons: students were "not found." This typically meant they were out of school (and dropped from the system), in adult

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[14] Vanessa was the only student recommended to participate in my study. Assistant Principal Goodwill thought it would be a good experience for Vanessa and one that may help her make better choices in school.

education or Juvenile Court and Community Schools (JCCS)[15] or students had transferred and a transcript request was not documented. Some students had graduated. One young lady was withdrawn from the school district by her foster mother, and a transcript request was not made thus there was no way of tracking her down.

Like most school districts, Nación did not store suspension information for individual schools; thus, school principals were asked to provide a list of previously suspended students currently enrolled at their school. I asked principals to focus on students with a history of suspension. The rationale behind this is that students who have a history of suspension are at higher risk of dropping out in comparison to students who have been suspended for two or fewer days during their entire academic career. For the purpose of this study, students with a history of suspension provided human accounts of separation from school and the process of reentry.

I gave identified students an invitational letter with a brief description of the study. I asked students to fill out a check-off/tear away form in which they decided whether or not to take part in the study. I also used the form to determine eligibility. The tear-away portion of the student letter allowed parent(s)/guardian(s) to choose whether or not I could contact them to discuss my study. I provided a self-addressed stamped envelope to parent(s)/guardian(s). If parent(s)/guardian(s) granted permission and/or requested a conversation with me, I contacted them over the phone or in person and explained the study and consent forms and answered any questions. If I did not receive a response from parent(s)/guardian(s) within five business days, I followed up with a scripted phone call. If parent(s)/guardian(s) agreed over the phone, I requested that they send in the tear-off portion of the letter for documentation purposes. If they

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[15] I refer to juvenile court and community schools (JCCS) as county court schools (CCS) because (1) they are operated by the County Office of Education, not Nacion District and (2) JCCS include students in juvenile hall, not reentering students.

agreed on the tear-off part of the letter I contacted him/her to schedule the student interview and make arrangements for consent form delivery. If the parent denied consent over the phone, I acknowledged their decision and thanked them for their time. No further action was taken when parents denied consent using the tear-off portion of the letter.

In the beginning of the study, a total of ten students agreed to participate and all consent forms were collected. A white male dropped out of the study because he "didn't have time" for an interview due to extra-curricular activities. This particular student would have been an interesting case since he was involved in a school fire along with a study participant. A second student frequently traveled to Mexico and was hard to get a hold of for an interview. Once an interview was scheduled he was kicked out of school and went to spend time with his uncles in Mexico. Two other students agreed to participate in the study but did not return signed parent consent forms. The mother of an African-American male sent me a note and later shared that her son was just tired of being in counseling for his involvement in a school fire (this is the same fire mentioned above and in discussed in Chapter Four). I explained the nature of the study but the mother stated her son was just too overwhelmed with the incident and the consequences that followed. A bi-racial (Asian and Caucasian) junior at Chollas High declined participation while a Latino freshman at Chollas stated that he wanted to be part of my project but that his mother did not want him to partake in "that kind of study." Wearing his football jersey (a game day tradition) he proudly exclaimed, "That is in my past. I am good now; look, I even play football!" I almost lost another student at this school. He was ready to begin the study and his parents were very encouraging but the school principal

did not meet with me until almost two months after my first visit to the school. In the end,

eight students took part in this study.

Table 3.1: Student Demographics

Name	Gender	Ethnicity[16]	Age at Time of First Expulsion[17]
Angel	Male	Hispanic	14
Cisco	Male	Mexican	14
Duane	Male	Pacific Islander	14
Eduardo	Male	Mexican	13
Isaiah	Male	Black	13
Joaquin[18]	Male	Mexican	16
Pedro	Male	Black	14
Vanessa	Female	Mexican	N/A

Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative research works to understand how different parts work together to form a

whole (Merriam, 1998). With this in mind, I conducted interviews, observations and undertook

document analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences with and

interpretations about school discipline measures and reintegration. Merriam observes that

multiple sources of evidence lead to more "believable and trustworthy" conclusions (Merriam,

1998). When combined, semi-structured open-ended interviews, observations and document

analysis focused on key informants (students) and allowed me to gain in-depth perspectives and

personal accounts regarding the impact of suspension, expulsion and the process of reentry.

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[16] Refers to ethnic or racial term used by student.
[17] This excludes Vanessa since she has never been expelled.
[18] This student is also referred to as "Quincho" a nick name commonly given to individuals named Joaquin.

Interviews

Interviews play a variety of functions depending on the research being carried out. On a basic level, interviews are a form of data. Clinicians, however, posit that interviews create "intimacy" between the subject and researcher (Gilligan, 1982). Portraitists affirm that interviews are an opportunity to establish empathy which they view "as central to relationship building in research" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 148). Whether described as intimacy or empathy, interviews pave the way for connection building and rapport between study participants and the researcher. I decided to begin data collection with interviews because interviews are a medium in which the student and I broke the ice and got to know each other before I asked them increasingly sensitive questions and shadowed them in school. As someone who had several encounters with school disciplinarians, I was able to identify resonant experiences recalled by the subjects; thus, creating both a connection and empathy.

Since the goal is to understand how students conceptualize suspension, expulsion and reentry interviews are the main source of data for this study. Interviews focused on students' schooling experiences including those related to school punishments. I developed questions to gain insight into how removal from school has affected students. Furthermore, I designed questions to gauge students' interpretations of the circumstances surrounding their punishment. I crafted interview questions to elicit information about school removal and reentry and the consequences faced by students.

Depending on the student and level of rapport, I met with some participants than others. For instance, some students answered all questions during the first interview, others asked for a second meeting. All students were interviewed at least one time. It was important not to disrupt class time so interviews took place in students' homes (when an adult was in the home) or on

their porch (when an adult was not in the home). Each interview lasted anywhere between forty-five minutes to 3 hours. Seven of the eight students participated in follow-up interviews. Given that Nación has a 70% Latino student enrollment and approximately 24% of these students are English Learners[19], interviews were conducted in the subject's language of choice (English or Spanish); some students used "Spanglish" (a mix of English with Spanish) or code-switched between languages. I took brief notes and wrote observational comments before and during interviews to capture smells, sounds, facial gestures or other things missed by the tape recorder. Following the interviews, I wrote memos. These served as reflection pieces.

I used the initial interview as an opportunity to explain the purpose and scope of the study and to describe the extent to which the student was asked to participate. I encouraged students to ask questions at any point during interviews and the study. Participants were also reassured that the information they shared would remain confidential. I also stressed that I hoped this would be a positive experience. Interviews were divided into three categories, each focusing on a specific phase of removal from and reintegration to school: (1) background information and general school experiences; (2) removal and reinstatement, (3) and reenrollment and reintegration.

Background information and School Experiences

These questions focused on student demographics, contact information, school activities and general schooling experiences including those associated with discipline, grade retention and transfers.

Removal and Reinstatement

Questions in this section explored circumstances leading to removal from school and captured how students made sense of their removal from school, how they felt, and what

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[19] Source: CBEDS, Ed-Data http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us

exclusion meant to adults in their lives (e.g., parents, siblings, teachers, etc.). Additional questions focused on whether or not the student thought the punishment was appropriate. Questions in this section sought to elicit information to document students' interpretation and analysis of normalized behaviors and structural power relations involved in their suspension/expulsion and reentry.

Questions in this particular section also provided students an opportunity to reflect on their suspension/expulsion and what changes, if any, occurred during and after exclusion. I anticipated that this would be a sensitive stage in the research process as some students might be uncomfortable retelling and in a way reliving the experience; therefore, I made every effort to make students comfortable by reminding them that I was not there to judge them but to learn from their experience; they had a story to tell and I was there to document that story.

Reenrollment and Reintegration

The third set of questions dealt with reinstatement, reenrollment and reentry. Participants were asked to describe reentry experiences and provide opinions and advice to those who develop and enforce exclusionary school measures.

Observations

I conducted observations after initial interviews were completed and after a level of trust and comfort was established with students. I carried out observations during class time, school breaks (e.g. nutrition break and lunch) and extracurricular activities. I shadowed students throughout their school day and, in some cases, at social activities on and off campus. Each student was shadowed for at least one week. Students had the option to include me in their social circles during school hours or simply allow me to travel with them from one class to the next.

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Observations gave me a sense of their school day and allowed me to examine daily interactions with teachers, administrators and peers.

Several teachers asked if I could reveal who I was following. Due to the nature of the study and sensitivity surrounding school discipline records, I did not share that information explaining that I needed to observe students in a most natural setting and that the identity of students had to be protected. I asked school administrators to keep this information confidential as well.

I took detailed field notes (with observer comments) during observations; accordingly, field notes were both descriptive and reflective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Descriptive field notes capture what the researcher sees, hears, and experiences. For instance, descriptive notes account for rich descriptions of schools and students' behaviors. Reflective field notes extend beyond descriptions and capture feelings, speculations, hunches or impressions. I used reflective field notes as a way to debrief interviews and observations and jotted questions or ideas to help clarify certain situations. Reflective field notes were identified as observer comments (OC). When activities did not allow for note taking, I jotted down key words to help me recollect accounts of specific incidents. In addition to the field notes, memos or "think pieces" were drafted to brief the day's events, to think about and try to solve any concerns that surfaced during the study and to help me plan the next observation and follow up interview(s) (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 114).

Observations were intended to capture ways in which students negotiated daily school encounters (especially those away from their home school). I looked for relations between the student, adults at his/her school and his/her peers, the nature of conversations that involved the

subject, the subject's social circle, etc. Specifically, observations allowed me to document

reintegration experiences and ways that excluded members rejoin and create associations.

As I conducted my study, Nación District was engaged in a district-wide strategic

planning campaign with several goals in mind. According to information found in the districts'

website, the committee would "explore, define and actualize" the following strategies to "guide

our daily work of educating students for life in this 21st century." In sum, the five-year plan was

intended to accomplish the following:

> [A] diverse curriculum and learning experiences, character education, exemplary staff,
>
> family involvement, systems of support, internal and external systems of communication,
>
> exemplary learning environments, effective collaboration, district organization, and the
>
> role of the adult program as a support system for the secondary school program. (Nación
>
> District website)

District personnel, teachers, administrators, community members and parents participated in a

series of meetings to develop a plan to ensure that Nación District goals would be met. The

groups were divided into ten different strategies. I signed up for the group focused on "[Creating]

systems of support for students to ensure student achievement and well-being" and attended bi-

weekly meetings as a community member and someone interested in the academic and social

success of Nación District students. Many interesting discussions took place at these meetings,

but there seemed to be a lack of interest in creating systems of support for marginalized students,

with the exception of English Learners.

On numerous occasions I asked how the strategies we developed would include students

in learning communities and students returning from expulsion and was answered with an

awkward silence. The group in charge of addressing how to best serve all Nación students did

little to address the needs of at-risk youth. A math teacher suggested that too much focus was placed on the emotional and social wellness of students rather than academic deficiencies. A connection between the two was rarely made. As the meetings came to an end, I e-mailed the group with questions pertinent to our strategy and learning community, continuation and reinstated students. I received one response from a committee member, a counselor at one of the district's alternative schools, "As a learning community counselor, I can address all your concerns. Feel free to call me @ 555-1234." Our team moderator was scheduled to retire within three months of these meetings. The group in charge of students' needs was relegated to someone who would leave the district before the plan was implemented.

Document Analysis

I analyzed student records to supplement data gathered from observations and interviews. Traditional researchers often use school records to carry out their studies; others view such documents as inaccurate and reject their use (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). Since this official (one-sided) document follows students throughout their academic career, juxtaposing notes about the student with student interviews was quite informative. School records provided insight into why certain offenses were punishable and why expulsion and suspension seemed to be appropriate measures. Administrative notes contained statements associated with the rationale used in removing students from schools. Data collection methods employed in this study led to a fuller and more complete "picture" of suspension, expulsion and student reentry and allowed me to "validate and cross-check findings" (Patton, 1990, p. 244).

Constant Comparative Method and Analysis

Before conducting data analysis, I followed Yin's (1994) guidelines and developed a (loose) database in order to have a system in place. The database was developed using Word and

Excel. Codes were created as data was being collected and were later revised. Coding helped to organize data so that it was easily identified and retrieved (Merriam, 1988).

Constant Comparative Method

To avoid being overwhelmed by an abundance of data, I collected and analyzed data simultaneously. Merriam (1988) argues that simultaneous analysis may prevent unfocused and repetitive data. This method allowed me to revise and refine interview questions and other data collection tools while developing categories of data. Data accumulated at a quick pace. Having a data management system in place (Miles & Huberman, 1994) eased the task of retrieving data during intense analysis by having records that "pull together and organize the voluminous case data into a comprehensive primary resource catalogue" (Patton, 1990, p. 386). Comparative method techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) simplified the creation of a case study database.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest that simultaneous data collection and analysis help the researcher to narrow his/her study, reformulate questions and map out future data collection. Since the constant comparative method guides further data collection, taking this approach facilitated the organization, reorganization and modification of this study, as required (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 1998). For example, review of the first interviews pinpointed unaddressed areas as well as similarities and differences among and between students' accounts. Different levels of coding and categorizing resulted from constant comparative analysis as well. Subsequently, main themes and codes were identified. I clustered emerging themes and included sub-codes within those themes. I explored outlying themes in subsequent interviews. Since I transcribed the majority of my interviews, I came to know my data really well; data remained "fresh" for a longer period of time. This proved to be both a blessing and a curse. I engaged in a tedious and challenging task especially as I thought about ways to best present students'

narratives without neglecting complexities and nuances. Trying to "fit" students' stories into compact vignettes would lose the uniqueness of students' overall experience, but it was also important to reflect on themes. Using color coded post-its, I mapped the different ways to convey students' stories without compromising their authority and uniqueness. Since this study relies on students' experiences and narratives, I considered ways to present data in a non-redundant manner.

Analysis

I conducted "within-case analysis" which is defined as "the in-depth exploration" that involves familiarity with a particular case, including its processes and local dynamics (Miles and Huberman, 1994, pp.205-206). Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe (2010) indicate that within-case analysis fosters the case's unique attributes and patterns. This process helped to make sense of the large volume of data I had acquired, to reexamine codes and to continually compare emerging themes against official documents, interviews, observations and new findings. This exercise was used to generate insight about data and cross check old and new findings to assess the validity of themes (Huberman and Miles, 2002). I continued to read and reread interviews, documenting and coding relevant patterns and noticeable deviations. Codes were then categorized under six main concepts. Each category contained codes, sub-codes and examples drawn from collected data. These constructs became somewhat of a puzzle in which pieces were moved around and "tested" against new findings and data.

Once within-case analysis was complete, I embarked on cross-case analysis, identifying the themes and findings that emerged from student interviews.
Multiple sources of data (e.g. interviews, observations and official documents) strengthened this study and enhanced internal validity by enabling me to triangulate data (Merriam, 1998).

Mathison (1988) argues that triangulation should not be relied upon as a "technological solution for ensuring validity" because multiple sources may produce contradictory data. Because I sought to understand the meaning students made of their experience with exclusionary school discipline measures, triangulation was used to capture a "holistic understanding" of the situation and to develop "plausible explanations of the phenomenon being studied" (Mathison, 1988, p. 17). This process included examining and accounting for discrepancies in school documents and conflicting narratives provided by students who underwent a similar experience. In the end, the differences and similarities in student narratives provided a comprehensive rendition of reentry and were important findings examined in cross-case analysis. Although the cross-case analysis was done thematically, the authentication of each case was not compromised.

(Member) Validity Checks and Study Limitations

External validity or the ability to generalize findings is not a central goal of qualitative research. This particular study did not seek to generalize findings as much as it sought to uncover and learn about an understudied area with serious policy implications. The central concern of this study was to explore and understand how students navigate a system which "purged" them at some point during their academic career. In providing real life encounters with school discipline procedures, students painted a picture that numbers alone fail to explain.

Member Checks

In the original design of my study, I intended to ensure accuracy through "member checks" (Maxwell, 1996). This was complicated by access challenges and scheduling conflicts. I have however, remained in contact with several students and have been able to provide feedback and advice. It should be noted that I used interviews to clarify if my interpretation of students' accounts were accurate. Attempting to provide the most accurate account, I double checked

conflicting responses with students and provided verbal summaries of interviews. At that point, study participants either agreed with my understanding of their stories or clarified any misunderstandings. I am confident that the stories in this study are accurate accounts of students' lived experiences.

Study Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this study was the inability to take part in expulsion hearings where I could have learned more about how students' placements and punishments are chosen, if students had representation, if due process was followed and how students and their families were treated throughout the process. I could have recruited students and followed them during their expulsion and through reentry. Accordingly, I could have captured critical points wherein some students disengage from the system, while others continue. Comparing and contrasting the critical moments along with particular students could have hinted at factors contributing to successful and unsuccessful reentry and may have provided insight into differences and similarities among and between those students. Recruiting students at the moment of reinstatement could have provided similarly rich information. This would have yielded a broader and more thorough documentation of meetings, paperwork and other district procedures required of students. Access into meeting would have made me witness to interactions between district personnel, students and their parents. I too could have observed and documented discussion and final decisions pertaining to reinstatement placements.

A second limitation was the failure to establish extended engagement in any of the schools. Since students attended several schools within and at sometimes outside of the district, it was difficult to stay at one school without risking disengagement from other study participants. Time also played a role in this limitation; several students for example were located at one

school but had transferred out by the time I visited the school to recruit them or during the study. In essence, mobility rates also posed a barrier in this study. However, I believe triangulation and occasional conversations with students gave me the opportunity to "catch up" with them without necessarily having to be at their school or in their home.

This study is also limited to the experiences of eight students. Perhaps maximizing the diversity of students may have made this a richer study; however, without the proper support from the district, I was unable to make those requests. Still, the stories presented in this dissertation reveal a number of offenses that led to suspension and expulsion and also provide detailed documentation about eight different cases.

As a former middle and high school educator, I felt very comfortable working with students in grades 6-12. I am cognizant, however, of my personal biases as a person who was, in one way or another, involved with discipline procedures. Times have certainly changed since I was in school. Schools have adopted a zero-tolerance approach to perceived misbehavior causing drastic changes to the discipline system I experienced as a student (and was expected to enforce as an educator). As someone who was disciplined in Nación District, and who knew many students that had been wronged by teachers and administrators in Nación, I had intimate knowledge of the discipline measures there. I observed how little things have changed and how much more punitive discipline measures had become.

This study forced me to reflect on my role in a student's expulsion while I taught at a continuation school. Combined, my experiences as a student and teacher provide a knowledge base and level of understanding which enabled my connection with study participants. This long journey of dissertating has been painful in many ways and rewarding in others. I've had to step back a number of times as to not let emotions take over my writing. I have shared in students'

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triumphs and challenges and am constantly amazed by their *ganas*, resilience, agency, coping

mechanisms and adaptability in a system that was not always accommodating to their needs. I've

tried to remain as objective as possible while reflecting on my subjectivity.

In this chapter, I provide a written portrait of study participants. By *portrait* I am not referring to Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1997) *portraiture* work. Rather, I refer to a set of vignettes introducing students to the reader. These portraits are meant to capture the essence of the young adults whose lives have been marked by one or a series of school punitive sanctions. First, I describe the students by including information about their lives and personalities. Second, I present a general description of the incidents that led up to the expulsion/suspension. Third, I present an overview of how individual students made sense of their expulsion. Fourth, I detail students' school placements during expulsion along with district requirements for reinstatement. I also share why individual students decided to go through the processes of reinstatement and reenrollment at Nación School District. The last part of this chapter describes the different schools attended by students during and after expulsion. Student vignettes and narratives reveal why students are subjected to harsh discipline policies. Their experiences speak to immediate and latent academic and social outcomes of such policies and provide a glimpse into student reentry.

The Students

Eduardo: Mr. Preppy

"Am I in trouble?" asked 14-year-old[20]Eduardo as he walked into the assistant principal (AP)'s office. He breathed a sigh of relief upon being told he was not in any trouble. The AP introduced us and asked if he was willing to talk with me about a project I was working on; Eduardo agreed. Eduardo, dressed in a pink shirt, jeans, a black hooded sweatshirt with colorful

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[20] Age description for all students refers to age at time of consent to participate in this study.

designs, and decorative accessories, quickly turned to me, stating, "I thought I was in trouble. I thought, 'I didn't do anything.'" He seemed quite energetic and relieved he was not in trouble. I introduced myself and explained my study as he leaned over, paying close attention to what I was saying. His body language and happy demeanor changed when I mentioned his expulsion. Noticing this, I assured him that I was not there to judge him but rather to listen to *his* story. He smiled and agreed to take part in the study.

While waiting for Eduardo to get ready for our interview in his home, I sat with Mrs. Sanchez, Eduardo's mother. I glanced at a glass curio cabinet full of trophies and medals. "They're Eduardo's," she said proudly. Eduardo had been an avid baseball player for many years and hoped to play in a professional league. Eduardo lives with his mother, brother, and some extended family and has contact with his father. Though he identifies as a Mexican, Eduardo is a U.S. citizen. In the spring of 2006, Eduardo admitted to being in possession of marijuana and furnishing and selling 0.5 grams to another student[21] on campus for $13.00. Eduardo was arrested by a school resource officer (SRO) and was interrogated by both the assistant principal and a Sunny City police officer. Eduardo was suspended and later expelled for summer session and the first semester of the 2006–07 school year. At the time, Eduardo was in seventh grade.

The first interview with Eduardo was very difficult. I constantly found myself reassuring him that I was there to hear *his* interpretation of the events. Through his interviews, Eduardo expresses discontentment with the expulsion, subsequent outcomes, and implications: "[I felt] like if I was just going to end up turning into a bad kid." Eduardo was required to attend juvenile court and drug counseling sessions, which included weekly drug tests. This made Eduardo feel as if others perceived him negatively. Eduardo reported that his parents were mad about the

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[21] According to Eduardo, the other student was suspended for a week and nothing was done to the student who gave him the marijuana. In his police confession Eduardo states he bought the marijuana from a guy at the local 7-Eleven, and there is no mention of a student giving him the drug. This may have been Eduardo's way of protecting the other student.

expulsion, were "more cautious" with him, and prohibited him from going out and seeing "certain people." His tone changed and face saddened as he shared his parents' belief that he was using drugs.

During the process of expulsion, Eduardo was enrolled in independent study (IS). Following district protocol, Eduardo had to fulfill specific district requirements prior to reinstatement. His "Rehabilitation Plan and Conditions for Reinstatement[22]" included enrollment in a community day school (CDS), an alternative placement for grades six through eight, *outside* of Nación School District; enrollment in 10 hours of a counseling program with emphases on decision-making and drug awareness; and compliance with all police and/or probation requirements resulting from the incident.

Eduardo described his experience at the CDS as " . . . a bad experience 'cause you're surrounded by nothing but bad kids." Eduardo did not see himself as one of the "bad kids" who, for instance, took and set off fireworks at school. He struggled to detach himself from negative labels and any association with students with longer discipline records and severe behavior problems. Eduardo's academic performance at the CDS was average. He earned As, Bs, Cs and a 2.36 GPA.

Eduardo returned to his local middle school during the second semester of eighth grade. When asked why he decided to return to school. Eduardo shared, "Because I don't wanna be a failure in life or nothing." He was extremely happy about returning to school but highly disappointed by the fact that he was unable to participate in middle school promotional exercises. According to Eduardo and his mother, the school did not input his grades from the CDS; thus,

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[22] This information was retrieved for all expelled students in this study from the school district's "Notice of Final Board Action," which is kept in the students' district files.

school documents reflected missing or incomplete credits. Mrs. Sanchez was unconvinced that this situation would not repeat itself and prevent Eduardo from completing high school.

Joaquin ("Quincho"): El Papi

"Joaquin Melchor" was the last name to be called at Nación High's 2007 graduation. Less than a month earlier, Joaquin informed me that he could not participate in his graduation since he had to work and was told "it [was] too late" to purchase a cap and gown. This, I thought, was an event he could not miss. After all, he had overcome many obstacles to obtaining a high school diploma. He had to be there.

Joaquin, a husky Mexican[23] male, walked into Mrs. Goodwill's small, stuffy office with hesitation. He smiled at me and stated, "You sent a call slip for me." Joaquin was asked to have a seat while Mrs. Goodwill introduced us and provided a gist of my study. "Hi! I'm Joaquin," he stated, extending his hand to shake mine. Joaquin's right arm bore an intricate tattoo that I was unable to decipher. Before further discussion of my study, Mrs. Goodwill called Joaquin's mother to ask if I could speak to her son. Slouching over Mrs. Goodwill, Joaquin informed his mom he wanted to take part in the study "*de cuando me sacaron de la escuela.*"[24] "She said 'yeah,'" he told us as he hung up the phone. I went over the purpose of my study and asked for his participation. He responded, "Yeah, I'll do it."

