ENDANGERED SPECIES:
THE HOPE FOR STUDENTS IN MEXICAN CHICAGO

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Policy Studies with a minor in Latina/Latino Studies in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016

Urbana, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation documents the experiences of Mexican American Boys and Men (MBM) in Chicago’s “México town.” Drawing on a year-long ethnographic case study of a Mexican immigrant neighborhood (community, high school, and local church), I audio-recorded the “counterstories” (Yosso, 2006) of twenty MBM, through individual and focus group interviews as well as participant observations, who attend/attended a specific neighborhood Chicago Public High School (CPS). Through a Critical Race (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) framework, I analyze how MBM in CPS are socially criminalized, politically disenfranchised, and economically polarized through Chicago’s youth control complex (Rios, 2011). The impact of the Zero Tolerance Policy and culture are imperative to address because the implications can hinder students’ academic performance, interpersonal growth, and socio-political participation. Recommendations are based on the participants’ suggestions and reports from community organizations and are intended for policymakers, school personnel, and neighborhood stakeholders.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A mi amor, te aprecié con todo mi corazón por estar a mi lado toda mi vida.

Estoy sinceramente agradecido por mi amada e inolvidable esposa.

To my love, I greatly appreciate you with all my heart for standing by my side all of my life.

I am sincerely grateful for my beloved and unforgettable wife.

Para mi familia, gracias por todo los sacrificios que hicieron para mi

y por enseñarme los valores de amor, educación, y ganas.

To my family, thank you for all the sacrifices you did for me

and for instilling me the values of love, education, and hard work.

Para mis hermanas/os, les agradezco por enseñarme como sobrevivir.

To my siblings, I am forever indebted to all of you for educating me on how to survive.

Para La Unidad Latina, que nuestra gran vision siga “Para Siempre” Adelante!

For La Unidad Latina, may our grand vision “Always” continue to move forward!

Para mi barrio, gracias por las experiencias porque tú me hiciste quien soy hoy.

To my neighborhood, thanks for the experiences for you made me who I am today.

Para la juventud, Yo soy tú y esto es para todos ustedes!

To the youth, I am you and this is for all of you!
Without the support of my wife, family, childhood friends, fraternity brothers, mentors, former and current educators, dissertation committee members, colleagues, and my beloved community members of “México town,” this dissertation would not be possible. A special thank you to all of the participants in the project who shared their personal and painful stories with me. I am forever grateful for having all of you in my life, thankful for supporting me throughout the Ph.D. career, and for reminding me of the notion that anything is possible (Si Se Puede). From the depths of my heart, thank you for motivating me to keep the struggle alive and allowing me to serve our barrio.

To the love of my life, my wife, thank you for all of your love, patience, and overall support during this long, isolating, and overdue journey. To my familia, thank you for all the sacrifices you did for me so that I can be the “endangered species” that represents and helps lead our people to better days. To my friends, for the “ones I left behind” in our barrio, to those who are “locked up” and “cannot out,” to those who “left us” early in their lives to violence and illnesses, and to those who are “still living” in the struggle, this project is a small tribute to all of you. To La Unidad Latina, it has been my pleasure and an honor to symbolize our fraternity’s mission thus far and I will continue to carryout our lifetime goals as promised. Lastly, I am thankful to my dear friends, brothers/sisters, and mentors at the local church in “México town” for the warm welcoming. Also, I would like to thank the rest of the people, who are not explicitly mentioned here, sinceramente gracias por todo. Peace, love, and respect to all of you.

To my committee chair, Dr. Yoon Pak, I am forever appreciative for the countless hours you invested in my development including the numerous meetings held throughout the years, the constant flow of revisions, and the overall emotional support throughout this process. To my committee members, thank you Dr. Anderson, Dr. Lugo, and Dr. Stovall, without your feedback,
critical insights, and scholarly expertise, this dissertation would not be possible. I am also thankful to my initial advisors Dr. Laurence Parker and Dr. Antonia Darder for educating me on the foundations of education policy and molding me to be a radical critical educator. To all of you, thank you for being patient with my writing and assisting me in navigating the graduate pipeline. To my graduate school friends, educators, mentors, colleagues, and staff at La Casa Cultural Latina, the Department of Latina/o Studies, and the Office of Minority Student Affairs, gracias por todo and for enlightening me on the truth about nuestra gente. A special thank you to Veronica “Ronnie” Kann, Dr. Ricky Rodriguez, Dr. Alicia Rodriguez, Dr. Edna Viruell-Fuentes, and Mr. David Coyoca for serving as academic mentors throughout my career at Illinois. Given my unique experience at this predominately white institution and the history of struggle and contention from Latina/o students, I am deeply grateful for having a “home away from home” at La Casa Cultural Latina and the Department of Latina/o Studies. Thank you for instilling in me the “Si Se Puede” philosophy and a sense of hope for the future of Latina/os in the U.S. and across the globe.

I would also like to thank Pamela Greer and Hugo Campuzano from the UIUC Bridge/Transition Program for granting me the opportunity to literally attend college in the first place. I am truly indebted to my dear friend and leadership coach, Dr. Betoel Escobar, for keeping me on my academic track and providing a social support system throughout the years. Likewise, to my McNair research advisor, Dr. Lisa Marie Cacho, for guiding and training me as a young scholar and teaching assistant. I am thankful for my S.R.O.P. faculty mentor, Dr. Nilda Flores-Gonzalez, for welcoming to the UIC campus and making my experience unforgettable. Lastly, to my undergraduate colegas (colleagues) and graduate mentors, Dr. Edelmira “Patty” Garcia, Dr. Jaime Alanis, Dr. Gabriel Cortez, Dr. Lilia Fernandez, Dr. Christina “Tina” Pacione-
Zayas, Dr. Angelica Rivera, Dr. Rebecca Ginsburg, Dr. Robert Scott, Dr. James Kilgore, Dr. Pauline Lipman, and Dr. Victor Rios, and Dr. Antonio Lopez, gracias (thanks) for keeping me grounded throughout this process and for all of your insightful consejos (advice).