I arrived at Joaquin's home and was welcomed by his girlfriend, Bianca. Soon after, his grandmother walked over to introduce herself while holding a toddler, a "Gerber baby." "That's my son," said Joaquin as he took the cooing baby from his grandmother. "He's the prince of this house," added Joaquin's grandma. Joaquin rented a back room in his grandmother's house where he resided with his girlfriend and baby. He had quit his job at Jack in the Box and was feeling

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[23] This is the term Joaquin selected when asked to describe his ethnic background. Terms chosen by students will be used as opposed to using blanket terms such as Hispanic or Latino/a.
[24] Loosely translated as "from when they took me out of school."

stressed about whether or not he would get a job at Sea World. Joaquin needed a job—any job—to support his young family.

Joaquin, who described himself as "pretty friendly," seemed to get along well with classmates and teachers. This was a student who had been expelled due to peer conflict that escalated. After catching the city bus to his grandmother's home, Joaquin's friend convinced him to take a detour and head to Bella High to meet up with a relative. Joaquin agreed. This decision would have severe consequences for all involved, especially Joaquin. A verbal altercation with Bella High students led to a physical fight. Joaquin was grabbed by his shirt, at which point his friend took out a "dagger." With several witnesses in hand, Bella and Chollas High (Joaquin's school at the time) administrators led a two-day investigation in which the "unknown suspect" was picked out of a yearbook and later identified as Joaquin Melchor. Although Joaquin did not brandish[25] the knife at anyone (his friend did), he admitted to having the knife in his backpack. Joaquin was handcuffed and, without parental consent, questioned in the school office. His aunt and uncle who had adopted him a couple of years prior to this incident were notified hours later. Joaquin said that administrators tried to scare him by telling him, "you're gonna go to prison," but all he could think of was his parents' reaction; he was not as concerned about the punishment he would receive at school. He feared his parents would change their minds about his adoption and "not want" him anymore.

After pleading "not guilty" of assault with a deadly weapon, Joaquin was sentenced to one year probation and was expelled for the first semester of 11th grade. School records indicate that Joaquin was expelled for "being in possession of a weapon (knife) during a confrontation

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[25] The assistant principal at Chollas High described the brandishing as an "attempted stabbing or potential homicide" and claimed there was no reason for Joaquin to take the knife out of his backpack other than to instill fear in the Bella High students. This account failed to note the fact that there were three Bella High students against Joaquin and his friend and that Joaquin had been punched in the face by a Bella High student on a previous occasion.

after school at the bus stop." Joaquin reported that he and his friend "were looked at as criminals" while the other boys involved were not. His friend pleaded guilty and was charged with a misdemeanor and placed on six months probation.

While his paperwork was processed, Joaquin was referred to and enrolled in an alternative education program (AEP) for a month. The AEP, as described by Joaquin, is a type of independent study run out of a strip mall office. He later enrolled in a County Court School, where he remained for the remainder of his expulsion. During his expulsion, Joaquin was proactive in securing a post-expulsion placement. He contacted his former math teacher, now an assistant principal at Nación High, to inform him of his situation and desire to enroll in Nación High once his expulsion term was completed. Joaquin did not want to attend school in the suburbs where his adoptive parents lived, where he had been classified as a "gangbanger." Nación High is located in Ciudad Proletaria, where Joaquin was raised prior to relocating to the suburbs upon his adoption. He wanted to be in familiar territory and hoped to reconnect with old friends from middle school.

In addition to completing a one-year probation requirement, Joaquin's "Rehabilitation Plan and Conditions for Reinstatement" included enrollment in an alternative placement for grades nine through 12 *outside* of Nación School District and enrollment in 20 hours of a counseling program with emphases on decision-making and anger management.

Joaquin decided to return to school because he was able to enroll in Nación High. According to Joaquin, the school administrator he knew gave him the choice: "'You wanna come here, I'll take you in. Just don't make any trouble if you're here.'" Joaquin also had ties to Nación High. He shared, "That's my school; Nación is my school. I lived in Ciudad Proletaria my whole life." Joaquin was reinstated into Nación School District and started his second

semester of 11th grade at Nación High, located in the working-class community of Ciudad Proletaria, where he grew up. Despite the apparent success of this student, he was overwhelmed by the academic and social culture of the comprehensive high school.

Pedro: The Golden Boy

"Are you a social worker?" asked a young lady standing outside of Pedro's home. Due to scheduling conflicts and cancellations, this was the fourth time I had visited the Jones residence, located in a gated community. I informed her I was not a social worker and that I was there to see Ms. Jones and Pedro. The young lady's question did not surprise me since Ms. Jones cares for several biological and foster children; visits from social workers were not uncommon. Pedro had been under her care since he was 11 years old. When I knocked on the front door, Ms. Jones peeked her head through the door, apologized, and asked if we could reschedule. I was turned away again.

Though sometimes shy, Pedro, a 16-year-old black[26] male, was a leader among his junior varsity football teammates. They turned to him during warm-up drills and rallied around him during pep assemblies. I would not be surprised if Pedro was crowned homecoming king his senior year. His good manners and cool and calm demeanor made him very likeable and approachable on and off the field.

Pedro hung out with a large group of peers and was frequently hugged by at least one female as he transitioned from one class to the next. I jokingly referred to him as a "little ladies' man" and a "gentleman"—he seemed to be both. Although he was not overly stylish, Pedro certainly took pride in his appearance. Pedro was a good-looking kid with a contagious smile, and a good student, sibling, and son. Ms. Jones indicated that Pedro was not a "problem child";

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[26]Some of Pedro's school documents indicate he is African American and Puerto Rican. This was also confirmed by his mother, Ms. Jones.

unlike some of her other children, Pedro never gave her problems. By all accounts he was, as his mother described, a "golden boy."[27] But like many young men his age, Pedro was not perfect and was susceptible to making rash decisions that resulted in serious consequences. In this case, Pedro's decision led to his expulsion, a missed promotion, and fines totaling $4,000.00.

Three months before summer vacation, Pedro and three eighth-grade classmates set a boys' restroom on fire. The fire led to an all-school evacuation, fire and police department presence, and damages totaling $12,000.00. According to Pedro's declaration, two boys grabbed toilet paper and put it on top of the hand dryer, and then he and another student lit the paper and walked out of the bathroom. No one was injured in the fire, but substantial damage was caused to the bathroom and building. Pedro was suspended for five days awaiting expulsion. The five days turned into two weeks out of school. Unlike other students in this study, Pedro was allowed to take a class during summer session but was placed in independent study once summer session was over.

Pedro believed expulsion was a preventive discipline measure, noting that he was expelled to prevent him from repeating the offense: "[Administrators] . . . did not want to take a chance on it." Pedro also believed that expulsion was a way to deal with students with a record of committing the same action in the past. Unlike the stereotypical suspended or expelled student, 16-year-old Pedro did not have a history of exhibiting harmful behaviors at school much less those that endangered others. His expulsion paperwork states that Pedro had a "history of discipline problems," although this was not the case. Pedro's "Anecdotal Report of Misconduct" revealed three incidents prior to his expulsion: Saturday school for excessive absences, "defiance" during panoramic class picture, and dress code violation. None of his previous actions

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[27] This term was used by Pedro's mother on a couple of occasions.

was harmful to others, and in fact at least one was subjective. "Defiance" can be interpreted to mean many things, depending on an individual's interpretation. His participation in the fire incident—his moment of "temporary foolishness"[28]—shocked his family.

After a month in independent study, Pedro enrolled in a community day school *within* Nación School District, in a neighboring city. During the semester-long expulsion Pedro's academics improved dramatically at the community day school. Pedro earned straight As, a GPA of 2.52, and a citizenship average of 3.18. He enrolled in 10 hours of counseling focused on decision-making.

Upon reinstatement, Pedro was allowed to attend his home high school, Prosperity Heights High, one of the newest schools in the district. Pedro "couldn't wait" to go back to school and prepared by shopping for new clothes. He expressed that he had two more years to finish school and wanted "a better life." Returning to school would make this a reality.

I met Pedro at his high school shortly after completing his first post-expulsion semester. He appeared to be doing well and did not stand out to school administrators. For instance, when I asked to meet with him, Assistant Principal Chavez asked, "He's been expelled?" Other students in my study are well-known by school administrators for a variety of reasons; Pedro is certainly not known as a problem student.

His ability to blend in and excel in sports suggested a positive transition into his home school; however, Pedro struggled with feelings of guilt. He was also concerned about how others perceived him for his involvement in the fire. Expulsion took an emotional toll on Pedro.

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[28] In his reinstatement letter to the district, Pedro describes his actions as "temporary foolishness that I regret."

Isaiah: An Endearing Boy

I met Isaiah during summer school at Beach High. He had just completed his first year back in the district and was taking a couple of classes. A thin boy with a very light complexion and a baby face, Isaiah seemed very young to have an expulsion on his record. His shirts and shorts were so big that his arms and legs looked like thin twigs peeking out of his clothes. Using the windows as mirrors, Isaiah walked toward the office cupping and padding his Afro, making sure it was intact. He looked around the office as the assistant principal (AP) called him over. "She'd like to talk with you, Isaiah" the AP told him.

I explained my study and told him I could get the permission forms from him the following day or he could mail them to me. "I'm going to Las Vegas and won't be in school tomorrow, so I'll just mail them back to you." I explained that he probably couldn't miss school, especially summer school, since attendance seemed to be stricter. He agreed but then said he would only miss a couple of days. Isaiah assured me he would mail the forms to me, but given the many students I met with and never heard back from, I was doubtful. Isaiah kept his word; the forms arrived to my house the next week. Unfortunately, he had also been kicked out of summer school.

Isaiah Speedy Griffin and his younger sister lived with their father since he was three years old. At the time of the first interview, his father's girlfriend and her son were also residing in the household. Isaiah's father, a manager at an auto body shop, was out of town on business, and his biological mother was in jail. Although his mother was detained on drug-related charges, Isaiah believed that prostitution was the reason for her most recent arrest. He had three other maternal siblings whom he did not see. When referring to one of his brothers he said, "I don't think I'm ever gonna see him in my life."

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Isaiah turned 16 a day before we met. He sadly shared that he did not have a birthday party; his father had forgotten his birthday, and his mom had written the wrong age on his birthday card. "I didn't care," he said, but I was not convinced. When I asked if he might have had a party had his dad been in town, he quickly replied, "No. A lot of my friends are bad, and my dad wouldn't want them over here."

School documents indicated that Isaiah's paternal grandparents had played an integral role in his upbringing. Along with his father, his grandparents had been very involved in his education. Isaiah's father, stepmothers, and grandparents had consistent contact with school officials regarding Isaiah's academics and behavior. Isaiah exhibited behavioral problems as early as second grade, particularly with issues related to blaming others, lying, and stealing. Assumed to be "a plea for attention," his actions led to several detentions, parent/teacher/grandparent conferences, and suspensions.

Days before winter break during the 2004–05 school year, Isaiah was expelled for possessing weapons in school—three M-80 firecrackers. According to Isaiah, a friend gave him the firecrackers as they walked home the previous day. With much regret, Isaiah shared that he forgot to take the fireworks out of his backpack when he arrived home. The next day he was called into the office, questioned, and suspended pending expulsion. At the time of his expulsion, Isaiah was enrolled in the first semester of seventh grade at Beach Middle School. Isaiah would be eligible for reinstatement by fall 2005, provided he fulfilled all of the conditions for reinstatement.

Isaiah shared that he had a track record of "being bad" that started while he was in elementary school. This, he believed, was part of the reason why he was expelled, along with the fact that firecrackers are illegal. But he didn't believe he should've been "kicked out"; he felt he

should have been given a second chance because "it was the first time I got in trouble in *THAT* school . . ." His school violation fell under mandatory expulsion guidelines.

Specific conditions for Isaiah's reinstatement included 20 hours of a counseling program with an emphasis on decision-making and enrollment in a community day school (CDS) *within* Nación School District. Isaiah was suspended twice while attending the CDS. He received a five-day suspension for "[urinating] in public on school grounds during P.E." and for three days after engaging in "mutual combat with another student." As a result of the second suspension, Isaiah received an F in citizenship for P.E. Per his progress reports from the CDS, Isaiah missed assignments, had several tardies, and continued "goofing around in class." Academic and behavioral marks were not the only reason why Isaiah remained at the CDS; Isaiah's father did not believe anything was wrong with Isaiah and disagreed with the counseling requirement. Isaiah shared, "They said I needed counseling and my dad refused to go, so I never really went until eighth grade ended. Then I started going into counseling so I could get back into school," adding that he wished he could have stayed at the CDS. Isaiah had participated in counseling sessions during his younger years; thus, his father's refusal to fulfill the counseling requirement seemed out of character. Since he wanted his son back in the district, he had to comply. Isaiah described his counseling experience as follows:

> [The counselor] said I shouldn't be there; he said there's nothing really wrong with me. Every single time . . . we play games there. We'd play all kinds of games and everything, so that was fun . . . leave school and go there. So [the counselor] didn't think that there was anything wrong with me at all. He said, "There's no problems," nothing.

Counseling sessions, then, seemed to be just a requirement with no real purpose.

Isaiah was reinstated in September 2006, over a year after his expulsion. He had been at the CDS much longer than anticipated, partly because of his continued misconduct but also because of the unwillingness to enroll in counseling. Isaiah entered ninth grade when he was

reinstated. When asked why he returned to school, he matter-of-factly stated, "Um, because I had to; 'cause I guess I was in ninth grade already and it's time to go to high school . . . I was tired of being there, though. I hadn't been to school in a *while* and I wanted to go back."

As Isaiah's reentry process continued, he often compared his current experience with that at the CDS. Torn between what he missed about the CDS and what he experienced at Beach High, Isaiah needed to decide what steps to take in order to have a smooth transition. By the same token, one cannot ignore the fact that the schooling he received at the CDS did not match up with Beach High's standards and expectations. Moreover, his system of support needed to remain consistent if he was to adapt successfully.

Cisco: Torn

Street-smart. Determined. A slender, well-groomed young man, Cisco was an adolescent with a very complex life. At the young age of 16, Cisco had completed enough credits to be classified as a senior. Cisco enrolled at the Nación High learning community (NLC) upon reinstatement. He was on an accelerated program to finish high school, and he hoped to become a border patrol agent. If all went well, Cisco would graduate a year early and become the first male in his family to graduate from high school. That was, of course, if he passed the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), which he had failed in the past.

In addition to the CAHSEE, social hurdles stood in the way of Cisco's graduation goals. Like other students in this study, Cisco had attended several schools and attempted to adapt to the social circles within those schools. This proved problematic, especially when Cisco was placed in schools located outside of his immediate community. Cisco asserted that he was no longer living the gangster life, but he was often recognized by former gang affiliates or individuals whom Cisco referred to as "enemies" from rival territories. His past residence in

Ciudad Proletaria made him a target while attending schools in or near Pedregal Heights, his current city of residence. In fact, when I showed up to meet him at school, I was informed that he was hospitalized after having been assaulted near campus.

Although his older brothers had been involved with gangs, drugs, and the Department of Corrections, Cisco explained that his brothers did not want that type of lifestyle for him. His mother, too, had done her best to keep Cisco away from drugs and gangs. Her efforts were recognized by Cisco's counselor and a district administrator, who described his mother as a humble woman doing her best to support her child. Although language had been a barrier, district personnel seemed to empathize with Cisco's mother and appreciate her cooperation and efforts. As the youngest of seven children, Cisco had witnessed the paths taken by his older siblings and was motivated to follow a path that would allow him to "help [his] mom and have a better life."

Cisco's school code violations were somewhat explained by both his past associations and current residence. Less than a month after starting ninth grade, Cisco was suspended and later expelled. Per district documents, Cisco was expelled for being in possession of two knives for protection, in possession of an illegal substance (marijuana) with intent to sell, and in possession of markers used in a previous tagging incident (which he had been reprimanded for). Police were called in to question Cisco about drugs and weapons. Cisco explained to police that he had to "have his back in Pedregal Heights" because he was sometimes harassed by the "little gangsters" who "act all hard" toward him. Living in Pedregal Heights, rival territory, Cisco explained he carried a knife for self-protection: "I was like taking care of my back." Cisco further stated he acted out because his life was "shit," and explained that his mother was rarely

home and his father frequented bars and was out all night. Cisco smoked marijuana to deal with his parents' absence and "mest up live."[29]

Cisco was taken to the Pedregal Heights Police Department, where he was booked and fingerprinted, and was later transported to juvenile hall where he spent two weeks. He was expelled for the remainder of the school year and was referred to a CDS *within* the Nación School District. In addition to complying with probation and police requirements, Cisco was ordered to complete 20 hours of counseling focused on decision-making, anger management, and substance abuse.

While at the CDS, Cisco was expelled after a knife slipped out of a female student's pants during P.E. The female student provided contradictory accounts of how she came to possess the knife; however, Cisco admitted to taking the knife to school to protect himself from someone who had threatened him with a gun while walking home from school. For the second time, Cisco was arrested, booked, and transported to juvenile hall, and was expelled for an additional semester. He was referred to and enrolled in County Court Schools, an alternative placement *outside* of Nación School District. The same requirements were set forth as a condition of his reinstatement. It is unclear if Cisco had to complete a total of 40 hours of counseling. Documents in his file indicate that Cisco completed 20 hours of anger-management and decision-making training, "treatment"/individual counseling, and 20 hours of community service through County Court Schools. The counseling sessions and expulsion did not change contextual factors associated with Cisco's need to protect himself; thus, he coped with threats as best as he could and on his own terms.

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[29] Messed-up life.

During a conversation, Cisco expressed the need for someone to "make a movie about teens and the hard lives they live." In addition to his troubled family life, expulsion placed Cisco at greater risk when placed outside of his community. He accepted his expulsions but not the timespan. Discipline policies, from Cisco's perspective, didn't account for social conflicts outside of school that sometimes spilled into school. He reasoned that school officials " . . . don't want that to happen again" but also felt that expulsion was a "dumb" way to address student misconduct. "I think if they did that with everybody there's no kids—who's gonna be in [school]?"

As Cisco transitioned into Nación High, he had many things to look forward to and some he'd rather not think about. He hoped for a position on the baseball team and anticipated going to prom and football games. The CAHSEE was certainly on his mind, as were the "enemies" and old acquaintances who could spoil the progress he'd made and jeopardize what he had to accomplish.

Cisco wanted to be in a comprehensive high school and not a learning community, which he described as "boring." Cisco's family encouraged him to return to school. Cisco was determined to be the "first guy that ever, like in my family, that's gonna graduate . . ."

Duane: Mr. Bling Bling

Duane is a very stylish Pacific Islander. He wore a different hairstyle each time we met: First, his hair was long and wavy, then braided. Toward the end of the school year, he cut his hair short and looked like a completely different young man than the one I'd met months before. Duane was rarely seen without his flashy jewelry, especially the gold plate hanging from his neck that spelled "DUANE." The name plate measured approximately 6 by 2 inches and was reminiscent of name plates worn by rap stars in the 80s and 90s. Duane wore his necklace

proudly and informed all who asked that the plate was real gold. Duane was short in stature and looked even shorter when he wore long, baggy shorts.

Duane rarely did any in-class work and was seen texting, napping, or listening to music throughout the school day. He was a special education student with documented poor academic performance, a few suspensions, and several detentions. Duane shared that at some point he was in juvenile hall for six months and served five months of house arrest. Somewhat of a class clown, Duane's good sense of humor and jewelry attracted much attention from his teachers and peers.

As an eighth grader in summer school classes, which he failed, Duane had stabbed a classmate in the leg, threatened another student by holding a knife to her neck, and vandalized a school bus. Statements provided to school officials indicated that Duane's actions had started off as a joke; however, the joke escalated with serious results. Duane was classified as a special education student early on in his educational career. In accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), a "manifestation determination" hearing must be held to determine if the student's behavior substantially relates to his/her disability.[30] In Duane's case, school personnel concluded that his actions were not a result of his disability. His parents disagreed, arguing that his misbehavior was a result of his frustration in school and the school's failure to address Duane's individualized education plan (IEP).

Duane was expelled and sent to a community day school (CDS) *within* Nación School District. School documents indicate that Duane attended the CDS for a few days before they learned of his special education status. His option was to enroll in a County Court School (CCS), but his mother refused to enroll him in a CCS because of the "type" of students who attend there.

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[30] Although I was unable to obtain a copy of Duane's IEP, school records indicate he took medication for ADD.

Duane's parents concluded that he was doing well at the CDS because he received extra attention. But services provided at the CDS did not comply with Duane's IEP. Somewhere along the expulsion process, Duane's special education status was overlooked and he was misplaced. Upon realizing such an oversight, Duane's parents waived special education services in order to keep him at the CDS.

Less than a semester at the CDS, Duane was arrested and later taken to juvenile hall for battery of another student. As indicated in Duane's discipline history, Duane punched a student in the left eye while riding the bus back home and was quoted as saying "that if he ratted on him, he was going to shoot him." Since Duane was on expulsion, he was referred to the County Court Schools (CCS) and was responsible for his victim's medical bills. According to district documents, Duane's parents refused to enroll him in CCS "because of the 'type' of students who attend there." Duane's parents did not enroll him in CCS.

In an e-mail between Mrs. Robinson, the person responsible for completing expulsion and reinstatement paperwork for the district, and a counselor, Mrs. Robinson states that she "lost track" of Duane's enrollment after he was removed from the CDS, where "he was not supposed to go," and after his parents failed to enroll him in County Court Schools. An institutional agent made the determination that the district "[had] to serve him." Duane was placed in an alternative setting, within the Nación District, where IEP requirements would be followed. He remained there through ninth grade. This arrangement facilitated Duane's transition back into a comprehensive school setting by allowing him hybrid enrollment. Duane's reinstatement differed from that of other students in this study since he was mainstreamed for several months prior to full reinstatement, which took place over a year and a half after his initial expulsion of one

school year. Upon completion of this transition period, Duane was fully enrolled in Pedregal High, his school of choice.

Duane felt that he "deserved" the expulsion and suspension, but he also suggested that instead of expelling students, gradual sanctions should be in place: "Try to help them before and if that's not going through their head *then* do what you gotta do." Like other expelled students, Duane was required to maintain a certain scholastic and citizenship level and complete 20 hours of decision-making/anger-management counseling.

As a senior, Duane was able to reflect on his younger years and the actions that led to his expulsion, offering thoughts on how things could have been different, or not. He shared that he didn't want to return to school because he was "tired of it" and felt that he did not belong: "It wasn't for me; I didn't feel it was for me so I didn't care. 'Cause I don't care. 'Cause I don't like rules." A student from a different school threatened Duane the week I observed him. The incident received much attention, and Duane played a huge role in informing classmates about the incident. He also informed school administrators about the threats, stating that he could not get in trouble because he " . . . [wanted] to graduate."

Angel: The Gangsta

"Hi. I need your help. I need help with my son." Those were the words on the other end of the phone: the desperate words of a mother. Just a half an hour earlier, a school counselor tried to talk me out of recruiting Angel since he was "probably not a reliable candidate" and his mother "would not call me back," but she did call me. Mrs. Garcia's son, Angel, had recently been reinstated into Nación District and was experiencing a series of academic, social, and behavioral problems at school.

Angel seemed bashful and had somewhat of a defeated look in his eyes. "Come in," his mom called in the background as a small girl ran toward me for a hug. Her older sister, Gina, followed her. I handed Mrs. Garcia take-out from Chapultepec, a Mexican food restaurant owned by one of my relatives. From our earlier conversation, I gathered she had young children, and since we were meeting around dinnertime, I thought I should take something for her kids to munch on while she, Angel, and I became acquainted with each other. I counted the little heads running around us: one, two, three, and four. There were four children under the age of six, including twins, and then there was Angel, who was 15 years old.

Although Angel had a lengthy discipline record in the Nación District, his literary abilities attracted the attention of a prominent language arts program in which he enrolled for a brief time. He was later dismissed from the program and school for various behavioral violations and low academic performance. Less than two weeks before junior high graduation and in the midst of ninth-grade activities, Angel assaulted a classmate. Per Angel's account, he stopped at a friend's home on his way to school so they could walk to school together. Angel took his friend's BB gun and began to shoot the trashcan outside. He tripped and almost fell and was laughed at by a classmate whom he shot a total of three times, twice in the leg and once in the eye. Expulsion documents indicate that Angel shot his classmate "five or more times and one time in the eye." Afterward, he and his friend walked to school. As Angel narrated the incident, he laughed a few times, claiming, "we were just playing around!" and that he and the classmate were in fact friends. As evidence of their friendship and playful intent, Angel asserted that the classmate did not inform school officials of the incident. Angel was placed on five days suspension (pending expulsion), arrested by Ciudad Proletaria Police, and transported to juvenile hall.

Mrs. Garcia was given the choice of taking her son home or having him transported to juvenile hall. Given all the behavioral problems Angel experienced at home and school, Mrs. Garcia thought that a weekend in juvenile hall would "teach him a lesson." Unfortunately, a weekend stay was not an option and he remained in juvenile hall until his hearing, two months after the incident. Reinstatement requirements for Angel included enrollment in an educational program *outside* of the Nación School District and 10 hours of counseling with an emphasis on decision-making/anger management. He enrolled in a county court school.

Angel felt that his time in juvenile hall was enough punishment for the BB-gun incident. From his perspective, the BB-gun incident itself was not why he was expelled: "Well, maybe not with what I did *that* time but because I already had a record. I had it coming, you know, 'cause of the record I had." Expulsion, according to Angel, was unavoidable and part of a sequence of sanctions resulting from previous offenses.

Angel shared that he returned to school because of his mom and his own desire to go back: "I *had* to, especially with my mom and everything and *I wanted* to go back, I missed friends and everything." Mixed with the excitement of going back to a comprehensive high school was the desire to improve and have a fresh start, " . . . start all over again. Do good this time around." Overall, Angel's reentry has not been positive. Angel was unwelcome in several school settings, attended four different placements/schools, lacked positive interactions with adults and students in those settings, and deliberately violated school rules (which in return put off the support of former advocates) as a defense mechanism to deal with negative situations.

The last time I met with Angel, he had recently been discharged from a local hospital after binge drinking. He looked so different from the bashful, insecure boy I had met the

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previous year. He had several piercings and large tattoos on his arm and shoulders. I asked why

he had all the tattoos. "I'm a gangsta,"[31] he replied.

Vanessa: La Chola[32]

Vanessa was a spunky 16-year-old with a pretty smile and good sense of humor. Vanessa

was quite vocal when she disagreed with someone or felt cornered. That colorful aspect of her

personality was absent from the teenager who wore two braids at soccer games (making her look

much younger and shy) and the well-mannered, glamorous young lady admired by all during her

sweet-sixteen celebration. The oldest of four children, Vanessa is often entrusted with the care of

her younger siblings. She has encountered many school-related obstacles (some resulting from

multiple school transfers), which set her back in more than one way.

I met Vanessa toward the end of her freshman year. By this time, Vanessa had attended

two middle schools, which she transferred in and out of during seventh and eighth grade, and

was currently enrolled in Nación High, a school once attended by her parents. Nación High is

located in the working-class neighborhood of Ciudad Proletaria. Years before, Vanessa's mother

relocated to a suburb in Pedregal Heights in order to keep Vanessa "away from all the bad stuff"

and to "give her a better education." Ironically, Vanessa's experiences in those schools were

troubling academically and socially.

Credit deficient and on a path toward expulsion, Vanessa was referred to me by Assistant

Principal Goodwill, who described Vanessa as a student with a terrible attitude whose behavior

was not severe enough to warrant an expulsion but who could easily fall through the cracks. At

first I did not understand Mrs. Goodwill's "fall through the cracks" statement; however, as I

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[31] Angel was not known to be in a gang.
[32] The gangster (female).

learned more about Vanessa's academic and behavior history, I gained a better understanding of Mrs. Goodwill's perspective.

Defiant. Disrespectful. Argumentative. This is how school officials describe Vanessa. Behavioral accounts recorded in Vanessa's file ranged from being tardy, to having a cigarette lighter at school, to defiance. Vanessa's misconduct attracted attention and disciplinary actions. Her record included over twenty AP detentions, five AP referrals, four counselor referrals, 21 days in opportunity class (somewhat of an in-school-suspension classroom reserved for unruly students) during seventh and eighth grade, and eight suspensions totaling 18 days out of school. Behavioral and academic concerns were documented beginning in seventh grade and continuing on to the end of ninth grade, when I met her. As a means of addressing mounting behavioral, scholastic, and social concerns, Vanessa transferred in and out of schools. Transfers, however, did not yield positive results.

According to Vanessa, when news spread that she had lived in Ciudad Proletaria, students in the suburban schools expected her to be like a *chola*[33] [34]and engage in mischief. Slowly but surely, she lived up to those expectations, adding to her troubles. Intra-district social adjustment transfers[35] led to academic and social instability. In some instances, Vanessa transferred mid-semester, making it difficult for her to catch up and keep pace at her new school. Her academic grades and several written notifications indicated that Vanessa did not demonstrate the needed skills to pass her classes, lacked credits, and was socially promoted at least twice, once in eighth grade and again in ninth grade. She completed eighth grade with a GPA of 1.62. From a social standpoint, Vanessa fraternized with students with similar academic and social

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[33] Female gangster. Note that Vanessa was not in a gang.
[34] When Vanessa returned to school in Ciudad Proletaria she was nicknamed Chola by her soccer mates. Vanessa and her mother were very unhappy with the negative label.
[35] According to Nacion's Intradistrict Transfer Policy, intradistrict transfers may be approved for one of several reasons, including "To satisfy adjustment needs."

standings. Instability resulting from frequent school transfers (and suspensions) manifested in Vanessa's credit-deficient status and alternative education placement.

Only one document in her thick school file indicated concern over Vanessa's emotional well-being. During a week when Vanessa had received a referral for every class, her seventh-grade science teacher also submitted a Request for Counselor Assistance, stating, "Vanessa has me very concerned. My concern is more emotionally than it is academically—although at this point she does have an F." According to her counselor's notes, Vanessa was counseled "regarding [her] emotional status"—Vanessa didn't recall such an incident.

For Vanessa, transfers were a reactive measure to increased tensions in school. They were a quick fix to an immediate problem, but the transfers did not address Vanessa's behavior and her slow disengagement from school. I met Vanessa soon after she violated her behavior contract at Nación High. Vanessa was transferred to Nación High's learning community (NLC), which she attended for two hours a day, every day of the week. Upon arrival, NLC students punched their time cards, walked over to a work table, and began their assignments. Vanessa and the other students worked against the clock; they were required to complete "four pages of table work" during the two-hour timeframe or "stay until complete."[36] Answers were not reviewed, but students were expected to pass a computerized test on the material. Students were allowed to move on to the next chapter when they obtained a passing score of 70 percent. Teachers sat at their desks and monitored the students, making sure no one was talking and that all were on task. During my week at the NLC, I did not witness any class instruction.

As I concluded my observations, Vanessa's teacher shared that she was doing well and that "she's gonna be fine." Vanessa was definitely doing well in this environment; she had not

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[36] This information was posted on a wall as part of the "Learning Community Rules."

been in any sort of trouble with NLC students or teachers. This was in sharp contrast to her previous school experiences in which she demonstrated a pattern of physical and verbal altercations with students and staff. Vanessa hoped to one day return to Nación High but needed the flexibility provided at the NLC. When she returns to her high school, Vanessa will have to complete chapters and tests in a fixed amount of time, and she will have a greater deal of instruction from her teachers. Vanessa will have to, once again, adapt to an environment in which she has struggled in the past. In addition, she will have to balance school, work, and, more recently, motherhood.

The Schools

Students have limited schooling options once they are expelled. Although students may have attended a temporary placement, most of their expulsion took place in community day schools (CDS) and juvenile court and community schools[37]. Community day schools and juvenile court and community schools tend to focus on developing pro-social skills, self-esteem, and resiliency. According to the California Department of Education, community day schools, in particular, have low student-teacher ratios and tend to organize themselves around the goal of offering "challenging classes" that teach "important skills." County Court schools provide public education for youth in juvenile hall and other youth detention facilities as well as students who have been expelled from their school districts. Juvenile court schools are operated by county boards of education. A minimum school day for county court schools is four hours.

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[37] I refer to juvenile court and community schools (JCCS) as county court schools (CCS) throughout the paper because they are run by the Sunny City County Office of Education, not Nacion School District.

Figure 4.1: Schools Attended by Expelled and Reentering Students[38]
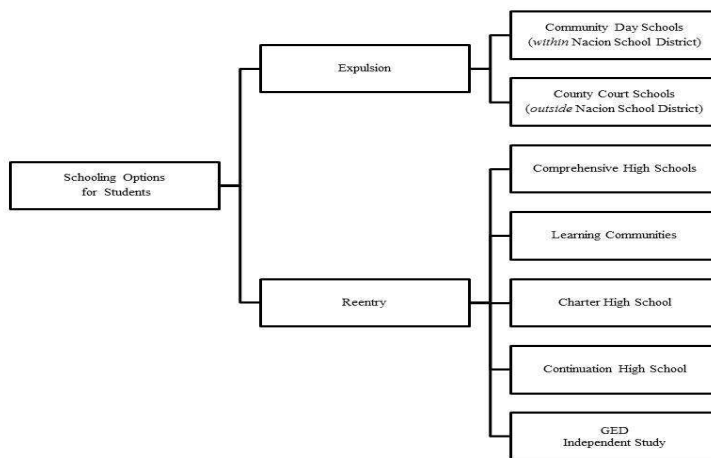
Because several students attended multiple schools, both comprehensive and alternative, during reentry, I provide Table 4.1 to help with the tracking of students, followed by a brief description of how each school functions. School names are not as important as the type of school.

Table 4.1: Names and Types of Schools Attended by Reentering Students

Comprehensive High Schools	Learning Communities (LC)	Continuation School	Community Charter High	Other
Beach High Lomas High Mountain High Nación High Pedregal High Prosperity High	Lomas High Learning Community Mountain High Learning Community Nación High Learning Community Pedregal High Learning Community	Continuation High	Charter High	GED Independent Study

Nación District alternative schools include learning communities (LCs), a continuation high school, a charter school, and several other alternative programs. Most Nación District high schools house LCs, which are run separate from the main campus.

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[38] This figure does not include Duane's hybrid enrollment during reentry.

The first learning community in Nación District was created in the 1980s with the goal of recruiting dropouts back into the school system. Today, the learning communities in Nación District offer credit-deficient students an opportunity to recover credits during two-hour daily sessions scheduled from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Nación District also has a continuation school with an approximate enrollment of 400 students between 10th and 12th grades. The school has been recognized as a Model Continuation School by the State of California. Its school schedule is split into two 4.5-hour sessions, morning and afternoon. Students may enroll in both sessions, which means that students could have a 10-class workload and complete, or recover, credits more quickly.[39]

The continuation high school requirement for credit completion is 60 hours. In other words, if students attend class and complete assignments calculated to be worth 60 hours of work, students receive a credit. A priority of the continuation school is to increase the number of students returning to their home school or graduating from the continuation high school. Alternative placements during and after expulsion are presented as accommodating students by offering them a flexible program of study.

Conversely, comprehensive high schools prioritize academics while offering students a series of extracurricular activities during and after school and are much larger than expulsion sites. All of Nación District schools operate on a year-round schedule. This allows for intercession or summer school during breaks and between school years. Mainstream schools

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[39] The Alliance for Boys and Men of Color notes that the California Assembly Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color has developed a series of policy recommendations and corresponding bills in the California Legislature. As of January 1, 2014, AB 570 extends the day of attendance for continuation high school or continuation education classes from 180 minutes to 240 minutes and requires school districts to adopt policies that ensure that specific groups are not disproportionately enrolled in continuation school within a district. Senate Bills 744 and 1111 pertinent to involuntary transfers of students to county community schools have been vetoed by Governor Brown, stating that much of the work can be done at the local level through the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).

consist of a complete program of study with a curricular focus (including Honors and Advanced Placement classes), extracurricular activities, athletics, and enrichment programs.

<u>Summary</u>

The students in this study differ <small>from one another</small> in their peer associations, relationships with adults, and mechanisms used to cope with one or several transitions during expulsion and upon reentry into Nación School District. What links them is their experience with school discipline policies. Their experiences tell a story of the complexities involved in expulsion policies and procedures, requirements that are attached to reinstatement and student reentry, and give insight into how these marginalized students, and others like them, attempt to reestablish themselves in an environment they were forced to leave.

CHAPTER FIVE: SOCIAL CHALLENGES OF STUDENT REENTRY

The analytic stories presented in this chapter illustrate how the first challenge of reentry is returning to a space where you know people have perceptions about you. This was a dilemma voiced by study participants. Judgments and views about (and held by) students were reinforced by institutional agents and the students themselves. A symbolic interaction analysis takes a more critical approach toward cross-examining students' (mis)conduct in relation to their sense-making and assessments of what it means to be a reentering student. This framework adds a complex analysis of interactions experienced during reentry into schooling institutions and documents how these exchanges informed students' consciousness and subsequent actions. In this chapter, I use symbolic interaction/exchange theories to analyze how disciplinary incidents affected interactions at school (e.g., teacher-student, student-administrator, student-student, etc.) and influenced how students made sense of their circumstances and the reentry process.

All students returned to school with serious marks on their files. Reinstatement procedures, such as notifying receiving schools that an enrollee is coming from expulsion, documented offenses, or expulsion itself, potentially influenced how students were perceived and treated upon their return. For some students, the co-construction of meaning and identities resulted in adherence to negative labels and expectations. Reentering students' senses of belonging and acceptance were impacted by interactions with school staff and peers. For instance, at least one student described an encounter with a counselor in which the counselor used disparaging remarks toward the student during matriculation.

Reentering students felt that school staff often judged them based on their past actions. Whether imagined or confirmed, students' worries about how they were perceived generated social and interpersonal struggles that impacted their readaptation efforts. The stories revealed that several students found ways to rid themselves of negative labels associated with their previous misconduct. On the other hand, students who continued to defy school rules inadvertently confirmed negative assumptions about them held by institutional agents. It appears that the former group conformed to school rules to avoid additional punishment, while the latter group of students did not. Students' narratives, however, reveal a sense of resistance exhibited by students. In other words, what may have appeared as a complete disregard for authority was students' response to the treatment they received at the hands of school officials, perceptions about how others judged them, and real incidents. Regardless of mild or extreme behavior modifications, students were " . . . locked to a distinguishing identity . . . " shaped by past actions (Goffman, 1983, p. 3).

Interactions and communication with district personnel may have determined how students were treated upon expulsion and readmission. Mrs. Robinson, who documented and tracked expulsions and reinstatements for the district, explained that her disposition to help students was influenced by a student's attitude and whether he or she expressed remorse. "When they come with an attitude, 'no wonder you got expelled!'" (personal communication, May 22, 2008).

Mrs. Robinson demonstrated her approach to assessing students as she reflected on a petite African American female student who came to her office in hopes that the school board would overturn her expulsion. As the young lady walked out, Mrs. Robinson commented that she was a "genuine little girl," suggesting that the girl's expulsion was a result of an innocent

mistake. Without providing details about her expulsion, Mrs. Robinson shared that the girl had just moved to California and that she and her mother lived in a hotel. The girl's mother left something in her backpack that was later found in school, and so, although she believed in her innocence, she had to be expelled. "It's zero tolerance, you know." Mrs. Robinson stated matter-of-factly. Before the young lady walked out of the office, Mrs. Robinson gave her a backpack with some school supplies, wished her luck, and reassured the young lady that she would not be sent to juvenile hall, a common practice in her previous state of residence. Mrs. Robinson's actions showed compassion for the young lady and a sincere belief in her innocence and naiveté. Her actions, however, shed light on the power of assumptions and arbitrary treatment of people.

The subjective nature of assumptions based on encounters (between students and institutional agents) influenced how students felt about themselves and available options and opportunities. In the next section, I discuss how personal judgments resurfaced at various points during students' transitions in the district and then later at their respective schools. According to the students, they were treated differently based on past misconduct. The students employed different strategies to cope with changes and expectations during reentry.

Worries Over Evident and Unsubstantiated Perceptions

The majority of study participants (all except Duane, Pedro, and Isaiah) believed their discipline history would impact their return to a district school. These students talked about how they might be perceived by students and staff at their new school. All of them returned with blemished records and some with lengthier discipline histories. Some students noted that their discipline files could play a significant role in how others formed opinions about them. Cumulative files and discipline documents, detailing complete accounts of their most recent school infractions (and previous infractions), traveled with the students as they reenrolled in

Nación School District. School officials were notified that a student "returning from expulsion"[40] would be enrolled at their school. This notice made at least one member of the receiving school's staff aware of the student's past history. In most cases, an e-mail notification was sent to a counselor, assistant principal, or both.

Participants felt that previous discipline incidents led to the belief that they were "bad" students with the potential to defy school rules again. Students spoke of a constant pressure to be good and not be associated with kids who made bad choices; they did not want to be deemed guilty by association, nor did they want attention brought to their discipline files and personal histories. Interactions at their new school and others' perceptions of the returning students played a critical role in how students viewed barriers and opportunities during reentry. Take, for example, Joaquin's account of his encounter with a counselor:

> Well, when I got to Nación High the registrar, no, the counselor, she was all like, "Why would I want you at my school if you're a troublemaker?" And I didn't wanna answer like, you know. I was like "'Cause you have to. Student Services put me here."
> And she was like, "But I don't have to take you in."
> I'm like, "Yeah, you do. Student Services put me here and you gotta take me in."

He continued to describe his initial reaction:

> I was like, "Dang! That's messed up. I'm trying to fix myself and you guys reject me." I was like, "Whatever."

The counselor's judgmental questioning and her hesitance to enroll him at Nación annoyed Joaquin. He was especially upset that the counselor had behaved in such a manner in front of his mother. Troublemaker or not, Joaquin had completed district requirements and was ready to move forward and finish school. Fortunately, Joaquin had an ally at Nación High—his former math teacher, Mr. Gomez. Joaquin believed that Mr. Gomez wanted him at Nación High; he had,

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[40] Soon after a student attended the required review meeting, Mrs. Robinson and/or her supervisor, Mr. Maje, e-mailed the receiving school a notice that a specific student was returning from an expulsion and would enroll in their school. According to Mrs. Robinson, notification was required by law, especially in cases where weapons were involved in the school code violation.

after all, approved his enrollment. Joaquin shook off the event and never went back to his counselor. In spite of the unwelcoming reception, Joaquin stayed on track.

Hostile and demeaning treatment frustrated reentering students who were already anxious about their return. Judgments were made about the students, impacting how they were perceived and treated. I encountered this firsthand with Angel's counselor, who discouraged me from contacting Angel's mother to recruit Angel for my study. As Angel's counselor located his contact information she suggested that Angel was "probably not a reliable candidate" and was certain that his mother would not call me back. His mother did call me.

In the following sections, I describe how students evaluated the reentry process. I pay particular attention to students' concerns about how their discipline histories impacted reentry at one or multiple points. Interactions with individuals at school and what students believed to be presumptive judgments held by others about them played a noteworthy role in shaping how they conducted themselves, how they assessed opportunities and barriers during reentry, and how they proceeded in their new school setting. Overall, these stories revealed how students struggled to detach themselves from the stigma of being suspended and/or expelled.

Eduardo: Oversurveilled and Labeled

Eduardo was often surrounded by friends. Although he was not the type to voluntarily speak up in class, he didn't shy away when called on. As time passed, Eduardo shared more about himself, his goals, and his views about his experience with school discipline. When he enrolled at Lomas High School, Eduardo sought to clear his name and distance himself from the crowd he felt gave him a bad reputation.

Pressure at home and lack of contact with his peers created much anticipation for Eduardo. He was happy to return, but he was concerned about his previous enrollment at an

expulsion school. Eduardo explained that his presence at Lomas High School probably did not raise any red flags; that is, unless someone delved into his file:

> Some [teachers] didn't really know me and when they checked where I came from they probably thought that I was going to be a bad student.

When asked if he thought teachers routinely checked on where students come from, he stated matter-of-factly, "The paper tells them where I came from." An expulsion stood out in students' cumulative files.

Eduardo voiced that reconnecting with old friends and staying within his community, where he "knew what was going on," made him feel at ease, as if he was picking up where he left off. What he did find difficult, however, was dealing with the bad reputation he had gained from the one-time drug deal. Eduardo shared some reactions from his classmates, even those who did not know him prior to his reinstatement. "When I got there, people I didn't even know just knew me—'cause, I guess everybody talked about it." Expulsion also impacted Eduardo's family dynamics. His parents were more vigilant with regard to his activities and friends. The relationship with his parents was affected by the nature of the expulsion; the expulsion had ramifications beyond school grounds.

Restrictions at home and rumors at school led Eduardo to conclude that he was viewed as a "bad kid"—a label he rejected. In an incident a few months after his reinstatement, Eduardo was suspended for being "involved in creating chaos, disrupting lunch supervisors that were trying to keep control." Eduardo explained that someone threw pizza at a teacher during lunchtime. Eduardo claimed that he and others who were suspended did not throw the pizza. Nonetheless, he worried about his fate because of his conditional reinstatement. Unlike the others in the group, Eduardo had an expulsion on file. This led him to conclude that he had a "worse chance of getting kicked out again." Eduardo recalled the incident:

Eduardo:	Because they said I didn't want to help them out, [that] I didn't want to help them figure out who threw a pizza at a teacher, so they just suspended a whole group.
EV:	So when you got suspended for not telling, or not "helping them," as you said, how did that make you feel?
Eduardo:	Because I signed a contract when I got back thought they were just going to let me go again, expel me again. But they said, "no," they were just going to suspend me.

It is unclear why Eduardo was not expelled a second time or transferred to another school after violating his conditional reinstatement. What the experience suggests, however, is that Eduardo was punished for what administrators perceived to be a lack of cooperation. If, in fact, Eduardo didn't know who threw the pizza, the three-day suspension he received speaks to the power of subjective judgments in school discipline policies and procedures, and calls into question whether or not his expulsion was used as a deciding factor in his suspension. This experience troubled Eduardo; he felt he was wrongly accused and punished just because he happened to be near the commotion. He wondered if his expulsion made him a target for further punishment and worried about becoming the usual suspect.

Eduardo believed he managed to detach himself from negative labels because of changes he made. For instance, he stopped hanging out with the *cholitos*[41] and stopped dressing in oversized clothes often associated with gangs. Eduardo may not have been viewed as a bad kid, yet he was on pins and needles and somewhat defensive when approached by school administrators. I saw this during our first meeting, when Eduardo asked me if he was in trouble and then feverishly explained that he had done nothing wrong so he could not be in trouble.

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[41] Little/young gangsters

Eduardo's story revealed the uncertainty experienced by expelled students. Eduardo believed that an expulsion on his record, coupled with a behavioral contract, placed him at a disadvantage. As the pizza incident shows, Eduardo's presumed "lack of cooperation" resulted in a suspension that remained on record and may be used as evidence in a future incident. Eduardo kept himself out of trouble but was well aware he still had a discipline record and conditional enrollment at Lomas High. Worries over potential sanctions were not limited to students who experienced additional disciplinary incidents during reentry. Even students without post-expulsion discipline incidents found it difficult to detach themselves from their offenses and the stigma associated with expulsion and/or suspension. Pedro's situation was a case in point.

Pedro: Conflicted by Labels, Stigma, and Guilt

Pedro's story is similar to Eduardo's in that he believed his expulsion resulted in long-term repercussions as he transitioned into Prosperity High. His story made clear that expulsion—and other forms of punishment—have lasting effects that are not always visible. Pedro's story differed from Eduardo's in that he was not reprimanded for any other actions, and he became an active participant in school athletics. Pedro feared being judged by his participation in the school fire. Since his reinstatement, Pedro managed to avoid further disciplinary actions and suggested that his behavior kept him under the radar of school disciplinarians. Pedro was somewhat convinced that teachers "probably don't pay no attention to me cause I don't do nothing." Good behavior kept him unnoticed. Pedro kept a low profile.

Walking around campus, Pedro hugged, "high-fived," and greeted several students. Hugging young ladies seemed to be his trademark, along with his million-dollar smile. The social young man, however, was more reserved in class. His classmates and teachers often asked about his football games and acknowledged his athletic ability, while his peers chimed in about

his academics. Such was the case in math class, where he received a B+ on a test. "He cheated, he cheated," said one student as he tried to hold in his laughter and gave Pedro a high-five. "I have reason to believe that Pedro is cheating," joked another student. Pedro chuckled.