Any mistakes in the dissertation are my sole responsibility and not a reflection of my committee.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The description [of the title, “endangered species”] applies in a metaphorical sense, to the current status of young black [and Latino/Mexican American] males in contemporary American society. They have been miseducated by the educational system, mishandled by the criminal justice system, mislabeled by the mental health system, and mistreated by the social welfare system. All of the major institutions of American society have failed to respond… as a result, they have become – in an unenviable and unconscionable sense – rejects of our affluent society and misfits in their communities. (Gibbs, 1988, p. 1-2)

This dissertation is an ethnographic study that documents the educational experiences of Mexican Boys and Men (MBM) in a predominately Mexican immigrant neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois. A Chicago Public High School (CPS) and the local community are “analyzed as an account in which young [Mexican American] males have had a history of criminalization and punitive social control” (Rios, 2011, p. 21). The ethnography’s four methods of data collection were individual interviews, focus groups, participant observations, and review of documents for three different research sites. Grounded in my positionality as a university doctoral student and as a community “native/insider” (Villenas, 1996; Delgado, 1998), I audio-recorded the testimonies of twenty current and former male students from Tenorio High School (a pseudonym) and from the “Si Se Puede” Church (a pseudonym) in “México town” (a pseudonym) during the academic-year of 2012-2013. The purpose of the study is to archive the oral histories and lived experiences of Mexican Boys and Men (MBM) at Tenorio High School.
The study highlights the “counterstories” (Yosso, 2006) of “troubled boys” (Lopez, 2003) who “dropped-out” or were pushed-out of CPS due to the Zero Tolerance discipline policy. I also document the different forms of students’ resistance and resiliency inside and outside of school (Ek, 2008) as youth strive to achieve their “Barrio Dreams” (Davila, 2004) and “Sueños Americanos” (Cammarota, 2008) in “Mexican Chicago” (Arredondo, 2008; DeGenova, 2005).

The overall objective of the ethnography is to provide a holistic view on the lives of young Latino/Mexican American male students at THS, a traditional Chicago Public High School. I compare Mexican Boy and Men (those young Latino male students labeled as “at-risk” of “dropping out” of high school prematurely) metaphorically to an “endangered species.” This comparison literally is representative of a vulnerable population in which the livelihoods of MBM are affected by a host of complex social issues. A few of societal problems that contribute to the deterioration of young Latino males are the high rates of school failure, poverty, unemployment, and street violence/homicide. In addition, many young males of color often experience heavy policing inside and outside of schools, are more likely not to graduate from high school, and less likely to matriculate to a community college and/or a four-year university (Garcia, 2001; Noguera, 2008). For instance, those MBM who successfully excel in CPS and overcome any interactions with the Chicago Police Department (CPD), Cook County Juvenile Center (CCJC), and Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) can be compared to an “endangered species” given their circumstances and the structural obstacles that hinder their professional success and economic livelihoods. To provide a clearer macro context of the metaphor, I examine the collateral damage (short and long term effects) of the Zero Tolerance school discipline policy and the school to prison pipeline for young Mexican American males via
a case study of a specific Chicago Public High School. The school to prison pipeline (SPP) (Kaba, 2011) is also referred to by other scholars as the “youth control complex” (YCC) (Rios, 2011) and the “cradle to prison” pipeline (CP) (Children’s Defense Fund, 2007). All three of these concepts (SPP, YCC, CP) are used interchangeably throughout the document to reflect the school to prison concept.

The three general research questions are aimed to capture the subjectivity of young Mexican male students and to elucidate the macro and micro effects of the zero tolerance culture on the academic success and life trajectories of MBM. The questions seek to document the stories of young Mexican American students in order to debunk the master narrative of “the Latino threat” rhetoric that labels Mexican immigrants and youth as “dropping out of school, becoming gang members, and causing problems” (Chavez, 2008, p. 38). Moreover, the oral stories of students are used to demystify the stereotypes that label certain youth of color as “dumb, dangerous, and deviant” (Gibbs, 1988, p. 3). It is important to acknowledge that many young males of color are labeled as high school “dropouts, dangerous, and delinquents” who belong behind prison bars and/or stereotyped as “lazy welfare freeloaders” who are a drain on the economy and taxpayers. In order to discredit the master narrative that deems young Latino males as a national security threat, this study contextualizes the factors that contribute and/or influence to urban school failure and to the school to prison pipeline for Mexican Boys and Men. The primary research question examines to what extent did the Zero Tolerance discipline policy in and out of Chicago Public Schools influence the MBM “dropout or pushout” crisis? Secondly, how do and how have Mexican American male students experience schooling in light of the Zero Tolerance school discipline policy at THS? Lastly, what were the consequences of the youth control complex for Mexican American students at THS in “México town”? 
Overall, the ethnography seeks to document, contextualize, and analyze the narratives of Mexican Boys and Men at THS in Mexican Chicago. “México town” serves as a case study to analyze how Mexican Boys and Men are (mis)educated by Chicago Public Schools, mistreated by Chicago Police Department, and mishandled by the Cook County Juvenile Center/Illinois Department of Correction. All of these major institutions have directly or indirectly criminalized and disenfranchised Latino male youth in Mexican Chicago. For example, certain punitive laws and policies serve to track and exclude Boys and Men of Color (BMC) from educational opportunities and professional success in Chicago Public Schools and across American public schools (Lipman, 2003; Polakow, 2000; Rios, 2011). Ultimately, I argue that Chicago’s key institutions have a long history of criminalizing Mexican Boys and Men, via Zero Tolerance policies and punitive culture inside and outside of CPS, which directly influences the “drop-out or push-out” problem at Tenorio High School in “México town.”

In the following section of the introduction chapter, I first present a concise background of the study and then specify the scope of the problem. Thereafter, I provide the significance of the issue, an overview of the theoretical frameworks, and an introduction to the methodological approaches used to gather the narratives from individual interviews, focus groups, and participant observations. As I conclude the chapter, I note the limitations of the study, define key concepts and terms, and briefly outline the remaining chapters of the dissertation. The next section contextualizes the educational background and the outcomes of the Zero Tolerance policy for MBM in Chicago Public Schools.

The (Mis)education and Criminalization of Mexican Boys and Men

For decades now, the student “dropout” phenomenon has garnered national attention as a critical educational issue because of the numerous problems and profound implications it creates
for the future of our country. Since the student “dropout” crisis affects the nation in a myriad of ways, scholars have devoted a significant amount of efforts to address and find solutions to the “dropout” problem (Fine, 1991; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). Given that the Latina/o population in the U.S. has rapidly grown, which is especially true for the Mexican American community, there remains an urgent need to identify the needs of Mexican American students and English language learners (ELLs) in Chicago Public Schools, who typically come from low-income, immigrant, and Spanish-speaking households. Moreover, the Latino/Mexican school failure or “the student dropout problem” is imperative to address and improve because Mexican American male students who “dropout” or are pushed out of high school are not acquiring a quality education for their professional livelihoods and economic success. Many others students never matriculate to college while others graduate CPS underprepared for the rigorous coursework and curriculums of colleges and/or universities. Also, some students lack the employment skills for the demands of an information and technology-driven workforce and many other students do not learn how to be critical thinkers or “critically conscious” active citizens (Freire, 1973).