On the surface, Pedro seemed well-adjusted at Prosperity High. His disciplinary troubles seemed to be a thing of the past. When recalling his time at the community day school, Pedro revealed that he looked forward to "getting out of that one school" and that his mother, Ms. Jones, was happy about his return because " . . . she didn't like driving out there." He giggled as he explained that his mother disliked the 20-mile daily commute. His trademark smile faded when I asked about how adults might feel about his attendance at Prosperity High. With his head down and in a very soft voice—almost a whisper—Pedro shared the following:

> Pedro: Probably didn't want us there.
>
> EV: They *wanted* you there? (I ask for clarification.)
>
> Pedro: No! Probably not (pauses)—I *wouldn't.*
>
> EV: Tell me more about that.
>
> Pedro: I'm not saying it's true or I *know* that.
>
> EV: But this is the way you think they might have felt?
>
> Pedro: That's how *I* would feel.
>
> EV: How *you* would feel? Okay, why is that?
>
> Pedro: 'Cause kids burning the bathroom and going in their school, I wouldn't want that.

Pedro's account was one of self-critique. His mannerisms and tone revealed an underlying sense of guilt and remorse for his role in the fire. Pedro recognized the severity of his actions and the dangers involved in arson and understood why school officials would not want an arsonist in their school. If he were a school official, he would not want that type of student at his school.

According to Pedro, teachers or school administrators did not discuss the fire incident. Up until I recruited him at Prosperity High, Assistant Principal Chavez and the school principal were unaware that Pedro had been expelled or that they had, as Principal Cobian stated, "an arsonist in our school."[42] Mr. Cobian indicated, " . . . as long as he doesn't start a fire here, he's all right," and proceeded to introduce me to school staff who could assist me in his absence.

Pedro's worries about attracting attention overshadowed the positive attention he did receive from peers and adults alike. Despite praise in and out of class, Pedro believed teachers disregarded him because he did not cause trouble at school. His positive attributes appeared to play a significant role in how he was perceived and treated by his teachers. In some ways, however, Pedro received mixed messages regarding school rules, which could have had negative consequences for him.

I observed Pedro texting or using his iPod on numerous occasions. According to the Prosperity Heights High Student Handbook, the use of cell phones is prohibited.[43] Pedro violated school policy by using his cell phone or iPod. Pedro's assumptions about how others perceived him because of his past didn't coincide with the way he was actually treated. He enjoyed privileges that violated school policy:

EV: I noticed you use your phone sometimes in class.

Pedro: Yeah.

EV: And your iPod. Is that allowed?

Pedro: Not really. [Laughs]

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[42] I found it quite interesting that Mr. Cobian made this statement almost in a joking manner, as if to not judge the student by his past actions.

[43] The Handbook cites cell phones as prohibited items twice, first among items that are illegal at school and then again under a section entitled "Prosperity Heights High Cell Phone Policy." A section of the handbook states, "*Prosperity Heights High students who violate this cell phone policy will be subject to disciplinary action*" and lists subsequent punishment.

EV: Okay, well we need to watch that.

Pedro: I know, I know.

EV: If it's not allowed and you get in trouble for it you're gonna get upset when it shouldn't have been there to begin with.

Pedro: Yeah. Some of my teachers let me; that's why I do it.

This was true. A couple of teachers simply asked him to turn down the volume when he wore his earphones in class. The special treatment he received from teachers who allowed him to use electronics in class could have resulted in suspension. This raised questions about mixed messages that students received in school. On the one hand, they were not supposed to use the devices in class; on the other hand, several teachers allowed the use of cell phones and iPods. Pedro was allowed to break a school rule without classroom repercussions but may have faced consequences with school administrators, especially as a reentering student.

When asked how he thought his teachers felt about his expulsion, Pedro stated that they were probably "shocked." Although he described his expulsion as "just a memory" that did not impact reentry, it was nonetheless a bad memory on which he dwelled. Ms. Jones, his mother, confirmed this. Following Pedro's second interview, Ms. Jones revealed that it was difficult for Pedro to put the expulsion and fire behind him even though others (including her and other family members) had. She encouraged me to ask Pedro about this and his feelings of being judged and directed Pedro to "think about the question and then answer," explaining that sometimes he needs to think things through before responding. Our interview continued as follows:

EV: My question to you is, with this expulsion, do you feel like you're judged by other people?

Pedro: I don't really care if I'm judged. If it makes a difference on the people or the people that I talk to or my friends and stuff, if they act different, I

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would be kind of mad about that, but with other people I don't really care if they judge me or not.

EV: So with your friends you might be kind of mad, hurt . . .

Pedro: Yeah.

EV: Is this something that has ever been brought up by any of your friends?

Pedro: Yeah, but they don't ask me serious like they really wanna know why.

EV: Give me an example.

Pedro: Like, most of them ask me if it was me. [If] I was the one that did it or what not. 'Cause I guess they heard about it, but it's been brought up a couple of times like that.

EV: But nothing that upsets you?

Pedro: Nah.

EV: Do you think it's been easier for your peers to put it behind them or has it been easier for you?

Pedro: Probably me.

EV: You put it behind you?

Pedro: Yeah.

EV: Is that something that you think about, like, "Ah man, people judge me by that" or . . . ?

Pedro: Not really. [Pauses] Well, I think that some people know me by that.

EV: How does that make you feel?

Pedro: Just . . . it's not something I wanna be known as by.

Ms. Jones was right about Pedro's inability to forget the incident; however, she misunderstood the source of his frustration. Pedro regretted his participation and was upset that he would be characterized by his involvement in the fire. He could not put the incident behind him because his peers' questions were a reminder of his involvement in a dangerous event that led to a

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school-wide evacuation. Pedro interpreted his peers' curiosity as proof that the incident had not been forgotten, leading him to believe that others may have had a negative image of him. Pedro's tone was unconvincing when he suggested he wouldn't care if non-friends judged him. The stigma associated with participating in such a dangerous event concerned Pedro, who was very remorseful about the entire situation: "I just feel really bad about it."

Pedro's case sheds light on the emotional impact of expulsion. There was a contrast between how Pedro thought he was perceived and how teachers and peers treated him. He was well-liked and enjoyed privileges unavailable to most students. Despite his apparent success, Pedro was tormented by guilt and viewed himself as a reflection of the negative act he had committed. Pedro remained very critical of his actions, noting that he would not want a student like himself in school. He coped with his feelings by keeping a low profile in class.

Angel: Troubled and Disillusioned

Angel was no stranger to being the "new kid" in school. Between sixth and eighth grade, he had attended two different middle schools and the local junior high school. Angel enjoyed school but didn't always agree with what was taught and how it was taught. He disliked school rules and punishments he viewed as "dumb." Angel was transferred in and out of schools once problems arose. He had a difficult time establishing a clean slate where his previous disciplinary actions were not a focal point during school transfers; in fact, negative judgments about his past behaviors were often reinforced by his actions. He adamantly believed that difficulties experienced in his new schools had more to do with his past than anything else, including his own actions. One of his teachers and a counselor suggested that Angel was a "problem" and a "study all on his own" and discouraged me from inviting him to participate in my study, suggesting that I would be wasting my time.

When I met Angel he was attending Prosperity High but was in the process of transferring to Court Schools. According to Angel, he had many problems with Prosperity students who knew him from before and who confronted him about past incidents.

> Angel: I just really don't like that school no more. And I liked it at Court Schools. So, I kinda wanted to go back.
>
> EV: What made you not like Prosperity anymore?
>
> Angel: Some of the people, the people.
>
> EV: The adults or the students?
>
> Angel: I had like problems; I had issues with someone.
>
> EV: What kind?
>
> Angel: 'Cause of the people I was hanging out with, they had jumped one of the brothers' friends and I was with them. Since I was new at that school they were just looking at me like all bad.
>
> EV: Do you think it had to do with the fact that you were new, or . . . ?
>
> Angel: I think so. They knew my background.
>
> EV: How would they know your background, though?
>
> Angel: People there . . . [Chuckles] big mouths; they have big mouths.

Angel explained that some students at Prosperity High knew him from middle and junior high school as well as from his time in juvenile hall. Some students knew why Angel was expelled; others concocted stories about why he was expelled. Angel struggled with the stigma attached to his suspension, expulsion, and time in juvenile hall. His peers made it difficult to establish himself in a new school, especially since they were aware of his checkered past. He found it equally difficult to start anew in the classroom. Teachers, too, were aware of Angel's troubles and were insensitive. Angel acknowledged that his attitude may have been the source of

misunderstandings at school but also recognized that school staff instigated troubled situations. This point became clearer when I probed into ways that he coped with sensitive situations:

> Angel: Sometimes it's only my fault, I know. But like there's other times when the teacher says something he's not supposed to.
>
> EV: Give me an example of that.
>
> Angel: Like, when I was in Prosperity High and stuff, the teacher would just blurt out stuff about me like, "Oh, we don't wanna hear your life story." 'Cause I'm talking or something. And he knew that I was locked up, or whatever, he'd be telling the whole class, "We don't care . . . " Or something, what would he say? Oh, with the math test [CAHSEE] and stuff, he'd always say I wouldn't pass them . . . why was I in school if I didn't care. And I was like, what the hell is it your business? It's my life, what do you care? 'Cause I knew he really didn't care, but he was just saying that, you know, to make me look bad.

Angel believed that his math teacher's awareness of his mistakes led to erroneous assumptions about him, particularly his academic ability. Angel had in fact passed the CAHSEE math exam he was expected to fail.

Curious about why his teacher would make such comments, I asked Angel to provide a probable explanation. He argued that race might have played a role in the teacher's assumptions about his potential: His teacher was white. His "past," however, stood out:

> EV: Why do you think he would say something like that, though?
>
> Angel: Probably because of my past, the background I had.
>
> EV: You think he knew about it?
>
> Angel: Yeah. He *did*.
>
> EV: Oh, he did?
>
> Angel: Yeah.

Angel's classmates told him that the math teacher remarked that he was absent from class because he was either ditching or "locked up again." This infuriated Angel. He became irritated

by his teacher's comments and frustrated by his inability to confront him without getting in trouble. Angel coped with the situation by avoiding it altogether. He ditched math. I remembered the counselor's earlier comments about Angel's math teacher being concerned about his absences. When I asked him why he was not in class the day I went to his school he calmly explained, "Oh, it's because that teacher don't like me; we don't get along." He disengaged to avoid confrontation and hostility.

The challenges he faced in and out of the classroom (with peers and adults at school) surprised Angel, especially since he felt welcomed by one of the assistant principals at Prosperity. Angel's enrollment at Prosperity High had been a positive experience in which he felt he was truly being given a second chance:

> Angel: Well, they found out that I was locked up and everything so they knew where I was coming from and they gave me a chance.
>
> EV: When you say they gave you a chance, do you remember what that interaction was like?
>
> Angel: Well, yeah, they were pretty cool, but then what I didn't like was the teachers. 'Cause some of the teachers, I guess, I don't know how but they knew, they were like, "Oh, this kid is bad." You know? Like the teachers on campus. I guess word got around cause people tell people, they tell . . .
>
> EV: So the principals were pretty good.
>
> Angel: Not *really* cool; I mean, he wasn't that bad. He was like, "We just want you to do good" 'cause he saw my grades. He knew I was capable.
>
> EV: Yeah, definitely.
>
> Angel: But then the teachers, some of them were like, "Oh, this kid is bad." [Looked saddened]
>
> EV: Was that tough for you?
>
> Angel: Well, yeah because I had to try and cope with them and get a good relationship with them so I could do good in class, especially math,

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remember I told you? (Here he is referring to the incidents with his math teacher.)

The belief that teachers perceived him as "bad" was reinforced by the hostile relationships he had with his math teacher and counselor. When his mother voiced concerns about the teacher's behavior, Angel's grades and truancy record were used to counter her claims. Although teachers didn't verbalize their feelings about his reinstatement, Angel sensed they might have mixed feelings. "Some of them were like, 'Oh, okay,' like giving me a second chance. But some were like, 'No!' They didn't say it or nothing, but I kind of felt their reaction with me and stuff." Moreover, Angel indicated that his expulsion impacted his schooling experience and influenced how people perceived him in school:

> The teachers are different, they act different, they see me different, like, "Oh, he's a bad kid." I just get in trouble easier now 'cause I have the record. Any little thing, oh, right away, boom! I can easily fall back in trouble, get expelled . . . again. It's just harder now. It's not the same.

Similar to Eduardo's situation, disciplinary encounters impacted how family members viewed Angel. As indicated in the following interview excerpt, perceptions changed according to punishment (e.g., suspension or expulsion). Angel's family members supported him but used words with negative connotations to describe him, even if joking:

> Angel: My mom's family started thinking that I was a criminal, a convict. They were all calling, my uncles would joke around, "Here's the convict." [Giggles] Of course they all found out I got expelled . . . they thought I was . . . one of my aunts she thinks that everything has to be upper-class and this and that. Well, she thought really bad of me now cause I was at *that*[44] school. So they were just like . . . some aunts are supportive. Most of them, my aunts and uncles, they're like, "You'll get through it" this and that. Most of them were supportive, real good, real supportive.

> EV: What about your parents, how do you think that they felt about you being expelled?

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[44] Here he is referring to the court school he was enrolled in.

Angel: First they were mad, but then they were like, "Well, it's your fault. You have to get through this."

EV: Do you think that the feelings were different from when you would get suspended?

Angel: Yeah. They thought I was worse. Oh my god, when she talked to her friends, "Oh my God, he's . . . real bad now."

Angel's involvement with school infractions and disciplinary procedures became the norm for him and his family. Angel's mother began to *expect* that he would misbehave and get in trouble at school:

EV: And what about when you used to get suspended, what was the reaction to that?

Angel: Well, she would get mad, but it wasn't that different. She wouldn't really get . . . I think she got mad, madder, when I got suspended.

EV: Really? Why do you think?

Angel: I don't know. 'Cause maybe this time she already *expected* what was going on, what was gonna happen, so I think that's why she wasn't that mad.

EV: What do you think she expects?

Angel: She knew I was gonna get expelled and everything. She was just like, "Oh."

EV: Do you mean because of what you did?

Angel: Yeah, and what they told her and everything, that it was possible. [It didn't] come at her as a surprise.

Although Angel disagreed with some of the measures used to address his misconduct, he made sense of, and accepted, his punishment and dealings in school as natural events that were bound to happen, especially given the numerous referrals and suspensions on file.

I already had a record. I had it coming, you know, 'cause of the record I had. I know in my . . . I kinda believe in karma and stuff and I had done other stuff that I wouldn't get in trouble. It wasn't at school.

As we discussed different punishments, Angel concluded that his offenses were not treated as individual incidents; rather, they were considered part of who he was and would continue to be: "They look at my background . . . Oh, this kid is bad; he's had a background and other stuff. So he hasn't learned from that so we might as well expel him." His grades—which on several occasions were his saving grace—were no longer considered; they no longer made a difference. Angel slowly but surely disengaged from school and his academics suffered immensely. At home, his mother had become frustrated with his lies, school misconduct, and what she viewed as Angel's unwillingness to get his act together. Like the teachers he encountered, his mother began to view him as incorrigible. During one of our conversations, Mrs. Garcia shared that she was going to focus on her younger children so they would not "be like him." She made this statement in front of Angel.

Mrs. Garcia continued sharing all the problems Angel had been involved in and all the problems he was causing her. The conversation went back and forth between Angel and his mother. Mom blamed Angel; Angel blamed mom. "He lies a lot, so I don't believe him anymore," she stated. She explained that Angel tells her one side of the story, but then she gets phone calls from school stating otherwise. "I'm late to class, so they mark me absent," Angel asserts. Mrs. Garcia rolls her eyes at his comment. Just as we were figuring out why Angel was being marked absent, the phone rang and the answering machine went on. It was an automated message from Angel's school—he had been absent for one or more periods that day. "You see what I mean?" said his mom in an "I told you so" way.

Given the conflict at home and at school, I asked Angel to reflect on how he could become the person that he knew he was rather than the person people thought he was:

> Well, it's kinda hard with all the people telling me, especially at school. They always judge me differently cause of the record or whatever and they think, like, "He's real bad."

Angel's story revealed how students internalize explicit and implicit messages sent by those around them. His initial contact with a school disciplinarian at Prosperity High was positive; he felt he was given a second chance and was eager to take full advantage of it. As he spent more time at Prosperity, though, his past became known to some of his peers, his teachers, and his counselor. This led to a series of uncomfortable and humiliating situations that Angel was unable to handle. He reacted in ways that proved to be detrimental to his standing at Prosperity. Unfortunately, his coping methods "confirmed" that he was incorrigible and a waste of time. Angel was once recognized for his literary talent; now he was labeled for his misconduct.

Vanessa: The Past Counts

Up until her enrollment at Nación High's learning community, Vanessa's experience within and between different schools could be described as complex and consistently troubled. From her early years in middle school, Vanessa was unprepared to overcome the challenges of peer pressure, adapting to new environments, and forming relationships. Combined, poor academic skills, credit deficiency, negative peer association, and temporary attendance at multiple school sites created "all the drama" that Vanessa sought to avoid. Moreover, her discipline history followed her from school to school even when her behavior improved. Like Eduardo and Angel, Vanessa experienced latent consequences of discipline practices and procedures. Her record would be used to formulate opinions about her behavior and would inevitably impact interactions with school disciplinarians.

By Vanessa's account, most of her troubles started in middle school. Her mother enrolled her in Cholla Middle, a school with more prestige and presumably more academic and social opportunities than other schools in Nación District. Vanessa connected with other students she knew from family acquaintances. The social aspect of her transition process, then, was not challenging at first; however, as she spent more time with those peers and met others at school, stories about her behavior and alleged gang status began to circulate. Instead of the academic opportunities her mother desired for her, Vanessa received a different type of education from her social network, one that encouraged misconduct

Vanessa's peer group consisted of older kids in eighth grade and some freshmen. They had been through middle school and had learned a thing or two about what was expected, what was allowed, and what one could get away with. As a seventh grader, Vanessa discovered she was credit-deficient and attempted to get back on track by staying after school, going to summer school, and enrolling in other credit-recovery programs. Unfortunately, she was influenced by the older kids who had once been in her situation and were socially promoted year after year. These friends assured Vanessa that middle school grades and behavior "didn't count" in the future and that she would *just* miss the promotion ceremony, which they described as " . . . not that important." Vanessa questioned the validity of her peers' stories but knew there was some truth to them. Her peers were in high school in spite of having failed middle school. Learning about social promotion confused Vanessa, making her feel as if her hard work to recover credits was in vain. Perhaps she, too, could be "passed on" like her friends. At this point it seemed as though her efforts to get back on track had backfired.

> I always went to school. I never ditched. I always was in school and that's probably the problem that I got in so much stuff; they were never in school!

Her effort to do well in school yielded results similar to those of her friends who did little to improve their academic status. Academics aside, Vanessa concluded that her presence in school only landed her in troubled situations time and time again. School came to symbolize an unsympathetic place in which efforts failed to produce positive outcomes. Her presence in school created more problems. Peer advice became a more attractive option:

> Like the credit recovery . . . I was, "Okay; I'll just come to school; I'll just stay in school" . . . but I got influenced by them. There was no point then.

Vanessa further shared feeling torn between what she ought to do and what her friends were doing. In retrospect she wished she had done things her way:

> I think [promotion] is a big deal. Well, back then, of course, maybe it wasn't. I saw that [my friends] went to the next grade; that's kind of all I was worried about. I don't want to stay backed up a grade. I saw that they were in regular school and on time with everybody. So they all came—I actually *saw*—I've seen their report cards and stuff.

After a short pause, Vanessa continued:

> But I think if I could go back and do it and stay in all the classes to get the credits, I probably would have done it. Yeah, would have done it.

Her choices were heavily influenced by seeing that her friends moved on at the regular school. For Vanessa, this solidified her peers' advice that "nothing's going to happen"; it was proof that *nothing* happened. Vanessa noted that her close friends attended school sporadically; their absenteeism decreased the probability of getting into trouble, Vanessa concluded.

Vanessa learned the hard way that past decisions both counted and resurfaced as she moved to the next grade level—in her case, the next school. Her mother's assertion, "If they know you they're going to always remember you as that kind of person," rang true. Diana, Vanessa's mother, had many mother-daughter conversations to stress the importance of making

the right choices and doing well in school. Diana used her personal experience as a teen mom to encourage Vanessa to think things through and make positive choices that would make her life easier:

> I tell her "Don't talk in class and do your work." When I was in school I was always quiet and when I had a bad grade I would ask for extra credit. Since I didn't give teachers any problems, they would let me make up assignments and do extra credit. They remembered that I was good in their class.

Vanessa's mother indirectly emphasized how one's actions influenced future opportunities. Vanessa didn't always heed her mother's advice. She obtained numerous suspensions, detentions, and referrals, and fell behind academically.

Vanessa transitioned from one school to the next with her reputation following not far behind. When her actions were questionable, administrators reviewed her cumulative file to make decisions. Her reputation also impacted how she was punished. With a series of documented school offenses, Vanessa's potential to change was often called into question. Vanessa recalled being habitually late while attending a school outside of her neighborhood. When she transferred to Cholla Middle School, her attendance was reviewed. She recalled an administrator stating, "You have a reputation of being late, so how is this different?" Even when she provided notes from her dentist, Vanessa's explanations were disregarded. On days when her teacher accidentally marked Vanessa absent, the burden of proof was placed on her. "They're like, 'Oh, well, going on your background or your past it doesn't make sense.'" Ironically, Vanessa's truancy was punished with suspension. While attending Nación High, Vanessa's friend was involved in a school fight. School administrators were curious as to why Vanessa recorded the fight. Before Vanessa could provide an explanation, Mr. Gomez cut her off, warning, "We're going to look at your background." Knowing what they would find Vanessa simply replied, "Do whatever." She was suspended for "[Knowing] a student would be assaulted.

Did not warn school and videotaped it."[45] Vanessa claimed that she failed to report the incident

to school administrators but tried to discourage her friend from fighting:

> So I was kind of trying to talk some sense in her and no, she was putting
> up her hair and I was like, "Well, I'll see you." I was like, "I'll see you later.
> I'll talk to you later another day." I always stand in the front for my ride and I had
> my cell phone out the whole time. We were all just talking on our cell phones,
> taking pictures of each other.

Vanessa found herself on the defensive, trying to prove her innocence, to no avail. Vanessa's

school standing in and out of the classroom remained the same. Her grades and behavior showed

little improvement and a pattern of nurse visits emerged. Such visits resulted in Vanessa being

sent home, resulting in missed school. Given Vanessa's notion that the more she was in school,

the higher the probability that she would get in trouble, it seems that nurse visits may have been

used as a way to leave school early without any repercussions. With over forty tardies in one

semester, low grades, and more instances of unruliness, additional detentions, suspensions, and

parent conferences, Vanessa felt hopeless—possibilities were slipping away. Following the

advice of her friends had only complicated her life at school. Vanessa's poor grades and lengthy

discipline record *did* count. Vanessa assumed she would be kicked out of Nación High and

hoped that would be the case. She was on a downward path, unable to change others' opinions

about her or the behavior that seemed to confirm such opinions.

    While attending Nación High's learning community, Vanessa planned her return to

Nación High. Despite having made up several credits and feeling ready, Vanessa feared the

unexpected, especially the possibility of "getting caught up" in a negative situation.

> But the reason why I'm like, oh, I don't want to [go back to Nación] is
> because if anything were to happen, like something were to come up, I

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[45] The "Report on Suspension" form used throughout the school district contains several violations (under California Education Code 48900) that can be marked off depending on the incident at hand. Such violations are deemed "immediate reason for suspension." For this particular incident Vanessa's report was marked for Disruption/defiance with a sub-violation of Major disruption/defiance involving threatening incident.

> wouldn't be able to go back to the learning community. I would
> have to go to like a Continuation High or I wouldn't be able to go back
> for any reason.

Vanessa was aware of the opportunities at the Learning Community, but she was also well aware of the limitations. If Vanessa showed no sign of improvement, she knew she would be transferred to a school she did not want to attend. Vanessa hoped that maturity would help her cope with situations differently. Vanessa soon discovered that her newfound strategies had limited results. For instance, on one occasion she felt that a teacher was "testing" her to get a reaction from her. "It's because of my past and how I used to be." Her past was well-known at Nación. In fact, I observed a computer aide and campus resource officer tease her about being called in by the assistant principal. The computer aide knew Vanessa and her family and was well aware of the antagonistic relationship she had with Assistant Principal Goodwill and the many dealings they had had because of Vanessa's conduct. Although the teasing was not intended to be harmful, it revealed that Vanessa's troubled past was common knowledge even in a school she had attended for less than a year.

As Vanessa prepared for her transition, she reflected on her past actions and the ensuing consequences, admitting that she was not always the victim. The self-proclaimed "loud-mouth" advised other students to make better choices:

> . . . just stay out of trouble because it's not worth it and at the end it's just
> a waste of time and bad on your background, on your record. When you
> do bad, I guess you kind of lose respect from adults kind of 'cause you get a
> reputation, I guess, like, "Oh, she's going to do this and going to do that."