Contemporarily, many young Mexican American male students (along with other underrepresented students) continue to leave the U.S. public education system (mis)educated (Woodson, 1933). Numerous students at THS enter the global workforce underprepared, which automatically renders them to the low-skill manual labor sector. As a result, certain groups of students are polarized to the lower social class of the U.S. society due to their level of educational attainment, socio-economic class, language proficiency, or undocumented legal status. Gibbs (1988) states that “young black [and Latino] males are stereotyped by the five d’s: dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed. There is no room in this picture for
comprehension, caring, or compassion of the plight of these young black [and Brown] men” (p. 3). This is also true for young Latino (Mexican American) males. For instance, students who “dropout” of Tenorio High School involuntarily, voluntarily, or are suspended/expelled for breaking school policies are now directly and indirectly forced to endure the dire consequences of educational and social exclusion. Moreover, Mexican Boys and Men (MBM) and/or Boys and Men of Color (BMC), who are tracked into a criminal trajectory early in their lives for breaking school discipline policies, eventually are labeled, classified, and deemed as troublemakers, delinquents, and/or stigmatized as second-class citizens in U.S. public schools, government institutions, and society at large. As a direct result of their criminal background, low educational attainment level, and/or their social class (along with many other social factors), many urban Boys and Men of Color are tracked and trapped as a disenfranchised class because these boys and men are ineligible to apply to good-paying jobs, to vote in many states, to fully practice their civil liberties, and/or participate in community events or politics. Currently, society, governmental institutions, and the media (along with other entities) continue to play a crucial role in how “dropout” students are stigmatized, disenfranchised, and polarized early in their lives. These so called race-neutral policies and practices severely curtails students’ life and career trajectories, rendering them as a disposable and expendable class (Darder, 2002) and ultimately marking them as socially dead (Cacho, 2012) due to their inability to fully participate in the political economy.

Society at large has begun see the aftermath of the zero tolerance politics and policies that have created the numerous effects of the school to prison pipeline in public education systems across the nation in states like New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Texas, and California and cities such as D.C., Denver, and Chicago, among many others (Ross, 2013). On
January 8th, 2014, Arnie Duncan, the U.S. Secretary of Education, stated that “the widespread use of suspensions and expulsions has tremendous costs” such as students not supervised while suspended/expelled, lost of instruction time, and the lack of adult and peer mentorship in classrooms (Rich, 2014). In Texas alone, “more than half of Texas students had been suspended or expelled between 7th and 12th grades... and students who received more disciplinary actions against them were less likely to perform well in school” (Huffington Post, 2011). In a recent study, researchers found that even preschool kids are likely to face suspension. Even more troubling is that this is especially true for Black preschool boys. According to the U.S. Department of Education, black children represent about 18% of preschool kids but almost half of the students were suspended more than once (Hefling & Holland, 2014). In December of 2012, the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law testified to the U.S. Senate to “End the School-to-Prison Pipeline,” which exposed the “deep inequality in disciplinary practices plaguing our public schools and its damaging effects on our youth” (p. 1). In 2011, Chicago Public Schools arrested more black students than the national average. Although African Americans make up less than half of the total student population, they unfortunately comprise of 75 percent of arrests (EurPublisher, 2014). Although policymakers are slowly reacting to the depleted education system and the school to prison crisis, the overwhelming problem persists, which is that low-income students of color continue to be (mis)educated, disciplined, and pushed out of public schools disproportionately (Giroux, 2003; Reyes, 2006). In order to better understand the complexities of the “dropout/pushout crisis” and the school to prison pipeline for urban youth of color, it is imperative to examine the larger context and economic forces at work. For instance, society’s need to socially control, track, and criminalize “at-risk” students into the school to prison trajectory and/or into the low-skill employment sector needs to be scrutinized
and problematized as a significant academic, social, and economic concern. The goal of the introduction chapter is to define and contextualize the processes that young Mexican American male students undergo as they are punished and pushed-out via the Zero Tolerance culture inside and outside of Chicago Public Schools.

One of the primary objectives of the dissertation is to understand how the school to prison pipeline (SPP) (Kaba, 2011) functions, fuels, and intersects with both the youth control complex (YCC) (Rios, 2011) and the prison industrial complex (PIC) (Gilmore, 2007). All three of these conceptual frameworks (SPP, YCC, and PIC) reinforce what the Children’s Defense Fund (2007) calls “America’s Cradle to Prison Pipeline” (CPP). Tupac Shakur’s (1994) also wrote a song called from the “cradle to the grave” (CG), which is reflective of the urban school failure and mass incarceration problems today. It is important to (re)theorize and (re)frame the school to prison pipeline rhetoric because this notion is misleading and has a limited perspective of where the problem originates. The school to prison pipeline signals that the starting point of the issue is at school(s) and the ending point at prison(s), however this concept is inaccurate and not a holistic view of the root cause of the problem. The school to prison tracks does not incorporate “life after lockup” and the struggles that formerly incarcerated people endure once they re-enter their communities after serving their prison sentences (Solomon et al., 2008). The problem is embedded in the structure of an unjust educational and criminal justice systems that first targets certain people in specific segregated neighborhoods in America (historically via red-lining practices and racial covenants laws) and thereafter tracks certain students through an unequal education system which results in an uneven professional playing fields today (Kozol, 1992). In short, this means that even from birth, a child’s future success can be predicted based on the socio-economic status of the family, community where he/she resides, schools where
he/she attends, along with other social indicators and factors that contribute to their educational, professional, and economic success or failure. Furthermore, the stigma and consequences of a felony conviction follows a person until death, which infers that even when an inmate is released into society, the punishment does not end on his/hers discharge date. On the contrary, the punishment of a felony ends at their death because formerly incarcerated people continue to be punished as second-class citizens post their prison release date. For the remaining of the text, I substitute the school to prison pipeline rhetoric for more appropriate language and frameworks such as the “public assault on America’s children” (Polakow, 2000), the “youth control complex” (Rios, 2011), and/or from the “cradle to the grave” (Shakur, 1994) concept.

In the literal sense, “America’s Cradle to Prison Pipeline” (Children’s Defense Fund, 2007) or the “cradle to the grave” (Shakur, 1994) phenomenon is defined as the majority of minority “at-risk students” who are typically “raised by the streets” and tracked early in their lives in schools to work as low-skill, manual labor, factory employees, sentenced to prisons as inmates, and/or injured or dead from street, gang, drug, or police violence. In this case, it is safe to assume that the majority of children who are born, raised, and educated in a ghetto public school of Chicago will, to a certain extent, continue to be poor, (mis)educated, and economically polarized as direct result of the communities (or certain areas codes) they reside in and schools they attend. It is also critical to understand that it is extremely difficult for a poor person of color to become a successful legal professional, where he/she can easily be promoted and jump salary lanes, quickly climb the socio-economic ladder, and acquire social mobility without a quality education and/or monetary capital. In other words, a young Mexican male who can escape Chicago’s inner city ever-lasting cycle of poverty and illiteracy and is now on the college-bound pathway can be compared to the token Latina/o student, “the rose that grew from concrete”
(Tupac, 1999), the one who escaped from the “concrete jungle” (Flash, 1982; Marley, 1973; Upton, 1906), “urban survival of the fittest” (Garcia, 2011), the “vanishing Latino male” (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009), “invisible no more” (Noguera, Hurtado, & Fergus, 2012), or as an “endangered species” (Gibbs, 1988).

Although there is contemporary scholarship that addresses the student dropout problem, academic tracking (also known as differential curriculum), and disciplinary issues in urban education, there are only a few scholars who have written about the educational experiences of Mexican American students in Chicago Public Schools such as Férrandez (2002), Flores-Gonzalez (2002), Garcia (2011), Lipman (2004), Alanis (2010), Cortez (2008), and Hernandez (2002). Historians such as Arredondo (2004), DeGenova (2005), Férrandez (2012), Pérez (2012), have addressed the historiography of “Mexican Chicago,” such as the schooling, racial tensions, political activism, labor relations, and housing conditions for Mexican immigrant laborers since the beginning of the twentieth century. Another prominent scholar who wrote about Mexican American youth and gang violence in “Mexican Chicago” was Spergel (2003). It is worthy to note that none of these scholars have focused on the specific high school that this dissertation examines, leaving it as unchartered area for research and practice. It is also important to mention that the vast majority of these scholars were “outsiders” to the community they researched with the exception of Alanis (2010) and Garcia (2011) who were residents of the community they studied. As a disclaimer, my insider positionality does not guarantee that the study’s findings hold more intellectual weight or value, are more accurate, valid, or credible than the findings of other studies. As a community-based researcher, my methodological responsibility is to uphold my academic integrity by exposing my native status, intuitions, privileges, and perspectives. As a scholar, my obligation is not to be competitive but to
contribute and build upon the existing literature for MBM in Mexican Chicago in different ways, and/or to complement to other study’s findings.

**Zero Tolerance Culture Inside and Outside of Chicago Public Schools**

Since the early 1990s, there were certain laws and policies that were implemented and enforced around Schools and Communities of Color (SCC) that were often modeled after prisons (Giroux, 2009), constituting a zero tolerance culture inside and outside of Chicago Public Schools. The hyper-surveillance and over-policing of urban youth tracks Boys of Color (Rios, 2006), specifically for Mexican Boys and Men, into manual labor jobs, prison cells, and thereafter sorts them to the lower tiers of the existing racial, socio-economic, and political hierarchy. The students’ counterstories demonstrate that a web of school and public laws, policies, and politics, such as the War on Drugs laws, Zero Tolerance school discipline policy, the tough-on-crime policing, harsh sentencing laws, racial profiling, and stop-and-frisks practices create dire problems and a pathway for low-income, minority students to be tracked into Chicago’s school to prison pipeline (Kaba & Edwards, 2012; Scott & Saucedo, 2013; Yosso, 2006). Consequently, the problem lies in the governmental and school structures and the policies that systematically suspends, expels, and pushes students with behavior issues out of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and into the handcuffs of the Chicago Police Department (CPD) and later into the prison cells of Illinois Department of Correction (IDOC). As previously stated, the scope of the study focuses on the narratives, oral testimonies, or counterstories of MBM who left or were pushed out of THS due to discipline issues and examines how the zero tolerance culture influences and/or contributes to the push out problem at Chicago Public Schools in Mexican Chicago.
By building on the shoulders of contemporary scholarship that addresses the minority student “push-out” phenomenon and the criminalization of youth in U.S. urban schools, all educational stakeholders are better equipped to tackle the problem of academic underachievement and the zero tolerance culture that disrupts the process of teaching and learning (pedagogy) in the classroom. In order to analyze if the ZT policy is effective in keeping schools safe and/or if the policy is detrimental to academic achievement of students, it is essential to examine certain historical laws and policies that created the zero tolerance culture inside and outside of American public schools. Scholars demonstrate that the zero tolerance policy infringes on students’ civil rights, contradicts the American educational values and goals of a democratic society, and the policy does an inadequate job in keeping our schools and communities safe (Keheler, 2001; Skiba & Noam, 2002; Welner, 2001). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) also remind us that the educational state of Black and Latino students continues to deteriorate and the high rates of dropout, suspension, and expulsion continue to surge. A review of the historical conditions, outcomes, and social indicators are also necessary to fully understand because educational stakeholders can scrutinize the history of criminalization via policies that influenced the (mis)education and economic polarization of Black and Brown males in urban public schools (Giroux, 2001; 2003).

The Collateral Damage of School to Prison Pipeline

Drawing on the scholarship of critical race theorists (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995), there remains a need to identify the factors that influence and/or contribute to the educational failure of Mexican American students at THS in “México Town.” This research project is unique in its nature because it contributes to the existing literature and adds new explanations as to why MBM were pushed out of THS. Moreover, I document how
MBM navigate the CPS’s discipline processes as students are pushed out, suspended, or expelled from a particular public high school. I also explicate the intersections and complexities of the “dropout” phenomenon and the school to prison pipeline in “México town.” The findings, which were based on twenty individual interviews with Mexican American students who “dropped out” or were kicked out, via suspension and/or expulsion from THS, are important to document because their testimonies provide a reflection of students’ subjectivity in a hostile learning environment. The students’ stories also elucidate the ineffectiveness of the Zero Tolerance discipline policy in schools and debunk certain theoretical assumptions that blame students for school failure. Secondly, students’ shared their oral histories on how their familial, community, and school contexts influenced their schooling experiences in minor and major ways. Lastly, students expressed their experiences on the processes youth endure as they were policed, criminalized, and/or incarcerated. The participants also offered recommendations on how to improve the conditions and relationships with school officials and provided alternatives for the heavy policing in their community. Both the oral stories and recommendations provide narratives and substantive insights that can be incorporated in improving the school’s culture and climate.  

By examining the relationships of the “dropout” phenomenon and discipline practices (along with other root causes that influence certain students to leave school), school educators, administrators, and researchers can better identify the key factors that contribute to the schools’ academic failure. In order to holistically understand the current plight of MBM today, we as educators, must scrutinize certain historical, educational, socio-cultural, economic, and political factors that have influenced the educational attainment, (un)employment, crime and delinquency, and violence rates for young Latino males. This ethnographic report complements the limited scholarship that exists on why MBM are stereotyped as a Latino threat and the subjectivity of
Mexican American male students who “dropped out” or were kicked out of THS in Mexican Chicago. In the following section, I define the processes and significance of Chicago’s youth control complex and why it is imperative to target as an educational, economic, judicial, and social justice problem.