Vanessa started taking her own advice; she stayed out of trouble and managed to recover credits. Her middle school years had left gaps in her schooling, so she attempted to close those gaps and take full advantage of the opportunity to recover credits at the Nación High learning community.

Summary

Reentering students perceived they were viewed negatively because of their troubled pasts. As students made meaning of their roles returning from expulsion, they began to form coping mechanisms that would potentially shield them from negative perceptions held by others and allow them to move through educational settings without additional disciplinary setbacks. As students began to process how others might perceive them upon their return, they questioned their ability to detach themselves from the unruly acts they committed and the stigma associated with individuals who commit similar actions. Students sensed they were labeled and over-surveilled, which led them to employ behaviors they hoped would facilitate the social component of reentry. Students switched peer groups, participated in school sports, and even switched schools, all in an effort to establish a new identity. In the long run some students were more successful than others. Those who struggled to "shake off" negative labels found that educational structures and institutional agents did not facilitate this process.

Before looking at patterns and variations among the students discussed in this chapter, I provide a brief discussion about their initial responses to a question about how others perceived their return to school. What stands out in Table 5.1 is that students predicted that they would be viewed negatively. Angel, Vanessa, and Joaquin provided concrete examples as evidence that previous suspensions and expulsion (along with past school-code offenses) play a significant role in how they are perceived and treated in school. All but one student reported that school personnel would perceive them negatively. Joaquin provided a direct example of how he was negatively characterized by a school counselor. Overall, student responses provided insight into how they see themselves in their new school and how school staff characterize them: marked, oversurveilled, changed, or incorrigible.

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Students wholeheartedly believed that individuals made judgments about them based on past disciplinary incidents, especially those associated with their expulsion. Students experienced a variety of interactions with adults at their schools, some negative and others positive. Peer associations also seemed to be complicated by students' past histories. Students adapted to their new environments as best they could through their own resourcefulness. What they all share, however, is the idea that their past would resurface at some point. Students had mixed emotions about how they would be treated. They hoped for the best but were clearly concerned with how their past would impact reentry.

Table 5.1: How do you think school personnel (e.g., teachers, administrators, etc.) feel about your return to school? Implicit Versus Explicit Perceptions

	Implicit	*Explicit*
Cisco	"I don't know, it's like—like another student coming in _____ what happens almost every day. So, they probably don't even, like, know me."	
Isaiah	"I don't really know. I just think that they're probably gonna keep a close eye on me and that's it."	
Duane	"They see that I've changed."	
Eduardo	"Some didn't really know me and when they checked where I came from they probably thought that I was going to be a bad student."	
Angel	"Some of them were like, 'Oh, okay,' like giving me a second chance. But some were like, 'No!' They didn't say it or nothing, but I kind of felt their reaction with me and stuff."	
Joaquin	-	"The counselor, she was all like, 'Why would I want you at my school if you're a troublemaker?'"
Pedro	"Probably didn't want us there."	
Vanessa	-	-

Cross-Case Analysis of the Social Challenges of Student Reentry: Labels, Stigma, and "the Past"

Students' narratives about reentry and reenrollment revealed challenges in trying to overcome disciplinary incidents. Angel and Vanessa changed schools as an attempt to establish a "clean slate" and to get what Angel described as a "second chance." Continued patterns of misconduct and bad choices, however, only helped to reinforce negative reputations and expectations. Pedro, Eduardo, and Joaquin tried to establish a positive reputation in their home school by switching peer groups, keeping a low profile, or engaging in extracurricular activities. Despite these changes, discipline histories continued to impact reentry in tangible and subtle ways. Combined, individual actions and institutional practices enabled students to either reject or fulfill negative labels.

Symbolic interactionists (including labeling theorists) posit that lives are socially constructed based on interpretations of interactions and expectations in different contexts. Ones self-concept, then, is fundamentally social in origin, and shaped by our interactions with others (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Symbolic interaction helps to reveal how and why students (dis)continue a pattern of misconduct and provides an understanding of students' subsequent negotiations as co-constructed by institutional practices and individual assessments. Notably, student's experiences called for this approach, since they are individuals undergoing a process affected by past and on-going exchanges with peers and adults.

Students with the longest disciplinary histories experienced more challenges when establishing themselves and overcoming negative categorizations in various schools; cumulative files challenged students to prove their innocence and facilitated decisions that "proved" their guilt. Students expressed concern about the stigma associated with removal from school.

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Whether the source of their concern was real or imagined, students felt vulnerable and upset that old incidents were used to address present-day circumstances. Individual actions, social exchanges, and institutional practices hindered progress made by these students, complicating their ability to redeem themselves and establish an identity free from suspension, expulsion, and other penalties. In this section, I discuss some of the patterns found in the aforementioned cases along with coping mechanisms adopted by students. I consider how suspension, expulsion, and attendance in alternative placements created challenges for reentry and shaped students' understanding of how they are perceived by others.

The Usual Suspects

Students in this study fulfilled district requirements and completed their punishments, yet their previous conduct was referenced when problems surfaced or when assessing their potential to right previous wrongs. The pizza incident involving Eduardo was a case in point. He was reprimanded not because he threw the pizza but because it was assumed that he knew who was at fault. Although he was one of several students sanctioned for the incident, Eduardo believed that his record and behavior contract raised suspicion about his culpability. Eduardo did not discuss whether school officials brought up prior incidents, but he sensed that his expulsion caused school personnel to view him negatively. Eduardo felt oversurveilled and disliked being viewed as a suspect. Becker (1963) suggested that once a label is applied, others' reactions to a person center on the "deviant" aspect of his or her identity. Eduardo was cognizant that people assumed he was a drug dealer and that his illegal behavior influenced how others assessed his role in the pizza incident.

Like Pedro, Eduardo was concerned about raising suspicion and awareness of previous misconduct. Reinstatement conditions specified that a student could be transferred to another

program of study if discipline guidelines were not followed by reentering students. Eduardo was safe this time around and remained at Lomas High. This contractual stipulation heightened students' awareness that additional infractions would lead to school removal. This fear forced students to transform themselves and remain unnoticed by school staff.

Keeping a Low Profile

Pedro's story is similar to Eduardo's in that school officials did not discuss his expulsion; still, Pedro concluded that arsonists were unwelcome in a school setting and rationalized that since he was an arsonist, he, too, would be unwelcome if his misconduct were disclosed. Pedro treated the act of arson and his role of arsonist as one and the same. The process of *transference* implies that labels applied to negative actions can be applied (or transferred onto) individuals who act badly (Tannenbaum, 1938). In other words, transference takes place from the act to the actor. Pedro, for instance, placed the burden of deviance on himself by defining himself not as someone who made a bad choice but as an arsonist.

Pedro considered his destructive actions characteristic of wrongdoers. According to symbolic interactionists, the process of transference along with markers used to categorize people are typically enacted by authority figures and are not self-imposed as in Pedro's case. Pedro worried about being judged by his past actions. He made it known to his sister and mother that he was uneasy about being labeled. He was a good son, likeable, and a popular student, and *that* was what he wanted to be known as, not an arsonist. His quiet demeanor helped him conceal his past misconduct and allowed him a new beginning. Still, he experienced emotional distress from his inability to forget the fire and separate the act of arson from his persona. His self-perception was tainted not by negative exchanges in school but by how *he* imagined others

perceived him. Perhaps this is why he "didn't do nothing" in class—Pedro didn't want to risk getting too much attention.

In both cases, the students experienced a great deal of distress from imagined situations and public knowledge of their roles as drug dealer and fire-starter. Because symbolic interaction focuses on the meaning-making process resulting from social interactions, this theory does not explain Pedro's decision to be undetected, nor does it inform us about the inner conflict that arises as individuals strive to conceal their pasts. Recall that in Pedro's case, his school administrators were unaware of his involvement in the fire and seemed surprised that he had been expelled. It was his peers who inquired about the event. Exchange theories failed to account for the actions taken by students who rejected negative labels. Symbolic interaction posits that individuals will act according to expectations. On the surface, it appears that Angel and Vanessa acted out in accordance to behavioral expectations, but their actions were a form of resistance toward disciplinary and schooling procedures that had worked against them.

The cases revealed a very private struggle against public labels attached to people who engaged in delinquent behaviors. Expulsion and reinstatement policies and procedures ignore the emotional and personal toll and internal conflict experienced by reentering students. Negative feelings associated with expulsion were often exacerbated through interactions with school staff, further exacerbating challenges to educational attainment and social adaptation during reentry.

Deviant Is as Deviant Does

Unlike Pedro and Eduardo, who predicted disapproving attitudes, Angel and Vanessa's suspicions were confirmed. Frustration loomed in the lives of these students as they attempted to clear their names and better themselves only to be doubted. Although both students recognized that their actions and decisions contributed to their negative profiles, they insisted that they were

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not guilty of all accusations; they blamed institutional practices for some of their problems. Angel firmly believed that his record was used against him; his counselor at the comprehensive high school referred to his troubled past, as did other institutional agents. Whether or not this information impacted the staff's treatment of Angel, their actions corroborated his beliefs. Angel was routinely reminded of his previous misconduct at every school he attended. His teacher and counselor thought very little of him and doubted his ability to improve his behavior.

Institutional reactions and limited opportunities to get a fresh start frustrated Angel. As his defense mechanism, Angel reverted to behaviors that fulfilled the negative perceptions held by others. Angel engaged in *secondary deviance*[46] by self-identifying with negative labels and engaging in destructive behaviors that confirmed the labels, thus creating a vicious cycle that affected his aspirations (Lemert, 1967). The process of internalization begins with social patterns of interactions. Lemert (1951) notes, "When a person begins to employ his deviant behavior or a role based upon it based as a means of defense,…to the overt and covert problems created by the consequent social reaction to him, his deviation is secondary" (p. 76). The chances that he would be viewed differently were slim to none.

Angel and Vanessa longed for a break from traditional school settings where most of their problems occurred. They were labeled, and school staff expected Vanessa and Angel to continue misbehaving school. Symbolic interactionists assert that interactions between students and teachers can create expectations for both parties. Once a student is labeled it is difficult to get rid of that label, which can create a self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1968). Teacher expectations influenced students' perceptions and attitudes. Vanessa's and Angel's oppositional behaviors were a result of various factors, including institutional procedures and social forces

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[46] Primary deviance is a behavior that violates a social norm, but does not cause long-term consequences to an individual.

that convince students that taking matters into their own hands is their only option (Luna & Revilla, 2013). Vanessa and Angel both associated comprehensive schools with negative encounters and orchestrated their escape from antagonistic people and situations. Vanessa's previous discipline encounters were referenced on numerous occasions, forcing her to assume the role of negotiator when trying to prove her innocence. Vanessa felt incapable of changing peoples' perceptions of her, especially when they used her past as a measure of her innocence and ability to adhere to school rules.

Partly to blame for her failure to distinguish between misinformation provided by her friends, Vanessa was also confused by how school administrators addressed her friends' rule-breaking and poor academic standing. When Vanessa realized that her academic and behavioral record played a significant role in her academic trajectory and relationships at school, it was too late. She was viewed as a defiant student with little chance of improvement.

Unlike Pedro and Eduardo, who modified their behavior in order to rid themselves of negative labels linked to their conduct and were not questioned by school administrators, Vanessa struggled to prove she had changed. Her pleas to transfer into a school setting she believed would offer the support and environment to thrive were denied, forcing her to think about a better solution. From one angle, her actions evidenced her inability to follow school rules; however, school administrators left her no choice. They denied Vanessa's transfer to the Nación High learning community (NLC) and placed her on a behavioral contract that, if violated, would result in transfer to NLC. Vanessa was adamant about enrolling in NLC, so she took matters into her own hands. Breaching her behavioral contract was her way of surviving in a system in which she constantly failed. Vanessa was not allowed to transfer to NLC because she was young, but she was placed there as a punishment. By paying close attention to school

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structures and the actions of institutional agents, we are able to better understand the nuances related to students' (mis)conduct. For instance, Angel followed a similar path of rule-breaking in order to be transferred to a school where he had experienced fewer problems and more academic success, a school where staff were receptive to his challenges and needs. The students became brokers of their educations.

Angel started missing school, knowing that too many absences would result in being dropped. He was threatened with arrest for truancy but was never arrested. After numerous truancies, Angel was dropped from the NLC and enrolled in independent study. His mother explained, "That's why he does it; they don't do anything to him." Administrators thought twice about transferring these students because of their age or credit-deficient status, but students received mixed and inconsistent messages from school officials. For instance, Angel was threatened with arrest but was never arrested. On the surface, Angel's challenges mirrored those of the typical high school student, such as disagreements with teachers and trouble "fitting in." A deeper look into Angel's situation revealed a complex web of intra-familial, social, and academic dilemmas.

Angel's and Vanessa's actions were a means to an end, a way to navigate and survive hostile and unwelcoming schooling institutions. Angel's and Vanessa's actions, for example, plainly read as offenses against requirements and contracts; students violated rules to be placed where they felt they could succeed. Vanessa and Angel rationalized their actions as viable options given their circumstances. Their creative solutions met their objectives but also added to their already lengthy discipline records. Their behaviors could very well be viewed as resistance against institutional rules and regulations. It was a form of agency unaccounted for by symbolic interaction. For instance, symbolic interactionists would explain continued misconduct as

fulfillment of negative expectations without explaining how institutional structures and agents were not responsive to students' needs.

Vanessa knew she had a better chance at the Nación High learning community; she violated the behavior contract on purpose. Angel faced a similar situation. Symbolic interaction suggests that exchanges influence behaviors, but this framework fails to capture the complexity in decision-making behind those behaviors. On the surface it appears that students were incorrigible as they continued to defy school authoritarians, but this view fails to take into account that they did so to improve their schooling conditions. Angel and Vanessa, and Cisco for that matter, longed for real opportunities that would move them along the education path devoid of hostility and conflict. As Angel and Vanessa became conscious of the limiting institutional structures, these students developed ways to disengage from oppressive schooling institutions but not from the schooling process altogether. Angel and Vanessa acted with intent.

In his study of community crime and the development of delinquents, Tannenbaum (1938) asserted, "The young delinquent becomes bad because he is defined as bad and because he is not believed if he is good" (pp. 17-18). We know this to be the case for Vanessa and Angel, who were consistently questioned, often doubted, and provided with little support. Both students reacted in ways that reaffirmed the negative reputations they hoped to erase. Once Vanessa entered the Nación High learning community she spent less time in school, recovered credits, and no longer got into trouble. Unfortunately, transfer into the Nación High learning community was documented as a punishment even though Vanessa had requested to be placed there initially. Angel, on the other hand, lacked academic and familial support and continued on a negative course.

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Joaquin's case stands out because of his counselor's clear opposition to enrolling a

student she perceived as a *troublemaker* in *her* school. Joaquin's encounter with the school

counselor exemplified an imbalance of power and an exchange that, according to symbolic

interactionists, should yield negative repercussions throughout Joaquin's academic career.

Becker (1963) posited that a *moral entrepreneur* is an individual, group or organization that

constructs deviance. Moral entrepreneurs fall into two categories: rule creators, and rule

enforcers. The effect of moral entrepreneurship is the creation of "outsiders" whose behaviors

violate established norms. Schools have set norms and codes of conduct that inevitably influence

how students are treated; these norms also impact students' transitions in and out of school. The

perspective employed by symbolic interaction is that "an adequate explanation of social behavior

requires understanding the subjective meaning that people attach to their social circumstances"

(Furze, Savy, Brym, & Lie, 2011, p. 14). Teachers, administrators and other staff members may

behave in ways that facilitate and encourage student success or failure. These behaviors,

conscious or subconscious, may be influenced by the nature of the offense and how it is judged

by staff members. Questions about a student's ability to stop disruptive behaviors and abide by

prescribed school rules may surface as students attempt to reintegrate back into school. If

students come into contact with individuals that view them as having the potential to repeat

negative behaviors, as "uncured" or unworthy of a second chance, students pick up on those

messages and may continue to violate set norms.

Joaquin's counselor was an example of a moral entrepreneur in a school setting. This

incident suggests that institutional agents at the same school may hold different attitudes about

reentering students. For instance, the counselor had a very different reaction from the assistant

principal regarding Joaquin's enrollment. The counselor's words had less of an impact on Joaquin than may be assumed for other students because Joaquin believed institutional agents with more power and authority than his counselor (the assistant principal and the district official who placed him at Nación High) supported his placement. Reentering students receive different and contradictory messages that are interpreted in complex ways, impacting student reentry.

Labeling theorist Ray Rist asserts academic institutions sort, label, track, and channel "persons along various routes depending on the assessment the institution has made of the individual" (1977, p. 155). Stated differently, categorizing and labeling students plays a significant role in the student's academic development, success, and failure. Study participants were affected by negative connotations associated with removal from school. Students have the least authority in schooling institutions, forcing them to develop strategies to counteract or cope with troubled situations, including instances of provocation or humiliation enacted by school officials. Many students react negatively to putdowns regardless of the penalties they may face. For example, Vanessa shared her opinion that when students feel their efforts are hopeless they respond in ways, defense mechanisms, that allow them to survive difficult situations, even if their actions yield unfavorable consequences, including negative labels.

As mentioned in a previous section, referring to students by labels or categories such as "troublemaker" or "arsonist" is an example of *transference*. This concept is understood through the use of symbolic interaction to the study of deviance and is associated with labeling theory. According to this concept, characteristics of an act are applied to the actor, thus creating "deviants" by defining individuals in the same manner as the "deviant" acts they commit (Tannenbaum, 1938). Descriptive terms applied to students, interaction theorists argue, define a person throughout his or her schooling. This, however, was not the case for Joaquin. Like other

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students in this study, particularly Pedro[47] and Eduardo, Joaquin did not adhere to nor did his actions confirm labels. Symbolic interaction fails to explain how these particular students rejected harmful descriptions and reinvented themselves in ways that opposed negative characterizations (although some students were more successful at this than others). This framework also lacks a concrete explanation for the paranoia experienced by Pedro and Eduardo. While neither student was confronted or reminded about the expulsion or incidents leading to removal from school, each assumed he was viewed as mischievous. In all cases, verbal and non-verbal cues led to the co-construction of identities assumed by students during reentry.

Students as Agents

Students and institutional agents molded students' self-concepts. Moreover, these cases revealed that some students were viewed as bad actors who continued to defy school rules and personnel, and others struggled with self-imposed markers that caused anxiety. Though it is perfectly reasonable to view Angel and Vanessa as persistent wrongdoers deserving of punishment, one cannot deny that their oppositional behaviors symbolized resistance to institutional policies and procedures they deemed obstacles to their progress and opportunities for success. The students' choices, though seemingly self-defeating, were made in hopes of being removed from what they deemed unproductive and unaccommodating environments. Even students like Pedro and Cisco crafted new identities by engaging in school athletics and conforming to school placements that hindered educational advancement, respectively. Although these students avoided additional reprimands, they dealt with negative consequences stemming from the lack of institutional support and stability to facilitate successful student reentry.

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[47] It is importantn to note, however, that both Pedro and his school principal referred to him as an arsenist.

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Symbolic interaction provides an understanding of how students like Angel and Vanessa continued to behave in seemingly counterproductive ways. After assessing the consequences of violating school contracts Angel and Vanessa looked at the long-term benefits of their actions: They would be transferred to their school of choice. Angels and Vanessa's actions are consistent with the idea that individuals will strive to maximize rewards. Although continued misconduct would appear on Vanessa and Angel's school record as an additional "offense," the big picture was much more favorable; another mark on their record was a low price to pay given the return. The decision to proceed in seemingly counterproductive, self-defeating ways brought about a certain level of fulfillment in the students' chaotic school lives.

Conclusion

Symbolic interaction is informative in understanding how and why some students internalize and define themselves with negative labels but comes up short in explaining why and how students are able to detach themselves from negative categorizations. Additionally, this framework does not advance our understanding of how oppositional behaviors carried out by students are a solution to oppressive educational institutions. A negative disciplinary history that brands a student is counterproductive to allowing a person to "change." Some students in this study were subjected to negative encounters based on previous misconduct even after they completed punishments.

The subjective nature of schooling and discipline significantly shapes student reentry. Labels and categories are a static way to define maturing students and can negatively affect their school success. Furthermore, discipline policies do not account for nuances in student behavior and the policies that govern student conduct. Yes, we want all students to be safe and for wrongdoers to take responsibility for their actions, but to what extent will they continue to be

punished for past violations? Constant vigilance, harassment, and blame experienced by some students extend beyond their original punishment. Discipline files do not document changes in students' behavior, maturity, or extenuating circumstances.

Unraveling the complexity involved in school discipline, students' perceptions, and reentry allows us to better understand and assist returning students during this critical transition. For some students in this study, their discipline records were used to assess their potential to change. The most successful students (Joaquin included) were not constantly reminded of their previous conduct, as were Angel and Vanessa, but it was brought up during the reentry process. Symbolic interactionists argue that individuals live up to expectations and that social interactions play a significant role in how those expectations materialize. For Angel and Vanessa, negative exchanges with peers and adults consumed their experiences in school.

Students with the most disciplinary encounters (Angel and Vanessa) learned how to work and manipulate the system to their (dis)advantage. Symbolic interaction asserts that individuals will evaluate a situation, assess costs and benefits of specific actions, and act in a way that will produce favorable results with fewer costs. Vanessa and Angel proceeded in a seemingly counterintuitive way, yet their actions showed intent, the desire to be transferred to a less stressful environment. Their dislike of traditional school settings was exacerbated by antagonistic exchanges with peers and adults alike. The decision to defy conditional requirements added to an already long list of behavioral complaints while giving the students peace of mind. Costs and consequences of social exchanges explained through symbolic interaction, however, overlook the history and background knowledge that informed these students' decisions. For instance, this framework focuses on exchanges without taking into account that those interactions and reactions are influenced in part by preexisting discipline files and past experiences with school

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officials. Also, symbolic interactionists do not account for institutional practices that make it difficult for students to stop being bad actors or the inconsistent messages they receive within and between schools.

Angel's and Vanessa's experiences with disciplinary procedures, along with the denied transfers, propelled them to take a novel approach to bypass contracts and requirements. School administrators and teachers viewed Vanessa and Angel as consistently misbehaving and breaking rules; the students saw institutional barriers that allowed for few options and real solutions to their dilemmas. Symbolic interaction oversimplifies the decision-making process inherent in social interactions by assuming that individuals will act in predictable ways based on specific encounters. Because individuals are part of the context, they are social agents and shape social composition of the contexts they experience. In all cases, identities were co-created by students and staff, by implicit and explicit messages, and by the assumption that once marked, students would continue to be viewed negatively.

The students' narratives reveal that students assume roles and initiate change in order to blend into their receiving schools to avoid scrutiny for past actions. Students over-perform or keep a low profile to conceal their pasts by switching peer groups, joining sports, or creating ways to remove themselves from what they perceive as counterproductive environments. Without formal institutional support in place to facilitate student reentry, the young people in this study bear the responsibility of coping with negative labels or interactions during reentry. Students who experienced a positive transition with regard to interactions with institutional agents also had consequences stemming from their pasts. When institutional agents question students' right to be at a school, instigate tense situations, and overlook students because they

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"do nothing" and adhere to school rules, the results are damaging to reentering students who need the most support in an already difficult transition.

It may be assumed that if students remain in a school long enough, they will be able to establish and maintain positive relationships with school staff and peers. For reentering students, this is not the case. Most of the students in this study were in and out of different schools and did not know how to forge and sustain those relationships, especially with adults at school. Even Joaquin, who seemed to have a good rapport with the assistant principal, did not mention the assistant principal as someone he would seek out. Pedro, who had ties to coaches and was well liked by his teachers, expressed the same sentiment. Because of the stigma attached to expulsion and the low-key roles they assumed, students had less of an opportunity to cultivate relationships with students and staff. Pedro may have intentionally avoided these relationships to prevent past dealings from being discovered. For students like Duane and Isaiah, who did not acknowledge adults as factors in their transition, adult presence may have still provided an invisible safety net, whether they recognized it or not. Again, this was evidenced by the attendance clerk who checked up on Isaiah's progress and both the campus police officer and assistant principal to whom Duane reported threats. The problem is that not all students had these relationships, and most did not know how to sustain them when they were present; some were suspicious of these relationships for fear of betrayal or being mistreated or the uncertainty of not knowing whether they would remain at a school long enough to invest in a relationship. In general, all students felt they had no connection with adults at school. This may help to explain why students' needs went unmet and why some students took on roles they hoped would change their circumstances.

Socialization is a significant part of the schooling process. Students' attitudes and dispositions are shaped by the daily exchanges with classmates and teachers. For reentering

students (and those who attend multiple schools), socialization (in schools) presents a different challenge stemming from forced mobility. Once removed, students had to transition into a new environment and adapt to peer culture, school policies, and routines, even if only for a few months. Once the expulsion was over, the student was transferred to another school in which he or she had to begin the process all over again. Temporary placements and adjustment time affected the type and quality of interactions that took place as well as students' abilities to assimilate into new schools.

CHAPTER SIX: ACADEMICS AND STUDENT REENTRY

As noted in Chapter Four, traditional K–12 schools, alternative settings within districts, and expulsion sites—where students are sent upon expulsion—are largely governed by different logics and it is not surprising, then, that these institutions focus on different aspects of the schooling process. Expulsion sites are specialized schools tasked with managing and educating vulnerable populations in a smaller setting, whereas traditional comprehensive high schools serve larger and more diverse student populations. That said, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that differences exist between and within both traditional and alternative educational institutions. For instance, one site may support students who are credit-deficient, while another may seek to improve school attendance, generating different outcomes for students. While the sites operate differently, they are part of a broader educational system that purports to promote the academic progress of all students. This chapter explores whether these distinct sites act as a common system in a manner that supports this goal. The following questions guide this chapter:

1. Do the expulsion sites act as if they are responsible for ensuring that students reenter their traditional high schools on track and with the necessary skill sets?
2. Do the traditional high schools ensure that reentering students receive an array of academic supports that allow them to reengage successfully?
3. Do expulsion sites act in a coordinated way with traditional high schools/receiving districts?

In order to answer these questions, I start by examining student outcomes, and then I trace backward to students' reentry experiences. This process helps us to understand what factors seemed to relate to those results, whether students were graduating on time/on track, graduating late/off track, or disengaging from the education system. This process helped me analyze why students experienced different results and helped me identify academic supports (un)available to

students and coping strategies used by students during reentry. I use this same approach in reporting my findings. I present students in groups by outcome, and then within those groups identify key supports and coping mechanisms that seemed to shape students' academic trajectories.

Outcomes

Once previously expelled students reenrolled in their comprehensive high schools, they had to readjust to a more rigid schedule, more teachers, four to six periods, homework for each class, and a much larger and less intimate student body. This is not to suggest that students were not excited about their return; most eagerly awaited readmission into Nación's schools, but they did not anticipate that transitioning back would have its share of challenges. Some were able to overcome such challenges, while others encountered setbacks and a very tough path. Most were allowed to return to their schools of choice. Of the seven expelled students in this study, only three remained and graduated from the schools they attended upon reinstatement. The other students attended multiple schools and eventually graduated or disengaged from the schooling process. For the purpose of this chapter, I will first discuss the paths of Duane, Joaquin (Quincho), and Pedro. Upon readmission into Nación District Schools, these students remained in one school through graduation and graduated on track. Second, I will discuss the paths of Isaiah, Eduardo, and Cisco.

Eduardo and Cisco completed most of their graduation requirements in alternative settings but had different outcomes. Isaiah was close to graduating from his home high school but was transferred to the district's continuation high school, where he graduated a couple of weeks before his projected graduation date. Like Isaiah, Eduardo graduated from the continuation high school, although he did so one semester late. Cisco completed most of his

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credits at two learning communities and graduated a semester late. Lastly, I trace Angel's

gradual withdrawal from the educational system.

Table 6.1: Students' Schooling from Reinstatement Through Graduation

Student	School Enrollment Upon Reentry	School of Residence?	Number of Schools Enrolled in During Reentry	Type of School Graduated	Did Student Graduate Before/on/ After Expected Graduation Date?
Angel	Traditional	No	>4[a]	GED program	After
Cisco	Learning Community	No	4	Learning Community	After
Duane	Alternative	No	2[48]	Traditional	On
Eduardo	Traditional	Yes	4	Continuation	After
Isaiah	Traditional	Yes	2	Continuation	Before
Joaquin	Traditional	Yes	1	Traditional	On
Pedro	Traditional	Yes	1	Traditional	On
Vanessa [49]	N/A	N/A	N/A	Learning Community	On

[a] This includes schools in juvenile hall and independent study programs.

Neighborhood/Home School Graduates

Duane, Joaquin, and Pedro were allowed to attend their neighborhood high schools upon

reinstatement. The commonality shared by these three students is that they remained in their

neighborhood schools through graduation. Their experiences, however, are dissimilar in many

ways, including their academic programs, support received, and school engagement.

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[48] Duane was allowed to mainstream one class, then he transitioned fully into Pedregal High. By this time Duane was living in Ciudad Proletaria (Nacion High would have ben his assigned school), but requested to enroll in what would have been his neighborhood school of Pedregal High.
[49] Recall that Vanessa was never expelled but had multiple suspensions and school transfers.

Duane

According to his transcript, Duane enrolled in a special day class (SDC), after his expulsion from a community day school, which Duane described as an independent study. During this time, Duane was pulled out of the SDC to attend one mainstream class at a comprehensive high school. After completing a second term, he enrolled in two summer school courses at a local school. Courses taken during intercession focused on study skills and support in math and reading, suggesting that this hybrid enrollment was preparing him for the academic program he would encounter at his comprehensive high school. Duane and his parents could not explain why he attended an SDC through special services placement instead of directly enrolling in his neighborhood school, though they were part of that decision.

Overall, Duane received extensive support through special services placement for an entire year before completely transitioning into a comprehensive school. Duane fully enrolled in Pedregal High as a sophomore and was reclassified from requiring an SDC to a resource specialist program. The latter is typically offered to students who require special services for less than half their school day. Duane was allowed to transition with varied support, ranging from reading comprehension classes to mainstreaming one class per day. Perhaps it was part of the district's way to support Duane and comply with special education individualized education plan (IEP) requirements.

I met Duane during his senior year. By that time he had been in Nación School District for over two years post-reinstatement. While Duane had completed most of his graduation requirements, he was retaking several failed courses, including Physical Education (which he failed again the last semester of his senior year), 11th grade US History, and 10th grade English. At Pedregal High, Duane received modified instruction in some classes and coaching to fulfill

graduation requirements. Duane continued to receive modified instruction and academic tutoring through his senior year. For instance, Duane's class schedule included preparation for the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), a high-stakes test required for graduation in the State of California. Duane was scheduled to graduate from Pedregal High in 2008 but had not passed the CAHSEE and felt pessemistic about his high school diploma being contingent upon a test and not the 12 years he had spent in school. Despite his concern about the test, Duane did not take advantage of additional instructional support provided to him during and after school hours. During a math exercise, for example, the teacher attempted unsuccessfully to provide Duane with one-on-one instruction while the classroom aide and I worked with small groups. Rather than engage in response to the teacher's overture, Duane spent most of the session talking about how the teacher was dressed and the fact that she stapled her pants instead of sewing them. Episodes like these were common occurrences while observing Duane. He spent most of his class time focused on things other than academics, and he even napped openly a few times (even during CAHSEE math essentials class). Regardless of the challenges that he encountered, Duane's transcript indicates that he successfully passed both parts of the CAHSEE and graduated on time in June.

Joaquin was another student who remained at one school through graduation but did not receive any transitional academic support to help him adapt to Nación High. Initially overwhelmed by the expectations and structures that differed from those he encountered through expulsion, Joaquin quickly adapted to his new school.

Joaquin

I met Joaquin approximately a year after he was reinstated. He was completing his senior year at Nación High. I was impressed by Joaquin's maturity level and attitude. Part of Joaquin's

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successful transition was a consequence of his initiative to establish ties to Nación High early on. Joaquin took an active role by reaching out to Nación High Assistant Principal Gomez, Joaquin's former math teacher, the week he was expelled in order to secure enrollment at Nación High upon reinstatement.

Joaquin was scheduled for only four periods during the school day. He attributed the shortened day schedule to his hard work while on expulsion, which allowed him to complete courses and accrue credits in less time than if enrolled in a traditional school setting. Joaquin recalled his experience in an independent study program he attended in transition to County Court Schools:

> Every week I had to show up at least one day. They gave me a list and "Do all these chapters, answer these questions, come take the test, you can use the book," and well, it was pretty easy. They gave me the whole list and, like, in a week I would finish at least half of the course.

Joaquin proudly shared his ability to complete a significant amount of work in a short period of time: "Now I have so many credits that I only need to take four classes . . . and I'm allowed to fail one of them." The independent study arrangement allowed him to remain connected to a school, complete coursework at his own pace, and work independently. Joaquin explained that the instructional component in County Court Schools was similar to that of the independent study (IS) except for attendance requirements:

> By the time I got [corrects himself] by the time *they* dropped me from the [independent study] thing I went to County Court Schools and County Court Schools was the same thing except you gotta show up every day.

Joaquin proudly shared his accomplishments while attending County Court Schools:

Joaquin: Well, yeah, I passed my US History class in two weeks, both semesters in two

weeks!

EV: Wow!

Joaquin: They give you a book and you do all the work in it and you pass. I was like, "Cool." I was getting used to that.

Joaquin became accustomed to working at an accelerated pace, completing ten classes during a semester at Court Schools. When his semester of expulsion ended Joaquin did not take the summer off; instead he enrolled in a year-round "alternative program" and completed two additional courses. His description implies minimal instruction in settings where students are assigned independent work.

The structure in alternative settings allowed Joaquin to thrive, though familial factors also played a role. Joaquin's aunt and uncle had adopted him sometime before being expelled. He feared the expulsion might make his aunt and uncle regret their decision to make him part of their family. Joaquin set out to prove his worth by immersing himself in schoolwork.

By the time I met Joaquin, he himself had become a parent and he no longer lived with his aunt and uncle, his parents. His adoptive status and ability to attend the school of his choice played a crucial role in Joaquin's determination to succeed in school. Joaquin had an additional reason to invest in the educational process, his son:

That's the only reason I'm in school. He's the reason why I'm trying to do good now cause if I don't I don't wanna end up in jail and not be here.

Joaquin continuously took classes, even during school breaks. Joaquin was proactive and committed to graduating on track and with decent grades. The combination of fewer classes and less time in school enabled him to continue his studies while working to provide for his newborn child.

Although Joaquin was proactive about taking advantage of all the educational opportunities offered to him, he wasn't able to gain access to high-track courses. Joaquin was

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enrolled in what may be considered "low-track" classes, especially for a senior. In fact, Joaquin

indicated that Nación High's curriculum was not challenging in comparison to that of Chollas

High (in the suburbs), the school where he was expelled. Such disparities, Joaquin noted,

adversely impacted educational prospects:

> I've seen that they don't, I don't know why, but they don't challenge
> students here as much as they do at Chollas High . . . 'Cause here they have
> integrated science; they give you science, earth science, all types of science
> together, and over there they didn't have that. Either you passed the class or you
> don't. And I think they challenged them over there; I don't know why, but they
> don't challenge you as much at Nación.
>
> We're all the same district; we should all be getting . . . we should all be taught
> the same thing, but I think at the end, you know, we don't have . . . we don't have
> here at Nación the same opportunity to go to college and graduate as they do over
> there. They get pressured a lot more and they get to go to college and they've
> been through the pressure and we haven't.

To some degree, Joaquin's assessment of the instructional rigor at Nación was influenced by his

class enrollment and not necessarily by actual course offerings at Nación. For instance, Joaquin's

class schedule consisted of Informal Geometry, English, Economics, and Integrated Science.

Nación High did offer higher-level science classes like Chemistry, Physics, and Biology, but

Joaquin did not gain access to that track. Joaquin seemed to be one of few seniors in his math

and science classes, but he worked diligently to complete assignments during class time. He

completed his senior year with three Bs and a C in Economics.

Joaquin's initiative shaped his reentry experience even before he was reinstated in Nación

School District. Joaquin took more classes than required while on expulsion, did not take breaks

between semesters, and reached out to an important school official at Nación High. He set

himself up to complete high school at the school of his choice and with a flexible schedule but

regretted what he viewed as a lack of academic rigor that he believed would prepare him for future educational and professional endeavors.

Like Joaquin and Duane, Pedro was granted enrollment at his neighborhood school and graduated on time. Unlike the previous students discussed, Pedro made sports a big part of his high school experience. He shone on the field, but his academics suffered as he progressed in the educational pipeline, though he, too, managed to graduate on time.

Pedro

I met Pedro when he was a sophomore at Prosperity High—his home school. When I asked Pedro to summarize his academic achievement, he giggled as he explained:

> Now my grades are better than in middle school 'cause in middle school I really didn't care. I don't even remember my type of grades, but in CDS I had straight As 'cause it was real easy. Now I think the worse class I'm doing bad in is History.

Pedro's transcript revealed that he earned all As the last semester he was in community day school (CDS); that was the first and last time he earned more than one A in a grading period.

Pedro was part of the football and track teams. He established two individual track records and was part of a league championship team. Pedro was highly regarded by peers and staff. In terms of his academics, Pedro went from receiving all As at his expulsion site to earning a variety of grades his first semester back at a traditional school, including a D− he received in English the second semester of ninth grade. He repeated the course during intercession between his sophomore and junior years.

Closer examination of Pedro's transcript reveals somewhat of a downward trend, specifically during his last two years of high school. By the time Pedro was a senior he had failed three classes including Formal Geometry, which he repeated after receiving a D−. He also failed Spanish and US Government; the latter course was required for graduation. Pedro was removed

from the "high" math track and placed in Math 12, which is considered to be the "low-track" math available to seniors who need a math credit. Pedro was not enrolled in any honors or advanced placement classes. His grades dropped and he seemed to struggle academically over time, failing and repeating courses as he reached the end of his high school career. School and district documents do not indicate that Pedro received any academic support during reentry. It is also unclear whether he initiated retaking classes to improve his grade in order to graduate or if a school official directed him to do so.

I lost contact with Pedro close to his junior year. It was always very difficult to schedule at-home interviews with him. His foster mother cancelled several times, even when we had rescheduled previously cancelled visits. His transcript indicates that he fulfilled all high school requirements and graduated on time.

Pedro and Joaquin each enrolled and remained in one school during reentry. Duane's special circumstances afforded him the opportunity for gradual transition with academic support prior to enrollment at his home school. The young men's paths toward the finish line differed due to educational needs, family responsibilities, and the ability to meet the educational demands of their comprehensive schools. While Duane's transition was eased via academic assistance, Pedro and Joaquin were left to rely on their individual resources to succeed and graduate from high school. While Joaquin, Duane, and Pedro were able to navigate the school system and graduate on time, their counterparts in this study had trouble reaching this milestone and were forced to pave alternative routes to high school graduation.

Alternative School Graduates

Like Pedro, Joaquin, and Duane, other students also completed high school, but they did so in non-traditional educational settings. Cisco was reinstated in a learning community (LC)

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because he was credit-deficient and enrolled after classes had resumed. He then moved back and forth from LCs to traditional schools; most of his schooling took place in LCs. Eduardo and Isaiah transferred from their neighborhood mainstream schools to the district's continuation high school. Both students had a difficult time adapting to the workload and academic demands during reentry. Isaiah also experienced behavioral challenges. These three young people needed an alternative setting to recover credits and graduate on time. Official school transcripts show that Eduardo and Isaiah attended the continuation school at the same time, though Isaiah was there close to the end of his senior year and Eduardo entered during the end of 10th grade. A priority of the continuation school is to increase the number of students returning to their home schools or graduating from the continuation high school.

In the following sections, I will provide individual student narratives to demonstrate how institutional and individual factors prevented Eduardo and Isaiah from engaging with and graduating from a comprehensive high school. Eduardo narrates a pattern of setbacks perpetuated by institutional flaws that failed to address his academic troubles. Isaiah, on the other hand, reveals the difficulties of readapting to a mainstream school's academic and behavioral expectations.

Isaiah

As mentioned in Chapter Four, Isaiah spent all of middle school in community day school (CDS). During his interview, Isaiah mentioned how being surrounded by positive staff at CDS helped him to calm down but made no mention of a similar situation at Beach High:

> I didn't really have anybody negative . . . [CDS staff] always would try to help me and people wouldn't really help me in school and stuff and they [people at CDS] actually sat down and helped me . . .

Isaiah spoke of a more personalized and responsive school setting distinctly different from most high schools in the district, including his current school, Beach High. Isaiah's recollection of CDS provides insight into his positive experience in a setting where "teachers would actually help you with your work." Isaiah appreciated the instructional support he received at CDS and enjoyed that instructional setting. Because the CDS that Isaiah attended was designed for students in seventh through ninth grades, and because Isaiah had completed his expulsion, he had to transfer out and into Beach High, a mainstream school within his community. Isaiah seemed to have a tough time balancing the workload and academic expectations of a traditional school setting. He failed four classes and earned mainly Ds and Cs throughout his enrollment at Beach High. He also shared that he did not have the 2.0 grade point average, a C average, required for school sports. Although Isaiah was not offered extra support or academic assistance, an assistant principal (his father's friend) routinely checked on his academic progress.

Isaiah had a hard time following the school's code of conduct. Isaiah's lack of compliance ultimately led to his transfer into the continuation high school. According to a school administrator, Isaiah's transfer was a disciplinary action. The move occurred toward the end of his senior year. While at Continuation High, Isaiah repeated World Geography and completed his senior year. Since Isaiah was able to transfer his academic credits completed at Beach High, he finished four classes and graduated within a month of enrolling in Continuation High, and a couple of weeks ahead of his projected graduation date in June.

Unlike Isaiah, who disregarded school rules, Eduardo did his best to follow behavioral guidelines to lessen the risk of removal or transfer. Eduardo's ability to adhere to school rules helped him avoid unwarranted attention from school officials, especially school disciplinarians.

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Unfortunately, Eduardo did not receive any attention from institutional agents. This situation had academic ramifications for Eduardo.

Eduardo

When I met Eduardo it seemed that he was adapting to the social component of reentry but not necessarily the academics. He was very friendly during observations and often told me it was "cool" if I hung out with his peer group. One thing that didn't sit well with me during observations at his school was that the assistant principal divulged the purpose of my visits to at least one of Eduardo's teachers. I was uneasy about this situation, especially since I had asked all administrators to protect student confidentiality. This was part of our agreement and I feared that Eduardo, and his discipline history, would receive negative attention.

As mentioned earlier, when I first met Mrs. Sanchez, Eduardo's mother, she was concerned that institutional processes would prevent Eduardo's participation in commencement exercises like in middle school. According to Mrs. Sanchez and Eduardo, his paperwork was missing grades earned in seventh grade while on expulsion. Eduardo's cumulative file contained a report card with grades for that period. Eduardo's mother also shared a copy of the progress report with the missing grades. Mrs. Sanchez noted that Eduardo's grades were not entered into his transcript. This inaccuracy caused her child to miss out on a very important event. Mrs. Sanchez hoped that Eduardo was not discouraged from doing well in school as a result of the negative outcome he had experienced in middle school. The Sanchez's were distrustful of and disappointed with the school system.

It was unclear why courses did not appear on one transcript but appeared on other school documents. A comment within Eduardo's community day school transcript indicates that Eduardo's cumulative file was sent to his middle school in February, which would have allowed

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his middle school to input grades in time for the June promotion. In fact, Eduardo had passed all his classes at CDS. The school did not take responsibility for this oversight. This situation created suspicion and uncertainty for both Eduardo and his mother.

Upon readmission into the district, Eduardo enrolled in "study skills" courses, Algebra Support, and reading classes. On paper, enrollment in the study skills classes could be interpreted as the school's attempt to bring him up to par with Lomas High requirements. However, a couple of classes I observed lacked instruction and seemed to function more as study halls than actual classes. For instance, English class activities focused more on repetition than meaningful and engaging activities. Students were required to perform timed tasks such as reading and repeating words. We watched a video in Geography class the week I conducted observations. Eduardo seemed to go through the motions of schooling and often "forgot" to complete assignments, bring class materials, and ask questions when he was stuck. I remember accompanying him to his class to take a computer-based math test. Eduardo pressed random keys on the keyboard throughout the class period. Eduardo seemed disconnected and unnoticed by teachers.

I became concerned about what I assessed as Eduardo's lack of academic progress during reentry. He was failing all his classes. Further examination of Eduardo's academics indicates a pattern of academic struggles. He completed the first quarter with two B−, one A in Physical Education, and an F in Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). The next grading period reflects a B− in Physical Education, a C in Algebra Support, a D− in Video Production, and another F in AVID. From that point on, Eduardo received Ds and Fs at Lomas High.

I shared my concerns with an assistant principal who explained that their school operates on a four-quarter year, meaning that Eduardo could fail four classes and still move on.[50] She did

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[50] As of the 2009–10 school year, the 4 × 4 system has been revamped; now students can take only 12 classes per year.

not mention whether there were academic interventions in place for failing students, especially if they moved on ill-prepared. The four-quarter school year allows students to take 16 classes as opposed to the 12 taken in other schools. Thus, if Eduardo failed four classes and passed the rest he could continue on to the next grade.

Eduardo managed to pass his classes with Ds, including a D+ in World Geography and a D− in Reading (he referred to this class as SSR), but he failed all four classes the first quarter of his sophomore year and was transferred into independent study (IS), where he remained for approximatly five months. While in IS Eduardo repeated failed classes, including two English sessions required for high school graduation. It is unclear why Eduardo was transferred into independent study for part of his sophomore year and then into the Lomas High's learning community, where he completed his sophomore year and part of his junior year.

I suspect that the transfers were a response to Eduardo's poor academic performance and an outcome of having been socially promoted. Rather than being offered support at the onset of low achievement levels, Eduardo was placed in several alternative education programs to help with credit recovery. From the Lomas High learning community, Eduardo enrolled in Continuation High for almost two years. Documents show that Eduardo's grades improved and he passed previously failed courses while attending non-traditional school systems. His success in these schools may be attributed to modified instruction. Eduardo continued his studies and graduated in December, a full semester off track. His graduation was jeapordized, however, due to an incomplete Physical Education course required for graduation. A school administrator indicated that the missing class was waived, allowing Eduardo to obtain a high school diploma from Continuation High.

Eduardo's reentry was marked with a sense of doubt, which started early on when Eduardo was barred from participating in promotional excercises. Eduardo managed to go through school undetected, avoiding additional disciplinary incidents. His academic struggles were overlooked during reentry, resulting in enrollment in alternative programs. Eduardo was transferred out of Lomas High and placed in alternative settings to recover credits he had failed. Unlike Eduardo, who slowly fell through the cracks, Cisco created ways to overcome hurdles that could potentially jeapordize his school success.

Cisco

Upon readmission into Nación School District, most students were placed in mainstream schools within their communities. Cisco was one of two students who transitioned from expulsion into one of Nación District's learning communities (LCs). District documents indicate that Cisco was placed in an LC because he was "behind in credits" and "late to enroll." Cisco looked forward to attending one of Nación's mainstream schools. Given the odds against expelled students or those who have been through the juvenile justice system, like Cisco, I asked him why he decided to return to school. He shared:

> Probably 'cause my brothers they were—were supportive because I'm gonna be
> the first guy that ever, like, in my family that's gonna graduate. So yeah, like, they
> wouldn't let me get out . . .

Although Cisco credits his siblings for his motivation to stay in school, Cisco had a strong desire to turn his life around, leave gang issues behind, and do well in school. Throughout the reentry process, Cisco created opportunities that the school system was not providing.

When I met Cisco he was in the process of requesting a transfer from the Nación High learning community (NLC) to independent study (IS) because his family was moving and he wanted to help his mother. Transfer into an IS program would only require that Cisco report to

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school once a week to turn in completed work. Cisco explained that he could return once the family settled into their new home.[51] What he did not vocalize at the time was that transferring out of NLC would shield him from negative social interactions. Cisco's counselor explained that his transfer may be difficult since he lives in the neighboring city of Pedregal Heights and may be required to enroll in a local school that may or may not honor his request to return. Cisco explained that he could not attend Pedregal High because he got "kicked out from there," adding that his family was not moving too far from Nación High. He also shared that Mr. Gomez, the assistant principal at Nación High, thought it would be better for him to stay at Nación.[52] After thinking about his options, he hesitated and said, "I'll just stay then."[53] It was not the placment Cisco wanted, but he complied.

Cisco attended the evening shift (7–9 p.m.) at the Nación High learning community (NLC) and hoped to catch up on credits to later enroll in Nación High. I commented that it seemed like he was doing well at NLC, recovering credits. His counselor confirmed this by stating, "Wow, I hate to say this, but you're all caught up . . . you need to slow down!" Confused by what the counselor said, I inquired about Cisco's academic performance. His counselor explained that once students reach a certain amount of credits, they are not allowed to do more than they need because they still have to take five classes per semester at the high school. Some students end up with an excess amount of credits, but the students, according to her, dislike "having to take" more than what they need.