In the first stages of the school to prison track, we see that students are born into their communities (in this case, México town) before they attend their local Chicago Public School (CPS). Once students enter public elementary school and then public high school, a significant number of minority male students leave or are pushed out of Chicago Public High Schools prematurely for various reasons. When a student is suspended numerous times and then expelled from their traditional local public school, they must serve their punishment inside of school through detention, in-school suspension, community service projects, or are ultimately expelled altogether. Those students who are expelled and then redirected to attend an “alternative” or continuation public high school(s) only attend this school as a last resort to complete their high school diploma or General Equivalent Degree (GED). When schools congregate so-called “at-risk” youth together in a school or classroom, tensions are extremely high among students from different racial/ethnic groups, gang affiliation, or simply because some students reside in a rival gang territory. Although limited scholarship exists on students’ experiences in alternative high schools in Mexican Chicago, research shows that some alternatives schools struggle to graduate the majority of their students. The outcomes demonstrate that sooner or later, students who “drop out/pushed out” of their alternative school(s) is due to the school being far from home and/or school officials and rules are too strict (among other factors). Many of these students quickly leave school altogether without any professional goals, some stay at home unsupervised, others
try to find a low-skill, factory job, while many other youth resort to hanging outside in the streets in order to money in the illicit economy by selling drugs, stolen goods, or other criminal activity.

The latter phases of the school to prison pipeline describes the role of the Chicago Police Department (CPD) along with their sister institutions of Cook County Juvenile Center (CCJC), Cook County Jail (CCJ), Cook County Courthouse (CCC), and the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC). Once young minority boys and men are stopped, frisked, and arrested by CPD officers, then they are detained and processed through the juvenile center, jail, courthouse, and then redirected to Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC). Since many of these young boys and men, who are arrested, charged, and convicted are from low-income, minority families, most of these justice-involved youth are unable to finance private lawyers and resort to public defenders to represent them in court. In many preliminary hearings, public defenders are notorious for convincing young people to accept the plea bargain deal, which requires the “offender” to plea guilty in exchange for a lower sentence and an expedite trial, reinforcing the notion of “guilty until proven innocent.” I call this process the “plea bargain scam” because more often than not low-income, minority males are not provided with a fair legal counsel, are not equally represented in court, and assumes that the defendant is guilty at the forefront, which renders them more likely to suffer from harsh sentences and infringes on their due process rights (West, 2004). After the “offenders” are sorted through the cook county juvenile center, they are sent to the local jail once they turn the age of 17, and thereafter to the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) to serve the remaining of their prison sentence. It is evident that IDOC continues to be ineffective in rehabilitating or “correcting” prisoners and further hinders inmates’ ability for a successful re-entry transition by not equipping them with the necessary skills to excel in society (Austin & Hardyman, 2004; Urban Institute, 2005). Research shows that there
are high rates of recidivism in Illinois, which infers that once “offenders” are released from prison, half of them will return to the criminal justice system (Urban Institute, 2004). In order words, the results demonstrate that prisons are not preparing inmates for a successful reintegration to society, which poses numerous problems for families and communities who also suffer from collateral damage of mass incarceration (Clear, 2007). Furthermore, under the “Secure Communities” immigrant deportation program, if an individual is undocumented and convicted for a serious crime, then there is a strong possibility for deportation, regardless if the crime is a felony, minor, major, non-drug or non-violent related offence (Scott & Saucedo, 2013). Once formerly incarcerated people return to their respective communities, many of them are unable to acquire a decent paying job, marking them as dependent citizens, which directly and indirectly forces returning citizens to seek employment on the streets that can lead to recidivism and/or death as a result of the systematic forces that constraints them in their social class and geographic location.

Given that most of these urban male youth of color suffer from “symbolic criminalization,” (Rios, 2011) where certain students are sent to detention rooms in schools and excluded from public parks and spaces. As a result of criminal backgrounds and lack of education and employment skills, many of the youth are directly and indirectly forced to enter the criminal enterprise as a source of income. There is also a significant number of urban youth who are recruited to join gangs or enter the underground economy of soliciting drugs, the sale of stolen goods, or other criminal activities to earn a little money. Once youth enter the business of “hustling” drugs, time shows that many of them will be arrested, convicted, and imprisoned for breaking the law. If boys and/or men are convicted as felons, their economic opportunities, professional success, and life trajectories are drastically curtailed because felons are undesirable
employees that most likely lack formal education, are unable to exercise their right to work due to employment discrimination, and/or ineligible to vote. Even after many of these formerly incarcerated people are released, the recidivism rate continues to be high because of the lack of quality re-entry programs, resources, and services that are not available or offered to returning citizens in their respective local communities (Bahr, Armstrong, Gibbs, & Harris, 2005). The social, political, and economic reality is that many of these urban Boys and Men of Color return to prison and re-enter to the cycle of poverty, crime, unemployment, and immobility, which is why it is urgent to research and address America’s “cradle to prison” pipeline in order to find solutions and alternative for Mexican Boys and Men in “México Town.”

**An Ethnography of “México town”**

The two theoretical frameworks that guide the analysis on the criminalization of Students of Color in Chicago Public Schools are Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and Latina/o Critical Theory in education (LatCrit) (Solórzano & Delgado, 2001; Yosso et. al., 2001). Drawing from these two theories, I center and examine the lived experiences and “counterstories” of Mexican Boys and Men in Mexican Chicago (Férnandez, 2002; Yosso, 2006) who were pushed out, suspended, or expelled from a specific Chicago Public School (CPS). CRT/LatCrit are the two chosen theories that lead and “explore the ways that so-called race-neutral laws and policies perpetuate racial and/or ethnic and gender subordination” (Delgado, 2002, p. 65). Moreover, I draw on the work of Férnandez (2002) and Yosso (2006) as I place students oral stories at the center of analysis. I document the narratives of disconnected youth in order to learn from students’ “telling stories about school” (Férnandez, 2002) and to “build [a] community among those at the margins of society” (Yosso, 2006, p. 14). In the following section, I cover the history, goals, and tenets of CRT/LatCrit in education, the
importance of students’ oral histories and lived experiences, and the methodological approaches used to gather the “counterstories” of Mexican Boys and Men at Tenorio High School in “México Town.”

In order to better understand the relationships between urban school failure and the school to prison pipeline, I decided to seek the answers to the research questions previously stated as an ethnographer and use my community as the case study site for analysis. To reiterate, the primary research question examines to what extent did the Zero Tolerance discipline policy in and out of Chicago Public Schools influence the MBM “dropout or pushout” crisis? Secondly, how do and how have Mexican American male students experience schooling in light of the Zero Tolerance school discipline policy at THS? Lastly, what were the consequences of the youth control complex for Mexican American students at THS in “México Town”? In doing so, I interviewed twenty Mexican American Boys and Men who lived in a specific neighborhood and who attend/attended a particular Chicago Public High School in Chicago’s “México Town.”

During the CPS academic-year of 2012-2013, I moved back into my community in “México Town” as a doctoral student from a university in Illinois. As I (re)entered my barrio, I negotiated two major roles in getting into the field site as I completed this type of research study. On one hand, I struggled to balance the dilemmas as a native and privileged community member and on the other hand as a university researcher (Villenas, 1996). My unique positionality as an insider in my local Mexican community, the particular population studied, the various settings where the study took place, and the methodological approaches used in the project serves as an exceptional opportunity to further develop theoretical frameworks and advance qualitative methods suitable for this particular site and population. It is imperative to state that I took upon this type of project not out of convenience of my positionality and proximity to the community but out of necessity.
to identify, document, and advocate for young boys and men that face daily challenges as they navigate Chicago’s ghetto schooling system, urban landscape, and youth control complex. In essence, I did what Sandra Cisneros states, “I have gone away [to a university] to come back [to my barrio]. For those ones [family, friends, and neighbors] I left behind. For the ones who cannot out [or escape from the cracks of CPS, CCJ, and/or IDOC]” (1983, 110). As I left my neighborhood to pursue higher education for eight consecutive years, I returned to my barrio with a purpose (and my calling in life), which is to document the educational and disciplinary testimonios/cuentos (testimonies/stories) of current and former male students who attend/attended and were pushed out of THS and to improve the school’s and community’s punitive culture.

Chicago, as a global city, is chosen as the best suitable research site because the location is a unique and an important context for the Mexican American community formation, (im)migration, and historiography which differs from the experiences of Mexican Americans, Mexican immigrants, and other Latina/os in the Southwestern, Midwestern, or Eastern states. Moreover, the stories of Mexican Boys and Men in Chicago allows us, as researchers and educators, to better understand and incorporate the history of Latina/os, specifically Mexican Americans, into the racial context, discourse, and literature of the Black and White binary. Historically, we see that Mexican Americans’ legal struggle for educational equity has been a long fought battle against separate and unequal conditions, which created dire outcomes of school failure for Latina/o students contemporarily (Donato, 2007; Gonzalez, 1990; San Miguel, 1987; Valencia, 2008). As early as the 20th century, Chicago has recruited and used Mexican immigrants as a cheap labor force to work in a variety of employment opportunities such as steel mills, meat-packing industries, agriculture, railroads construction, industrial/factory work, and
service jobs (along with many other low-skill occupations) (Arrendondo, 2008; Upton, 1903). These employment opportunities paved the way for a migrant stream from Mexico and other Mexican enclaves in the Southwest to the major northern industrial city, proclaiming it as “Mexican Chicago” or the Midwest’s Mexican port of entry (Davalos, 1993; DeGeneva, 2005; Kerr, 1976). For these reasons, Chicago, as a leading model of public education and as a global immigrant city, is an important context to examine the “historiography” (Férnandez, 2012) of “second city Mexicans” (Ramirez, 2011) and to document the experiences and “counterstories” (Yosso, 2006) of CPS students inside Chicago’s “youth control complex” (Rios, 2011).

Ultimately, this dissertation serves as a report to elucidate the short and long-term effects of the zero tolerance culture that deteriorated the state of Mexican Boys and Men at Tenorio High School in “México Town.”

In this ethnographic study, the methodological approaches used were based on qualitative methods such as individual interviews, focus groups, and participant observations. As I utilized qualitative tools in the project, I was better equipped to explore and analyze the issues and factors that students struggled with while remaining in high school and the causes that influenced students to leave school. In short, the usage of qualitative practices allowed me to examine the students’ subjectivity within the community, school, and church, the unknown factors that influence students to “dropout” of school, and the social interactions that took place among stakeholders (students, families, school personnel, community members, and representatives from key institutions). In essence, the study’s findings contribute to the wealth of literature on the urban education, Latino/Chicano studies, youth development studies, and restorative practices studies. In the next section, I explain the limitations of the study and define key concepts that are consistently and interchangeably used in the dissertation.
Defining Bodies, Identity, and Spaces

Since minority male students are disproportionally overrepresented in the school dropout/push out rates, suspension and expulsion cases, and prison cells, this dissertation project solely focuses on the experiences of Mexican Boys and Men (MBM) and occasionally on Boys and Men of Color (BMoC) at THS in Mexican Chicago. Although there is a significant amount of literature on Black boys and a growing body of scholarship on Black girls, Latinas, L.G.B.T.Q. members, and students with disabilities who are also punished through the Zero Tolerance policy, school detention, suspension, and expulsions, this dissertation only highlights the educational experiences of Mexican Boys and Men. Given my positionality as a community insider, male researcher, and my research interests, the study’s sites and participants were the best suitable spaces and people to work with to capture the students’ subjectivity.

In regards to the key definitions and concepts used in the text, I summarize them into two sub-sections. The first sub-section focus on the ethnic identity of the participants, in which the participants’ self-identified as Hispanic, Mexican, Latino, Chicano, or Brown. I interchangeably use Mexican American, Mexican, and Chicano to refer to students of Mexican descent. Although some of the participants were unaware of the specific vocabulary used to identify themselves, I played a conscious role in renaming their and/or “our” identity in an effort to rewrite our own histories and our “Chicano narrative” (Rosaldo, 1983) and excluded words like “Hispanic” that have been imposed on us by the government via the U.S. census categories. Here, I am embodying a sense of political identity that pays tribute to the Latino/Chicano scholarship. However, Davalos (1993), a Mexican Chicago scholar, asserts that Mexican Americans in Chicago referred to themselves as Mexican “over Chicano” (p. 58), which forces myself to be critical in order to respect the participants’ identity preference.
In the second sub-section, I also substitute labels and hurtful words that demonize Mexican Boys and Men with caring ones that empower all youth of color. Given that many adults in schools, communities, and families (along with government institutions) often stereotype minority male youth as “at risk, dumb, thugs, gangsters, demons, savages, bandits, and/or villains” (Gibbs, 1988; Rodriguez, 1997), there remains an urgent need to substitute these hurtful and subtractive words with additive, helpful, caring, and asset-based vocabulary such as at-promise, at-potential, smart, strong, and resilient students (Rios, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). For the remaining of the text, I refer to these young male students as “at promise or at potential” youth in order to demystify the stereotypes of MBM in Chicago.

Lastly, the three terms that summarizes the populations studied are Mexican Boys and Men (MBM), Boys and Men of Color (BMOC), and School and Communities of Color (SCC). Moreover, the three major philosophical concepts used throughout the dissertation are the school to prison pipeline (SPP), and the youth control complex (YCC), and from the cradle to the grave (CGC), which refers to the relationships between America’s urban youth, public education, and collateral damage of mass incarceration that constitutes “America’s Cradle to Prison Pipeline” (Children’s Defense Fund, 2007).

**Description of Chapters**

Chapter two, “the cradle to the grave: telling counterstories about Chicago’s youth control complex,” reviews the literature that covers the conditions, outcomes, and consequences of the school to prison pipeline via the Critical Race Theory and Latina/o Critical Theory (CRT/LatCrit), which are the two frameworks that guides the analysis. I then contextualize the (mis)education of Mexican Boys and Men in the U.S. public schools through a historical overview of landmark Mexican American court cases that inherently created the educational
conditions and outcomes today. The following section summarizes the history, use, and effects of Chicago’s punitive laws and discipline policies that contribute to the deterioration of MBM in Mexican Chicago. Lastly, I provide current social indicators that showcase the plight of MBM in regards to education, poverty, crime, and violence in “Chi-Raq.”