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[51] A possible reason why Cisco asked to be placed in IS is that he had been assaulted near campus during his first week in the Nacion High learning community. Cisco wanted to avoid dangerous situations and problems that may arise if he came in contact with rival gang members or old friends.

[52] Both Cisco and Angel shared that they could not enroll in a particular high school if they were expelled from one of its feeder schools. I'm not certain that this is true, though Angel was told he could not enroll at Nacion High because the student he hurt attended Nacion High. Angel was expelled when in junior high, not high school. One can only wonder how these students could have fared had they been allowed to return to their neighborhood schools.

[53] Cisco's cumulative files contain a completed independent study enrollmment form as if he had enrolled. According to this paperwork, Cisco's educational goals were to make up credits, complete a high school dipoma, and return to regular high school.

The topics covered in my conversation with Cisco and his counselor surfaced throughout Cisco's reentry process. The more he and I talked and the further I looked into his academic trajectory, I gained a better understanding of why it was so important for him to transfer out of the Nación High learning community. Yes, he experienced conflict with rival gang members, but Cisco had begun to focus on academics and wanted to remove himself from any obstacles to his educational goals. Cisco's emerging critique of his schooling experience propelled him to move from a system that compromised his learning and educational opportunities.

Cisco remained at NLC for approximately eight months. Although Cisco was glad to be back in the district, he was disappointed about the grading policy and class offerings at NLC:

> [Grades], that sucks, too. Yeah, because—this—like if you put, like, a lot of work into it, and you think you got an A and then they tell you, "You got a C," how's that gonna make me feel? This is like, "Wow, I thought I was gonna be more creative than—

Cisco did not feel his work and effort received due credit, and he recognized that grades earned at NLC would travel with him to his next school. Cisco's transcripts and an informal conversation with a Nación District teacher confirmed Cisco's feelings about the NLC grading system. According to a Nación High staff member, students in the NLC could not receive higher than a C in core classes.[54] Though this grading policy is not found in learning community documents, Cisco received all Cs while at the NLC except for a couple of Bs in elective courses. For eager and motivated reentering students like Cisco, the goal wasn't simply to complete credits but to do so with good marks.

In addition to frustration over the grading system at the learning community, Cisco was disappointed about limited course offerings. Ironically, LCs addressed credit recovery and other issues impacting underperforming students, yet there were few options for students who were

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[54] A Nacion District school administrator who preferred to stay anonymous shared that students receive all grades except for Fs. The C-grade system, according to this individual, may be something unique to the Nacion High learning community, but he does not know why they would use that particular grading system.

excelling at the NLC. On a day of observations, I noticed Cisco was just sitting at his desk. That didn't come as a surprise to me since this seemed to be the normal routine at the NLC; still, something was different that day. Cisco looked sad and pensive. I was worried about his demeanor and the likelihood that he would be reprimanded for not being on task. Cisco was not concerned; he explained there was a reason for his inactivity:

> I'm ahead—So, whatever I want to do is fine with [my teacher] 'cause he's like, "All right, you're ahead, so we can't do anything about it." Or at least—well, he don't wanna do anything about it.

Cisco had successfully caught up on his credits and was technically a senior, but the NLC didn't offer any more core classes for him to take. Cisco was prevented from moving forward by the limited curriculum. He completed eight classes, including non-core classes like "Power Thinking Study Skills" and Art, in approximately nine months. The structure of NLC curtailed Cisco's progress, yet he was required to show up daily.

A Nación District administrator explained that NLC students were allowed to take a class at the high school, especially if students were doing well and if the class was not offered at the LC. Administrators from both the comprehensive school and the learning communities had to formally agree on a student's placement. However, this hybrid enrollment was rarely allowed because it contradicted a policy that restricts learning community students from being on the main campus.[55] Monitoring NLC students would be a difficult task for Nación High and Nación High learning community staff. From Cisco's perspective, his teacher was unwilling to help him move to the next class/credit. Cisco's actions, words, and demeanor expressed disappointment with a system that limited his opportunities through inaction and the advice to work at a slower pace.

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[55] A study participant shared that Nacion High learning community staff had strict bathroom-pass policies since students were only there two hours per day.

The NLC counselor recognized Cisco's accomplishment and shared, "Yes, we told him to slow down. He's moving too fast!" Instead of receiving extra support in English, which Cisco needed to pass the CAHSEE (which he previously failed), he was asked to slow down because there were no more classes he could complete at the learning community.[56] Sometime after the CAHSEE was administered, I asked Cisco's counselor for his results and shared his concerns about his readiness to pass the test. "Well," she said, "we offer CAHSEE prep and he did not attend." CAHSEE classes were in fact offered before and after NLC hours. Students were sometimes allowed to have CAHSEE prep time count for their weekly required hours; Cisco was not given this option. Cisco welcomed the opportunity to recover credits but was dissatisfied with the overall organization and curriculum in the NLC: "Well, it's not like regular, regular school, but it's like—like in the progress—but it's not that good." The NLC was a sort of "pit stop" for Cisco. He candidly explained that his academic deficiencies were a cumulative result of his enrollment in alternative education placements, including the NLC:

> Yeah, it's just like they don't teach you here, right? And like right now, I'm doing an essay and they have to like—almost three years I haven't done an essay, so how do they expect me to do it without, like, them teaching me? So, what I am doing is try to memorize what I learn from the CAHSEE, try to memorize and I use, like, first person and the same things, or things like that.
>
> So, it's what I'm trying to remember, but it's a little bit hard. That's why he told me to take my time and—so I have like almost a week of doing it.

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[56] A high school administrator in Nacion School District shared it is not uncommon for students to attend Continuation High to take a class not offered in their school during a particular cycle and return to their home school to graduate. I am unaware if this option is available for students enrolled in learning communities within the district.

When the school year ended Cisco requested a transfer to Mountain High, a comprehensive high school where he believed students had positive goals for their future and a system of support available to help accomplish those goals:

> In a regular school, it's, like, a little bit more, people are looking towards their record and career and everything. And they have everything already *como acomodado y todo* (planned out/set up and everything).
>
> So, that's where I wanna go and, like, *ahi conozco mas personas que* (I know more people that) are thinking right; they're socials and things like that. So, yeah. That's why I want to go [to regular school].

Cisco's transcript indicates that he attended Nación High for a day and transferred into the Mountain High learning community (MHLC), where he remained for seven months.

After attending four different schools during reentry, Cisco graduated and received a diploma months after his expected date of graduation in June. I can only imagine how Cisco would have performed if given the chance to move forward by taking a class at Nación High. Cisco, the young man who was "moving too fast," graduated a semester late but fulfilled his goal of being the first male in his family to graduate from high school.

Cisco completed high school on his terms. He avoided social conflicts and, after enduring a series of setbacks resulting from institutional structures and processes, he initiated changes to compensate for educational gaps. By transferring to a different school where he thought opportunities for students abounded and adhering to school rules, Cisco graduated from high school despite institutional limitations.

Not all of the students benefited from transfers, and few were able to overcome educational neglect. As we see in the next section, Angel transferred in and out of schools and had a tough time adapting to so many changes in a short amount of time. While Cisco's counselors and teachers never mentioned his expulsion or behavioral problems, staff at Angel's different

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schools focused on his conduct, making it difficult for Angel to engage in reentry without criticism.

Taking a "Non-conformist" Route

Angel

Angel shared that he was reinstated approximately two weeks into the second semester. He recalled being informed that he could not attend the high school near his residence because the student he harmed was attending that school. Despite the facts that Angel was expelled in junior high, he had completed all expulsion requirements, and no official school document outlined this provision, Angel was not allowed to enroll in Nación High. Angel enrolled at Prosperity High, which was approximately 13 miles from his home. According to Angel's mother, the district did not provide transportation services; thus, Angel relied on his friend's father for a ride. Unreliable transportation resulted in several tardies for Angel, but this was only one of several challenges faced by Angel during reentry.

Most students in Nación schools were required to have a spiral notebook for core classes. The notebooks included class notes and assignments that students were occasionally allowed to use during exams. If students enrolled midway through a course, they missed material that could be covered on tests. The packets and work-at-your-own-pace system during expulsion and at alternative schools differed from the instructional system to which students had to adjust in mainstream schools. Students who were readmitted after classes were in session faced the additional burden of transitioning while already behind. As the following exchange captures, Angel's situation was a perfect example of this dynamic.

> EV: Okay. When you were at Court Schools . . . were you able to catch up on missed schoolwork?

> Angel: I don't really remember. I think I just started off where I was at.

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EV: Okay, and when you went back to Prosperity, did you start where you were at as well?

Angel: No. What I didn't like is that when I went back I missed, I think, a week or two. The teachers wanted me to catch up all that 'cause I wasn't there so it was *more* work that I had to do 'cause I had to catch up those days I wasn't there. So I was like, "Ah!" [Expressing frustration]

EV: So that put you back, those two weeks that you missed. But prior to that, you had been caught up?

Angel: No. 'Cause I didn't start the semester, when I got out of County Court Schools, I didn't start the semester right away I started like two weeks later. So then I had missing work then and when I got locked up and I came back out two weeks later I had *more* work. So then it was so much work where I couldn't catch up.

Angel was forced to complete assignments he had missed during the transition from expulsion to reentry and was not afforded the opportunity to start fresh. He was behind even before entering Prosperity High. The situation was discouraging and overwhelming. Angel continued to lose ground. Mandatory tutoring, Saturday school, and weekly progress reports were assigned to assist Angel when he struggled academically in earlier grades, yet it does not appear that any type of academic intervention was developed to aid Angel with the academic hurdles he encountered in high school. To make matters worse, Angel was required to retake an English class he had completed and passed during expulsion.

Angel and his mother deemed course repetition unnecessary and did not understand why it was required:

Angel: They still put me in the regular 10th-grade class.

EV: So you have to redo it?

Angel: Yeah. They told me I was . . . my mom thought I was wasting my time, but they were like, "No, you're still gonna get credit," but I mean [Mom said] "he already went through this."

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EV: But didn't you get credit from Court Schools?

Angel: Yeah, but I guess they wanted more credit.

EV: Double credit?

Angel: I don't know.

Angel was unaware that some classes he took in alternative placements had transferred as electives. Angel's situation appears to be an outcome of inconsistent course descriptions and titles between and within expulsion sites and Nación District. Angel's transcript, for example, shows that he was enrolled in Algebra I at Acre Junior High and Algebra IA in CDS. His transcript also shows that he was enrolled in English 10A at two different schools (with passing grades), English 10A-B in CDS, and later in English 10-2. English 10-1 and 10-2 do not appear on Angel's final transcript, though they appear in one version of his transcript. Both classes were completed at the young offender camp facility. In terms of English 10-2, one document indicates he passed with a C, and another indicates Angel failed the class. Additional discrepancies in Angel's transcripts existed prior to expulsion and reentry, negatively affecting Angel's completion of high school requirements. For instance, one transcript documents that Angel received a D in English 9-2 (at Acre Junior High), and another indicates that he received an F. It is unclear why his grade was changed. Grade and class inconsistencies may also be attributed to Angel's multiple site placements during expulsion and reentry.

Instead of providing Angel with an opportunity to make up credits and improve his grade in failed courses, he was made to repeat classes already accounted for. As a result of this oversight, Angel became resentful of a system that seemed to disregard his education and improvement. Angel continued to fall behind during reentry and eventually failed every class during his enrollment at Prosperity High. His counselor seemed more concerned with Angel's

disciplinary issues than with his educational needs. During our conversations she explained he was defiant and missed many days of school. After being removed from Prosperity High, Angel moved back and forth from the Nación High learning community (NLC) to independent study (IS) and later attended a charter school. He did well in the NLC and IS but failed at the charter school. Once a student in a highly coveted specialized academic program, Angel was now a drifter who distanced himself from systems of education.

Reentry requires students to adapt to school structures and instructional programs. Angel repeated the process several times, resulting in inconsistency and instability. After multiple transfers, alternative school sites were Angel's only option. While he attributes his disengagement from school to various factors, he primarily blames the instructional practices in alternative education settings:

> The schools I'm going into—I don't have any options. I'm not getting anything out of them; don't benefit me, learning-wise. Maybe I will take the GED instead of going back to school; it's less time than going into school where it's the same thing—I'm not gonna be learning. You know how those schools are—probably gonna be more drama.

Angel's disengagement from school was an act of resistance against poor schooling, limited opportunities, and lack of academic support. Combined, Angel's discipline history, his inability to enroll in a neighborhood school, and his reactions to negative situations impacted reentry— how he was perceived and the educational services offered. With few options, Angel left a hostile school environment and opted to pursue a high school equivalency credential through the General Educational Development (GED) test.

Summary

Institutional practices such as expulsion and suspension (or any type of removal from classrooms/schools) adversely impact removed students, yet they are commonly accepted

punishments in American schools. On the surface, suspension and expulsion seem like the only punishment meted out to defiant students; however, students also endure academic consequences of school mobility as they transition in and out of different school systems. Instructional and institutional inconsistencies make the reentry process difficult for students, even those who complete high school.

Students revealed benefits of expulsion (and enrollment in alternative educational settings): the ability to recover credits, get better grades, and become part of what seemed like a supportive learning environment. As students transitioned from expulsion to reentry, they confronted a sobering reality, recognizing the downside to the accelerated achievement gained during expulsion. Different levels of academic expectations and rigor as well as social challenges surfaced. Students identified numerous disparities between and within expulsion/suspension placement and traditional high schools. Students' narratives provide a glimpse into the obstacles and opportunities encountered during reentry. These insights offer possible ways to facilitate student reentry and raise the question of why this process yields different outcomes for different students.

A common thread across students' reentry is the absence of formal and informal academic supports. As students reflected on their schooling while expelled, it became obvious that there were immediate gains while enrolled at expulsion sites, but difficulties surfaced in the long run, causing several students to fall behind and struggle during reentry. For the most part, students were left on their own. In the absence of school-based services, ties to schools, and relationships with staff, the educational needs of reentering students went unaddressed. Those who fared well did so because of resources they brought with them from prior experiences and

familial support. These resilient students had the *ganas*—deep desire and willingness—to complete a high school education, though it was not an easy path.

With a couple of exceptions, students lacked adequate support during their transition from expulsion and were given conflicting messages that resulted in a strong distrust of the school system. Some students were actively discouraged from doing things that they intuitively understood to be in their own best interests. For instance, Cisco was asked to "slow down" and not disrupt the procedures in place at the Nación High learning community. Others suffered consequences tied to poor coordination and communication between the different school sites that they attended during and after expulsion. Such limitations " . . . inhibit personal development and the fulfillment of personal potential" while forcing students to shoulder what is deemed *their* academic failure (Watkinson & Epp, 1997, p. 191).

Cross-Case Analysis

To help us fully understand student reentry as experienced by previously expelled students, I focus on institutional and individual resources available throughout the reentry process. This analysis is guided by a thematic approach that is tied to both student outcomes and academic supports that shaped reengagement. Findings from this study indicate that student reentry is complicated by the absence of resources that facilitate this important transition for returning students. The analysis that follows also indicates that students respond to what they perceive as restrictive school-level processes through a variety of coping mechanisms, such as transferring out and rejecting schooling structures altogether.

In spite of the challenges that some students faced, several were able to overcome gaps in educational structures. Cisco and Joaquin are examples of students who actively resisted

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educational limitations by maintaining an interest in completing high school. The students were resilient in the face of insurmountable challenges.

Striving and Sustaining Initiative in the Face of Challenge

Several students were encouraged by their ability to meet *and* surpass academic requirements at expulsion sites. Joaquin, Cisco, and Angel proudly revealed that they were able to effortlessly recover credits *and* get ahead while expelled. Student transcripts indicated that these particular students, especially Cisco and Joaquin, recovered enough credits to be approximately a year ahead of their peers. But what followed during reentry impacted these students' progress.

Joaquin and Cisco graduated from high school, each experiencing a different set of circumstances along the way. What sets these students apart from others in this study is the proactive stance they took to shape their educations. Cisco and Joaquin countered institutional neglect by creating conditions that would yield educational opportunities and fill the gaps in their educational trajectories. Cisco's and Joaquin's families also motivated them to persevere and graduate.

Individual strategic actions helped these students to move forth. Cisco expressed disappointment with schooling practices, especially those that hindered his academic progress. For Joaquin, his responsibility as a parent superseded institutional barriers and provided the drive and motivation to push through. Both students critiqued the substandard education they received in expulsion sites (and alternative settings within the district) and found ways to overcome poor schooling. The students' success was shaped by family and their motivation to complete high school. That Cisco made many attempts to complete his education in a mainstream school rather than an alternative setting (e.g., continuation school or learning community) reflects his

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understandning of a tiered educational system.. Recall that several students distinguished "real schools" (comprehensive schools) from alternative sites. A diploma from a non-traditional school setting could limit employment and future options. His delayed graduation was partly due to limited academic opportunities. Cisco was congnizant of the stigma attached to alternative schools and their students. He rejected negative labels and tried to remove himself from learning communities. Cisco and Joaquin felt a strong desire to not let their families down. At some point in the educational process, Cisco's and Joaquin's families had implicitly or explicitly communicated high aspirations for them in high school and beyond. For Joaquin, being responsible for his child entailed serving as a positive role model. These students had a sense of purpose, which was attached to family. Their families' aspirations for them had a positive effect that countered negative schooling practices and empowered them to defy the odds. A thorough examination of Cisco's and Joaquin's narratives allows us to contextualize their experiences and motivations while understanding their resilience in the absence of institutional support.

Getting By

Pedro became a star athlete whose athletic prowess became the focus of his existence at Prosperity High. On the other hand, Isaiah wanted, but was ineligible, to participate in school sports. Isaiah gained attention at school when he acted out. Each of these students followed a different path, yet both experienced academic neglect. Isaiah and Pedro graduated, but their "success" was redefined by reentry experiences, specifically those tied to academics. Pedro's and Isaiah's outcomes are positive; they graduated from high school, but they did so just getting by.

Pedro mentioned that schoolwork at CDS was "easy," but as he transitioned from CDS to Prosperity High academic difficulties surfaced. Determined to do well, Pedro mentioned he "didn't do anything" that could attract negative attention. He kept busy by participating in

different sports. In fact, Pedro was the only student in this study involved in school-based athletics. Other students, like Eduardo, Isaiah, and Angel, wanted to partake in school athletics but either did not meet grade requirements or attended schools where sports were unavailable. Pedro's athletic abilities were praised, but his academic flaws went unnoticed over time. His quiet demeanor strengthened the perception that he was not a bad student; in fact, his peers and teachers were fond of him. In class observations, teachers engaged Pedro in conversations about school games and recent victories. Pedro graduated, but he had to repeat several courses in the process. He did not report assistance from school staff, and his school file does not contain evidence that he was supported academically.

The pedagogical practices and procedures of community day schools assisted Isaiah while he was expelled but seemed to work against him at the comprehensive high school. Like Pedro, Isaiah also graduated, but he did so ahead of time at the continuation school. Isaiah had a tough time adapting to the academic demands and behavioral expectations. The informal support of the assistant principal who monitored Isaiah's progress may have allowed Isaiah to remain at the comprehensive high school. As explored earlier, Isaiah wished he could have stayed at the community day school, explaining that the structure and culture of CDS helped him behaviorally and academically. At the comprehensive school, Isaiah completed school requirements but fell short of the 2.0 grade point average required for sports eligibility.

Both Pedro and Isaiah completed high school, but they experienced an educational decline. Isaiah's inability to comply with school rules gained the attention of school administrators, while staff at Pedro's school focused on his athleticism. These students gained attention for reasons unrelated to academic performance and experienced low educational attainment in the process. Isaiah's and Pedro's reentry experiences reveal that sports and a loose

system of support kept these students connected to school, yet their educational lapses went unaddressed. The following section reflects ways in which institutional practices and procedures contribute to the gradual disengagement of students.

Resisting and (Dis)Engaging

Duane's, Eduardo's, and Angel's returns from expulsion were shaped in part by rightful distrust of the school system. Disorganization and inconsistent messages within the system encouraged these three students to resist and withdraw from the schooling process. This was especially true for Angel and Eduardo, whose negative experiences during their formative years seemed to establish a pattern of distrust in a system of uncertainty.

Institutional inconsistencies also influenced Eduardo's school (dis)engagement and in some ways set him up for failure. Lost or misplaced documents prevented Eduardo from participating in a culminating and very symbolic promotion from eighth grade. When he reentered Nación School District, Eduardo was placed in classes with deficient pedagogial and instructional approaches that neither challenged him intellectually nor provided him with the tools necessary to meet the demands of that particular school structure.

Eduardo's poor performance was minimized as a situation that could be remedied through the school's four-quarter system. The administrator's focus on this system caused her to ignore the fact that Eduardo was allowed to readily move ahead while ill-prepared. In the end, Eduardo was failing most of his classes and transferred into the continuation high school. Eduardo's school administrator knew that he was unsuccessful and failed to provide institutional support to help him succeed. This situation enocuraged disengagment and compounded academic troubles. His mother's fears had materialized.

Duane's circumstances differed from Eduardo's in that Duane received substantial support to ease his transition into the comprehensive high school. Duane's reentry was facilitated via special placement and the opportunity to mainstream before complete reintegration. Despite these institutional supports, Duane believed that he was at risk of not completing high school. Specifically, Duane was not confident about his ability to pass the required state exam and felt a sense of false hope. Duane was overwhelmed by the fact that if he failed the state exam, he would not receive a high school diploma. Instead of taking advantage of the help provided in class, Duane disengaged from a system that he viewed as unfair. In his meaning-making process, no matter how he performed in school, his diploma was contingent upon a state test.

Disengagement by these students manifested in different ways. For instance, Duane withdrew by neglecting academic support sessions and not "being present" in class. Eduardo went through the motions, failing but being passed. The mixed message Eduardo received placed him in a position that was difficult to ignore. He failed most classes and was falling further behind.

Angel was perhaps the student who experienced the most antagonistic relationship with schooling structures and institutional agents, yet Angel found ways to counteract and resist these structures by engaging in what seemed like self-defeating actions. Angel's narrative describes the difficulty of starting school late and being expected to catch up on missed assignments while keeping up with present school demands. In some ways Angel was set up to fail. The uncoordinated efforts of the County Office of Education (home to juvenile court and community schools/county court schools), the juvenile detention facility, and Nación District to establish course requirements and transfer guidelines led Angel and Cisco (and, to some extent, Joaquin)

to have duplicate credit for courses. Institutional agents, structures, and processes impacted Angel in ways that made him feel unwanted and unsupported.

Inadequate instructional approaches and inconsistent record-keeping by institutional agents made Angel (and other students) feel hopeless and unwilling to continue in mainstream and alternative educational structures, which he found to be oppressive and unresponsive, within Nación District schools. The system, as documented in Angel's narrative, conversations with his mother, and official school documents, set up Angel for failure. In the end, Angel reclaimed his educational path by taking an alternative route and completing a GED program.

The "practices, procedures, and educational conventions" at expulsion schools and alternative sites attended by reentering students do not coincide with the insructional programs at comprehensive high schools (Watkinson, 1997, p. 5). Reentering students have particular circumstances, yet expulsion sites and receiving school districts do little to sckowledge and improve these conditions. The likelihood that expelled students will experience a prolonged or even permanent educational risk undoubtedly increases. Staggered reentry, mismatched assessments, delays in school transfer/enrollment, and dissimilar grades increased students' frustration. Student were discouraged by what they viewed as a waste of time. These practices stratify the educational paths of returning students.

Reinstatement provided students with access to an education, but the procedures involved in this process created preventable obstacles for several returning students, resulted in students' lowered confidence and increased frustration. While reinstatement provides students with an opportunity to rejoin the Nación School District community, students did not receive help to transition. In some cases, school practices hindered students from moving forward on their academic paths and played a significant role in their educational outcomes.

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Conclusion

In order to yield positive results for students, academic structures should be conducive to student learning and academic achievement. Looking into students' reentry pathways and outcomes, it is evident that there is no collective responsibility on the part of the expelling district and expulsion site for how these students fare. Seven of the eight students in this study received a high school diploma, but their success did not come about in ways we would hope. They faced significant hurdles throughout reentry. Schooling structures and processes created challenges for reentering students that limited educational advancement and opportunities. Students' desires to return to, and graduate from, a comprehensive high school were not facilitated by school and district officials. In fact, success experienced by these students is attributed to their families' persistence, their individual resilience, and their resistance against what several students viewed as an oppressive system with limited opportunities.