In chapter three, I detail the methodological approaches used to record participant observations and the processes taken in order to interview participants from the community, local high school, and neighborhood church. In this section, I describe how participants were recruited, the steps and tools used to gather the information, and how I incorporated the participants’ demographics in the study. I also state the procedures taken to transcribe the interviews, code and organize the major themes, and analyze and summarize the findings. I end the chapter with a thick description of the three research sites.

In chapter four, I situate Chicago as global city and focus on the Mexican immigrant community. Based on my neighborhood observations, where I participated in local events and attended gatherings such as peace and immigrant marches, numerous recreational games, youth art galleries, town hall meetings, and silent vigils (among other activities). I also draw on my cultural intuition as an insider and the findings gathered shed light on the collateral impact of the zero tolerance culture, heavy policing practices, and violent conditions that contribute to the deterioration of youth in “Mexican Chi-Raq.”

In chapter five, I present and discuss the results from the interviews with Mexican Boys and Men from Tenorio High School. Here, I document the interviews and discuss the findings from the narratives of Mexican American students who were either punished, suspended, expelled, or “pushed/dropout” of THS. The chapter provides a space for marginalized youth, who are often generalized by statistics as dropouts or expelled students, to voice their
educational experiences inside of THS. The findings demonstrate that many MBM were labeled as a security threat, bullies, gang members, and delinquents in high school, which justified their suspensions and expulsions from THS and Chicago Public Schools. In sum, MBM were “telling stories about school” (Fernandez, 2002) on how they were miseducated in class, pushed-out from high school, and thereafter tracked from school to prison.

In chapter six, I discuss the results from the focus groups, peace circles, and prayer circles with Boys and Men of Color in a neighborhood church. In this context and with this specific population (both Mexican American and African American boys and men), I focus on “restorative circles” that were held pre, during, and post basketball, softball, boxing, and football events inside and outside the church. I document the different forms of resistance and resiliency that youth demonstrated as they were excluded from public school, parks, and other community spaces. The findings show that even though many BMC/MBM were excluded from educational and social services, youth were resilient in relation to making their own spaces available for educational, social, and recreational opportunities. The “Si Se Puede Iglesia” is an exceptional community center to research because the church complemented the local high school in various ways such provided the services that the school was lacking like an open space for sports and social events, provided formal and informal mentoring, advising, and tutoring, and referred students, who left school prematurely or were pushed out of THS, to re-enroll in GED classes.

In chapter seven, I conclude with a final word on the implications for Mexican American children in America’s public education system. I then provide students’ recommendations for educational stakeholders. I also suggest new directions for future scholarship that can help to decrease the suspension, expulsion, policing, and criminalization of Chicago’s Mexican American male youth. In order to build a better today and a greater tomorrow at THS in “México
“Town,” my greatest hope is to utilize the findings in the dissertation to address, confront, and disrupt the America’s “cradle to prison pipeline” and to provide alternative prevention and intervention programs that can deter the educational and social exclusion of MBM at Tenorio High School in Mexican Chicago.
CHAPTER 2
FROM THE “CRADLE TO THE GRAVE”:
TELLING COUNTERSTORIES ABOUT CHICAGO’S YOUTH CONTROL COMPLEX

From the cradle to the grave, life ain’t never been easy.

Living in the ghetto.

Surveillance on a [brother] every day,

Waitin' on my daddy just to take his ass away.

Now Mama always workin' tryin' to make ends meet.

So now a young [brother] bein' raised by the streets…

Did I sell my soul as a young kid?

All the things I did

Wishin' someone held me

but they never did.

I can't take it

will I make it to my older age?

Before I'm shot up or locked up in a fuckin' cage.

Lord help me, guide me, save me! (Shakur, “Cradle to the grave,” 1994)

Counterstories can build community among those at the margins of society. Because they bring a human and familiar face to empirical research, counterstories remind us that as we navigate through the educational pipeline, we don’t struggle alone. In addition, counterstories can serve as a tool of empathy among marginalized communities. A
counterstory can open new windows into the realities of those ‘faces at the bottom of society’s well’ (Bell, 1992) and address society’s margins as places of possibility and resistance (Hooks, 1990). (Yosso, 2006, p. 14)

The youth control complex is composed of material and symbolic criminalization… includes police harassment, exclusion from businesses and public recreation spaces, and the enforcement of zero-tolerance policies that lead to detention rooms, school suspensions, and incarceration. (Rios, 2011, p. 40)

Currently, the proportion of 18 to 24 year old Latina/o completing high school (76.3%) is at a historic high (Fry & Lopez, 2012), yet Latina/os remain less likely to complete high school than their non-Latina/o peers (Aud, Fox, & Ramani, 2010; Garcia, 2001), constituting the notion of the Latino/Mexican school failure (Valencia, 2011). Academic underachievement is more likely among youth from low-income, Spanish-speaking, and immigrant families (Hernandez, Denton, McCartney, & Blanchard, 2012). In addition to these academic challenges, many Latina/os students are systemically tracked into differential curriculums and specific employment sectors such as college-bound, military J.R.O.T.C. programs, vocational training courses, and/or low-skill manual labor programs. Simultaneously, other students are funneled into the school to prison track through punitive practices such as the Federal Zero Tolerance School Discipline Policy (Atkinson, 2005; Casella, 2001). Most of the students who endure the dire consequences of school punishment and criminalization in U.S. public schools are low-income, minority boys (Lipman, 2003; Zweifler & De Beers, 2002).
In the current era of meritocracy and colorblindness, it is imperative to acknowledge and address the on-going trend of urban school failure and mass incarceration for Boys and Men of Color (BMC) because young minority males disproportionality comprise the majority of high school “dropouts” and they also constitute the vast majority of the 2.3 million jail/detention/prison population (Alexander, 2012; Davis, 1998; Oboler, 2009). According to Gilborn (2008), educational policies that recreate and perpetuate structural inequities, such as the Zero Tolerance policy (ZT) and the No Child Left Behind policy (NCLB), are grounded on a youth control complex to keep minorities disenfranchised (Rios, 2011). The youth control complex (YCC) is significant to understand because the implications are devastating for the future of the city, state, and the country as a whole. The YCC impacts the nation academically, socially, politically, and economically. For instance, those MBM who suffer from high rates of suspensions at school and over-policing practices in their neighborhoods are more likely to endure the effects of leaving school prematurely, criminalized at a young age, and under-prepared for the demands of a technology and information jobs. The impact also confines the economic potential, limit youths’ civil engagement, and polarizes certain People of Color straight into the urban underclass.