Students' reactions against schooling practices consisted of transfers, partial disengagement, and complete detachment from Nación School District. For students like Angel, coping mechanisms often led to additional barriers that hindered academic progress. Deceived by the overwhelmingly high marks obtained in expulsion sites, Isaiah, Cisco, Duane, Eduardo, and, to some extent, Pedro returned to Nación academically disadvantaged. In the end, students found ways to feel successful despite the lack of support received in academic settings. The educational system available to expelled students differed from the curricular program at Nación schools, particularly the mainstream schools that students would reenter and hope to graduate from. Students had to adapt to several educational programs, including mainstream schools and expulsion sites, and then back to mainstreams schools or learning communities, with each site having its own set of class offerings, grading system, instruction style, and expectations. This

perpetuated academic difficulties experienced by low-performing students. Multiple and sometimes prolonged transitions between schools resulted in what Brown (2003) refers to as "school transience" (p. 450). In her study of suspended and expelled youth, Brown proposes the term *transience*:

> because it denotes not only "mobility" but also the condition of being "transient"—without a consistent school "home" that can provide academic stability, security, and opportunities to build strong relationships with adults. (Brown, 2003, p. 450)

Students' narratives about academic transitions and absence of social ties are associated with multiple placements and removal. However, students in this study who remained at their home school for one or more years did not report feelings of security nor the opportunity to cultivate relationships with staff. Students in this study were overwhelmed with how they were perceived and taken aback by unexpected academic challenges. Students' descriptions also underscored contradictions about alternative placements. Expulsion schools seemed to support students in ways they appreciated and may actually have kept them in school; they were important spaces where students found a sense of social support and "easy" curriculum. However, the absence of "teaching" and the low level of the self-paced academic work offered increased the risk of academic failure upon readmission into mainstream schools. This academic mismatch forced students to find ways to stay afloat or risk academic failure. Some students were able to adjust to the demands of Nación District schools; others, however, were overwhelmed and unable to keep up.

Expelling districts and schools for expelled students must find ways to bridge the gap between reentering students and their educational success. Part of the solution in assisting reentering students is contingent upon these institutions coordinating efforts to provide students with similar programs of study and necessary academic support. Administering pre- and post-

academic assessments to expelled students may provide each institution with information on the strengths and needs of students, and would help facilitate the various transitions they expereince. Alongside assessments, students, their families, counselors, and school adminsitrators must meet to develop a plan that would facilitate reentry and identify potentially challenging areas. This preventative structure may include a key person whom returning students may contact during reentry. There needs to be a willingness on the part of all stakeholders to take responsibility for the academic success and well-being of these students.

In some ways, referring expelled students to expulsion/alternative schools seems more like a practice of convenience rather than one of genuine interest in providing students with an adequate education while they fulfill their punishment, and reinstatment reflects an institutional procedure that accepts students back but with minimal, if any, support.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

My personal and professional experiences in education have influenced this study. My work history includes several years working with young people who had, for a variety of reasons, been classified as "at-risk." Those students reminded me of me. I was disciplined when I was in school, and later as a teacher I had to enforce school rules and monitor student conduct. I know the negative labels school personnel apply to students and the difficulty students face in shaking them.

As someone who spent plenty of time in detention and the principal's office, I witnessed the different types of punishments meted out to my peers and me. As a student, I once received detention for talking in class; when I protested being singled out for punishment, the punishment increased. While I graduated high school prior to the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, the kinds of disciplinary policies I have described in this dissertation pushed many of my friends out of school. School personnel had dismissed them as bad and incorrigible kids early on. These experiences led me to question the effects of disciplinary sanctions and the validity of settings and programs reserved for troubled youth. My own escape from expulsion, the penal system, drugs, poverty, and early death seemed to be due to luck more than merit. The influence of our environment—a working-class community where crime and gang and drug activity were significantly higher than in any other city in Sunny County—seemed as significant as the bad luck of being labeled by school officials. While even as a student I recognized that schools need practical ways to address disruption in the classroom, punitive discipline seemed destructive and unhealthy.

My experiences as a teacher brought this message home to me. As a first-year teacher at a continuation high school in 1998, I had to enforce discipline guidelines that had become more rigid than those I'd experienced as a student a few years earlier, and I had to take part in the expulsion of one of my students who sold drugs at school. As we began to document his offense, a school administrator informed me that my student's parents were incarcerated and he was the sole provider for his young siblings and their guardian, his grandmother. This student was also doing well at the school and was scheduled to interview for an apprenticeship with a local military apprentice program. Knowing the impact that expulsion would have on this student and his family, I spoke with my supervisor, asking for leniency and resources for my student and his family. It seemed to me that part of the reason why he sold drugs was to provide for his family; removing him from school was not the solution. My student's extenuating circumstances did not matter to administrators. California school discipline zero-tolerance guidelines demanded his expulsion. This incident was my first real-life introduction to zero-tolerance discipline.

Society had failed my student despicably, and a large body of evidence suggests that expulsion increased the likelihood he would experience other negative outcomes, such as complete disengagement from school, entering the corrections system, or an early death. However, the extensive literature about school discipline is mostly quantitative in nature. Qualitative studies that expand this research tend to focus on dropouts or students in specialized alternative school settings. Few studies include students' lived experiences and perceptions of exclusionary discipline and its effects on student reentry. This study adds a new dimension to research about school discipline by focusing qualitative research in a very particular way.

I sought to understand why the students decided to return to Nación School District, particularly "regular" school and how they navigated educational settings within the expelling

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district. Drawing from youth reentry literature, I refer to the process of reintegration as "student reentry." Through this study, I hoped to contribute to work on school discipline by providing a richer analysis of how removal from school affects students' lives from the perspectives of the students themselves. Expulsion is a life-changing event with consequences that far exceed the duration of punishment. Removal from school alters a student's personal and educational course.

The young people who participated in this study did not drop out; all of them faced situations that made it seem likely they might. Through their generous sharing of their experiences, I found that multiple factors hinder or facilitate student reentry. Further, the disruption in schooling that expulsion entailed and the substandard education they received during and (sometimes) after their expulsion created obstacles to successful reentry. In the following sections, I revisit the research questions that guided this study, present key findings, describe the theoretical contributions of my research, and conclude with implications.

Revisiting the Research Questions

Why Did Students Choose to Return to School?

Although removal from school was a traumatic and stressful event for students, most participants expressed a strong desire to return to Nación School District, the expelling district, particularly its comprehensive schools. Students embrace the opportunity for (what they hope will be) a fresh start and have positive associations with traditional school settings. Students view their return as beneficial to immediate goals (high school graduation) and a foundation for future goals (more and better employment opportunities, joining the armed forces, continuing their education, etc.).

Initial conversations with students revealed mixed opinions about expulsion sites. They mentioned social support from teachers, bonds amongst peers, and feelings of belonging in a

close-knit community as positive characteristics of these sites. Isaiah and Joaquin, for instance, explained that expulsion sites created a sense of solidarity, though a few students disliked being in a school with students they viewed in stigmatized ways. In general, students described their own academic performances at these sites as having been strong, in part because they found them less demanding. Several students worried that handling academic demands in a traditional school would prove even more challenging than it had been prior to their expulsion; students also expressed nervousness about students' and staff's perceptions of them. However, they noted that traditional school settings provided a more well-rounded education than alternative schools, and they regretted the educational and social opportunities they had missed while on expulsion. These comments betrayed a consciousness of the distinction between traditional and expulsion sites, operationally, socially, and academically. Participants saw traditional schools as a better route to success.

Each of the students in this study had an individual interest in returning to school. The young people in my study believed that a high school diploma would secure a better future for them and their families. Joaquin, for example, was determined to graduate from high school to set a good example for his young son. Cisco expected to be the first in his family to graduate from high school. In spite of difficult circumstances, students remained encouraged about their futures and found ways to secure opportunities that educational institutions failed to provide.

What Is the School Reintegration Experience from the Perspective of Expelled Students?

The logistical side of student reentry was not easy. A number of participants experienced late delivery of school files and lost documents that prevented them from receiving high school credit for classes completed at expulsion schools. Differences between expulsion site course descriptions and content often resulted in credits being applied as electives rather than core

classes. This, too, made it more difficult for students to readjust to schools in Nación District, especially when students were made to repeat courses. These technicalities, along with multiple placements during (and sometimes after) the expulsion process, placed students at a disadvantage.

The concerns students expressed with respect to their decisions to reenter traditional schools proved valid. Expulsion schools' low academic requirements had put them at a disadvantage, especially at comprehensive schools. To make matters worse, institutional inconsistencies placed students at a disadvantage by requiring them to repeat courses they had successfully passed during expulsion. Reentering students had a tough time keeping up in Nación District's mainstream schools. Most were enrolled in one of the district's alternative schools by their senior year. Students also found interactions with school personnel a barrier to success. At least two students described hostile encounters in which school officials referred to their disciplinary histories. In one case, a school counselor suggested a student had no right to attend what she referred to as *her* school. Students had no key contact or institutional support in charge of easing reentry; their own transitions fell solely on them.

Students described their coping mechanisms as intentional—designed to create a particular result. Some sought social connections with students they would never have associated with prior to their expulsion, others engaged in sports to distract personnel and peers from their history, and still others violated behavior contracts specifically to gain entry to schools where they felt they could satisfy graduation standards. In other words, students constructed personas during reentry that helped them reach their goal of graduating from high school.

According to Students, What Is the Impact of Their Previous Expulsion on Their Academic

Progress, Their School Activities, Their Relationships with Teachers and Peers, Their

Relationships with Their Families, and Lastly, Their Future Aspirations?

The themes that emerged from this study reveal that students continued to experience repercussions from previous school sanctions. Students described multiple stressors that affected them academically and socially. They described concrete reasons that time away from traditional school placed them at a disadvantage. Cisco and Duane had experienced academic difficulties before expulsion; on return they felt their chances of meeting high school and state requirements approached zero. Expulsion had also separated them from formal and informal networks within their home schools. Reintegration posed difficulties and they described stigma. The following subsections describe how expulsion and suspension marked students socially and academically.

Academic Progress

As mentioned earlier, students were overwhelmed by the different academic standards in traditional and alternative schools. Expulsion placements kept students connected to school, but their educational programs were incompatible with those of mainstream schools.

This disconnect between the goals and function of expulsion sites and schools in the Nación district widened the achievement gap several students had experienced even before their expulsion. Students found comprehensive schools' pace, expectations, and state graduation requirements overwhelming. The ease with which students had accrued credits and good grades during expulsion made Nación comprehensive schools' demands seem extreme.

Relationships with Teachers, Peers, and Family

Labels, Stigma, and the "Other"

Several students expressed concern that school personnel and peers made negative assumptions about them. The use, by some school personnel, of discipline histories as a reason to increase a punishment caused a sense of hopelessness. Being confronted with their histories made students feel cornered and humiliated and mistrustful of school personnel. Students felt no one recognized their efforts to prove that they had changed.

A number of students noted that school personnel used cumulative discipline files to reify stigmatized status. Being presented with previous misconduct made it harder for them to make a fresh start; they proposed that school personnel should view their records holistically, and perhaps recognize that the factors that made it difficult for them to adhere to school rules in the past had not changed. School documents focused heavily on students' past poor decision-making, which impacted how they were perceived. Some were still thought of as troublemakers unable to change and unworthy of resources. They proposed that this kind of context could lead their schools to establish appropriate forms of punishment, practical district requirements, and transitional support. They felt that school personnel only consulted their discipline records to stigmatize them.

Social Adjustment, Forced Mobility, and Relationships

Students reentered schools at a social disadvantage. For most, leaving their expulsion placements posed a challenge. Their alternative schools had become familiar, and most had formed positive connections with teachers. Expulsion sites had small class sizes, rigid daily routines, and a sense of belonging that contrasted with their larger traditional schools. Some

described the "bad" kids at expulsion sites as a bad influence, but most described expulsion sites as supportive. The transition from these supports proved difficult.

Reentry meant returning to a peer network from which students had been separated. While peer associations can be disruptive, on reentry they had difficulties establishing positive bonds with classmates. They found their large traditional schools less personable than expulsion sites and felt alienated from school personnel and schoolmates alike. Students who transferred mid-way through a term experienced a particular disadvantage, as all their classmates were used to set routines. In time, participants established peer relations to some degree during reentry, but strong bonds with school personnel were rare. Most said their schools had no one they could depend on for support during troubled times.

My participants' experiences illustrate Angela Valenzuela's (1999) argument that the schooling process of native-born and Mexican students in the United States contributes to social decapitalization by making bonds difficult to develop and maintain. Time alone put students at a disadvantage; they had to reenter social networks that had changed in their absence and seek to forge meaningful relationships in limited time. It is important, then, to recognize that alternative education placements offered students a comfortable environment but rarely prepared them for the educational programs they would experience upon reenrollment in traditional schools.

What Systems of Support, If Any, Do Students Report During Reentry?

None of my participants experienced a formal system of support during reentry. Joaquin mentioned a school administrator, his former math teacher, who helped him with his reenrollment process. But even that administrator offered conditional acceptance, stating, "I'll take you in. Just don't make any trouble if you're here." This same administrator expressed concern with Cisco when he was hospitalized after a physical altercation with another student.

Family seemed to be a strong source of adult support for reentering students, although some whose expulsions had been related to drug use or sale reported that their family members treated them with suspicion. Nación District staff had not remained in contact with them during expulsion, which surprised most participants; a sense of neglect led students to believe that they were unwanted (and later unwelcome) in their expelling districts.

In What Way Do School Practices Discourage or Support the Reintegration of Expelled Students?

The State of California *encourages* school districts to provide alternative placements for expelled students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). It also requires districts to offer the opportunity for reinstatement after the period of expulsion (Bryant, 1998). In Nación School District, administrators develop a rehabilitation plan with provisions and requirements for reinstatement at the time of expulsion. As Chapter Four described, eligibility for reinstatement is contingent upon requirements set forth in the plan. For instance, students must attend school during expulsion and attain passing grades, and may be asked to attend counseling sessions, possibly focusing on particular areas such as decision-making skills, anger management, or drug use prevention. These plans typically emphasize behavior modification over educational goals, which puts students with preexisting academic challenges at a particular disadvantage. The lack of formal structures to support reentry compounds their challenges.

Ideally, students returning from expulsion should easily make the transition to traditional school settings. Legislation affords previously expelled students the opportunity to be reinstated, yet we have learned from study participants that successful reintegration is not guaranteed. Institutional processes penalized reentering students through missing, late, or incomplete documents. Courses taken during expulsion sometimes were given elective instead of graduation

credit, leaving students with more courses to complete. Students (and their parents) expressed disappointed and frustration when they had to re-take classes they had taken at expulsion sites. Practices such as these reveal that schools enact reinstatement procedures to conform to state requirements rather than as genuine attempts to support students.

Students' coping mechanisms included transferring to more favorable schools and leaving independent study–type schools that failed to improve their academic skills or provide them positive peer relationships. Angel and Cisco transferred to escape educational settings they found unsupportive; both found the curriculum at the alternative school in which they were reinstated disengaging and the instructors apathetic. Cisco pointed to a lack of support for multilingual students. Students like Eduardo and Isaiah gradually became credit-deficient after reinstatement and ultimately enrolled in Continuation High to complete high school. Angel resisted schooling practices altogether and was eventually pushed out of the Nación district; he passed the GED exam.

Reinstatement protocols do not require school systems to support successful reintegration. The plan of action created at the time of expulsion does not address a way to meet students' needs through guidance and support; these plans put all of the onus on students to resolve the issues that led to their expulsion in the first place and tackle the difficult project of successful reintegration.

Revisiting the Theoretical Framework

This qualitative study produced a large data set based on months or years of interaction with most of the study participants during reentry through high school completion. By employing symbolic interaction as a theoretical framework to explain much of our daily interactions, this study makes a unique theoretical contribution. This is important because this approach allows for

a better understanding of expelled (and suspended) students' experiences and perceptions (meaning-making) of exclusionary discipline, while recognizing students as active agents in decision-making. It also helps us understand the nuances associated with choices students made during reentry. The current body of education research provides significant insight into school discipline trends but little insight into the experiences of the students those trends affect. My research presents the perspectives of reinstated students enrolled in a variety of school settings. It reflects students' conceptualization of their expulsion and reentry experiences. Interactions and exchanges involved in students' meaning-making influence how they negotiate their identities and roles as students returning from expulsion. Students' beliefs about how they are perceived by others shape their self-concept and choices. In this sense, meaning is co-constructed through daily interactions.

I used symbolic interaction as a tool to understand my participants' experiences of reentry; how they define themselves and their experience. Participant observations, interviews, document analysis and the use of symbolic interaction helped me to ascertain what the students were experiencing, how they interpreted those experiences and how they navigated reentry based on their meaning-making. As Shibutani (1975) notes, "in studying the behavior of human beings it is necessary to get 'inside' the actor, to see the situation from his point of view" (p. 257). Symbolic interactionists propose that individuals develop self-concept through the interpretations of words, actions, and symbolic cues present in their interactions with others. Symbolic interaction assumes that such expectations cause behaviors. The symbolic interactionist perspective values each participant's perspective as a powerful tool in our understanding of social phenomenon. This perspective is helpful in understanding how previously expelled students come to understand student reentry.

In relation to education, interactionists are particularly interested in the effects of tracking and labeling students. These institutional practices, coupled with interactions with institutional agents, include overt and subtle cues that students recognize and give meaning. From this perspective, reentry tasks students with navigating their new environments (along with set rules and expectations) as they simultaneously negotiate their identities as students returning from expulsion. Students are conscious of labels and stigmas attached to their discipline histories and adopt coping mechanisms that serve their own educational goals even though they may invoke the censure of adults.

Symbolic interaction helps us understand how meaning is co-constructed through interaction between individuals (Prawat, 1996). Applied to this research study, symbolic interaction acknowledges agency. In this sense, students conform to Stryker's description that individuals "do not simply react to one another's actions; rather, they interpret or define those actions" and act accordingly (2002, p. 90). Students adjusted as best they could during reentry. The reciprocal effects they experienced of school as institutions, which, as Blumer notes, are "moving and not static affairs," indicate this study's relevance (Blumer, 1969, p. 50). The interactions returning students experienced influenced their actions.

This framework also helps us to understand that symbolic gestures are both explicit and implicit. When students were placed in alternative settings during reentry, for instance, school officials may have reasoned that they were giving students a chance to continue their education. Students, however, viewed such placements (and the lack of academic instruction within them) as detrimental to their educational and personal goals. These placements did not fully enable students to improve their academic skills and, in Cisco's case, discouraged students from making academic progress. Students who requested transfers or behaved poorly to be removed from

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school appeared to repeat past negative patterns, but in fact they acted rationally to extract themselves from environments that denied them the opportunity to thrive.

Speculation also played a role in decision-making. The supposition that peers and school officials viewed returning students negatively influenced how they positioned themselves during reentry. Involvement in sports, less visibility in school, and modified, shorter class schedules were ways in which students attempted to lessen unwanted attention from classmates and school staff. Students reasoned that escaping notice would keep school personnel from referencing their discipline histories, but their behavior encouraged staff to ignore their academic challenges as well.

Both fear and dissatisfaction with a repressive and irresponsive system promoted the actions of returning students. The cumulative effects of substandard schooling experiences and nonexistent ties to school officials jeopardized students' success, but they nonetheless sought to negotiate their identities as expelled students. Some immersed themselves in school activities or kept a low profile. Students who vocalized their negative opinions about their schooling conditions often receive increased sanctions, but those who sought to be undetected also experienced minimal academic support. Symbolic interaction allows us to understand students' meaning-making and actions, even when they have harmful effects, as agency within constrained opportunities. This nuanced understanding of students' perceptions, strategic actions, and negotiated identities underscores how students navigate the complex transition that is student reentry.

The Significance of This Study

Analysis and discussions on the overuse of exclusionary school discipline are valuable, as are studies that underscore the disparities this research found in the application of suspension and

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expulsion, but acknowledging and effectively addressing the educational needs of returning students requires research such as the present study. Educational research and policy initiatives continue to overlook expelled students. These initiatives have given all their attention to suspension in lieu of expulsion and its aftermath. As this study reveals, expelled students had a very positive attitude about reinstatement that conditions and a lack of support quickly dashed. Receiving school districts did not begin to address their complex needs, and several students experienced academic setbacks. Under state law, local education agencies have the ability to provide alternative educational programs for expelled students and the opportunity for reinstatement. Educational services provided at expulsion sites differ from those that traditional school settings offer to students; alternative learning environments designed to support struggling students do not typically include rich pedagogical strategies or high-quality learning opportunities. Procedures involved in reinstatement and reentry should facilitate students' abilities to overcome the academic and social barriers they face during reentry; the research reveals they utterly fail to do so. Conversations about school discipline should address the needs of such students to support high school completion and positive life outcomes.

As I noted in the introductory chapter, federal guidance on school discipline practices and procedures calls for advanced data collection and encourages states and school districts to reexamine the use of exclusionary discipline. However, this data leaves researchers less than knowledgeable about the number of expelled students who go through the reinstatement process (or are unable to reinstate) and what happens to returning students, including how many complete high school in any setting. Students like the young people in my study, who returned to their expelling district to complete high school (in mainstream schools), represent a particularly understudied group. Students' narratives reveal the complexity of the reentry process. Findings

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indicate that students encounter academic and social challenges and institutional errors. Expulsion and reinstatement procedures must be reexamined in order to prevent unnecessary burdens on students and to ensure that students are supported.

According to talking points published by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU, n.d.), "the school-to-prison pipeline is one of the most important civil rights challenges facing our nation today." The path to incarceration, according to the ACLU, includes the following "stops": failing public schools, zero tolerance and other school discipline, policing school hallways, disciplinary alternative schools, and court involvement and juvenile detention. These "stops" within the pipeline are policies and practices that push students away from classrooms and into the criminal justice system, thus disrupting students' education and further marginalizing already underserved and disadvantaged youth (ACLU, n.d.). A school discipline guidance package released in January 2014 by the U.S. Department of Education in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Justice was issued as a resource to help create a safer learning environment "without relying heavily on suspensions and expulsions" and to help schools "understand their civil rights obligations and avoid unfair discipline practices," stated U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. The disproportionate impact of exclusionary discipline on students of color demands additional research, resources, and legislative action. Research that reveals that suspensions and expulsion lead to involvement with law enforcement, drugs, and poverty makes it vital. Time out of school results in missed opportunities to learn and negatively impacts academic achievement, which has short- and long-term consequences for the affected student, her family, and her community. School-to-prison pipeline studies and advocacy reports demonstrate that the prison and educational systems are linked and have formed a problematic relationship that disproportionately impacts communities of color.

My study contributes to educational research by deepening our understanding of exclusionary discipline by focusing on a particular group of students who have experienced it. Research's neglect to date of students' experiences mirrors schools' neglect of their perspectives and needs; changing the trajectories of vulnerable students demands immediate action. Systems that support students' full and speedy integration into the school environment will support their meaningful participation in society as well.

Federal guidance should be a foundation for comprehensive action rather than a requirement districts fulfill as barely as possible. Schools should support students returning from expulsion through high school completion. Part of this process should require expelling school districts to communicate and coordinate efforts with expulsion sites to prevent institutional procedures from delaying successful reintegration; it should also include priming educators to see returning students as an opportunity and to support their efforts to make a fresh start. The state should therefore hold expelling institutions accountable for the trajectories of returning students. Education programs available to expelled students should be better resourced. The state should support intermediary services for reentering students to facilitate their reintegration through such measures as transition teams, similar to teams that assist youth returning to their communities from detention facilities. Team goals should include an educational assessment and clearly outlined educational guidelines to help align district-required courses with those offered at the alternative education sites. Reentering students should have on-site support at the schools to which they return. The expelling school district should treat each expelled student as a likely returnee and maintain communication with students and their families during the expulsion period.

A true opportunity for reintegration requires resources, time, and commitment from different stakeholders. These same stakeholders have the potential to provide returning students with a network and academic support for successful reentry. Schools must create and facilitate opportunities for all students to engage and succeed in the educational setting; students who have experienced exclusion from mainstream schools have a stronger need than their peers. It is in our best interest to provide students with the resources they need to help them succeed in school and in life. School disciplibne research must extend the conversation to account for what happens to students post-removal, especially those who transition back into their home school district. Student reentry is a difficult path. As Angel noted, "The teachers are different, they act different, they see me different, like, 'Oh, he's a bad kid.' I just get in trouble easier now 'cause I have the record. Any little thing, oh, right away, boom! I can easily fall back in trouble, get expelled . . . again. It's just harder now. It's not the same." If we continue to focus on numbers alone, we dehumanize the impact of exclusion and ignore the long-term consequences experienced by suspended and expelled students.

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