The overarching theme of the literature review is to better understand how certain race-neutral laws and educational policies fuel structural inequality via a “ghetto schooling” system (Anyon, 1997; Fine, 1991) and the school to prison pipeline (Scott & Saucedo, 2013). It is also pertinent to examine how Schools and Communities of Color are modeled after prisons (Giroux, 2009) and to elucidate the collateral impact that these colorblind policies have on the academic success of Mexican American Boys and Men in Chicago Public Schools (Hernandez, 2002). Recently, researchers have begun to address the school to prison problem in schools and
communities, but only a few scholars, especially those who are insiders from the community they study, have used Chicago and a particular Chicago Public High School “as a case study in which Black and Latino [specifically Mexican American] males have had a history of criminalization and punitive social control” (Rios, 2011, p. 21). This ethnographic study fills certain literature gap by capturing the voices and oral histories of MBM who are most affected by the Zero Tolerance culture inside and outside of Chicago Public Schools in “México Town.”

The review of the literature is divided into four major sections. First, I start with a description of the theoretical frameworks, which are Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Legal Theory (LatCrit) in education. Both theories are used interchangeably to analyze the intersections of education policy, mass incarceration, race, class, gender, citizenship status, language, and the culture of Mexican American students in Chicago Public Schools. Secondly, in order to contextualize the (mis)education of Mexican Boys and Men in the U.S., I summarize the historical conditions and outcomes of a separate, unequal, and “subtractive” public schooling system (Woodson, 1933; Valencia, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). I then provide an overview of the history, use, and collateral damage of the Zero Tolerance culture and policies on MBM in Mexican Chicago. Lastly, I demonstrate via numerous social indicators (education, unemployment, crime, and violence) the plight of Mexican American males in Chicago and how they continue to be seen as “troubled boys” (Lopez, 2003), a “Latino threat” (Chavez, 2008), and/or as an “endangered species” (Gibbs, 1988). Overall, the literature review analyzes the collateral damage of “savage policies” (Kozol, 1992) from the past to the current “systematic violence and public assault on America’s children” (Polakow, 2000; Robbins, 2008) and on-going “Cradle to Prison Pipeline” (Children’s Defense Fund, 2007) that targets youth of color in Chicago’s urban communities.
Critical Race Theory and Latina/o Critical Counterstories in Education

Critical Race Theorists (CRT) and Latina/o Critical (LatCrit) legal scholars developed several fundamental themes that generalize the tenets of the CRT/LatCrit theory (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billing & Tate 1995; Parker & Roberts, 2011). The primary principle of CRT/LatCrit recognizes that racism is a pervasive and permanent part of American society. Secondly, CRT/LatCrit seeks to challenge dominant claims of objectivity, neutrality, colorblindness, and meritocracy. Another important tenet is that both theories recognize the experiential knowledge of People of Color in analyzing law and society. CRT/LatCrit in education is also interdisciplinary in nature and works toward eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression in pursuit for social justice (Delgado & Stefancic 2012; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Solórzano, 1997; Dixon & Rousseau, 2006; Stovall, 2001). As stated earlier, the policies that constitute the Chicago’s youth control complex are scrutinized through a CRT/LatCrit theoretical perspective. Through a CRT/LatCrit lens, I demonstrate how the zero tolerance policy disproportionally targets low-income, minority youth in Schools and Communities of Color. In order to contextualize the impact these colorblind policies have on “those faces at the bottom of the well” (Bell, 1992), I center the experiential knowledge and stories of Mexican Boys and Men in light of the Zero Tolerance school policy at THS (Davila & De Bradley, 2010).

Drawing on the work of LatCrit scholars, such as Alemán (2009), Elenes and Delgado, (2010), Haney-López (1997), Montoya (1999), Solórzano and Yosso (2002), and Yosso (2006), LatCrit theory aims to elucidate Latina/Latinos’ multidimensional identities by addressing the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression (Delgado, 2002). Originally derived from CRT, LatCrit is commonly known as CRT’s counterpart because they
are both rooted in the same tenets and overall vision. However, LatCrit scholars further complicate and expand CRT theoretical assumptions by incorporating other elements that are pertinent to the U.S. Latina/os, specifically for the Mexican American community, such as issues of citizenship, immigration, language, and the history of conquest post the Mexican American War of 1846-48 (Yosso, Villalpando, Delgado, & Solórzano, 2001). The goal here is not to derail from CRT history and tenets but to complement and enrich CRT scholarship by highlighting issues that are often ignored or overlooked by CRT scholars. Moreover, Valdez (2005) clarifies that LatCrit’s four functions are to produce knowledge, collectively work towards a transformation of society, to connect and relate our histories of oppression with other peoples’ struggles, and to foster a sense of community building and coalition for the greater goal of social justice.

The primary tenet of CRT/LatCrit that I draw on is the importance of experiential knowledge and lived experiences in order to shed light on the “critical counterstories” of Mexican Boys and Men in Mexican Chicago (Delgado, 1984; Fernandez, 2002; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Yamamoto (1997) and Valdez (2005) challenges CRT/LatCrit scholars to practice “praxis,” where researchers connect theory to practice and spend less time theorizing in university settings and more time on the ground working with young people in the community. In answering Yamamoto and Valdez’s call, I left academia’s ivory tower and returned to my barrio to spend more time with young people in order to best capture students’ lived experiences via an ethnographic case study. As I documented the “counterstorytelling” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) of twenty Mexican American male students who attend/attended, suspended, and/or expelled from THS, I was able to build a strong rapport and sense of community with the participants. Yosso (2006) asserts that by building theory from
the ground up and centering the students’ lived experiences, researchers are better off in exposing the systematic forces and institutional oppression at work against poor People of Color and the effects that students endure as they are socially and academically marginalized (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Lastly, counterstories are also referred to as “critical race testimonies” which serves as oral history accounts (Pérez, 2009; Barnett & Noriega, 2013) that documents and reflects the educational experiences of Mexican Boys and Men in Chicago during the 1990’s – 2010’s zero tolerance era and to expose the forgotten voices of pushed out and/or expelled students that are often silenced by schools.

The (Mis)education of Mexican Americans: An Overview of the Conditions and Outcomes

U.S. History of Racial Oppression and Educational Exclusion

In order to better understand the current U.S. education system, racial climate, and social hierarchy, it is imperative to acknowledge that the United States has a long history of oppression, such as the genocide of the Native indigenous populations, the enslavement of Africans, the conquest of Mexican territories, and the colonization of Puerto Rico (and other lands). The outcomes of these historical oppressive racial projects created the structural inequities in today’s society, where the dominant culture is privileged and those who are deemed as “Others” are marginalized. For instance, after the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), Mexican Americans were academically discriminated in schools, economically segregated in the employment sectors, and socially disenfranchised in the political arena (Griswold del Castillo, 1992) via Jim Crow laws similar to the injustices committed to the African American community in the Southern states (Alexander, 2010; Anderson, 1988). As a result of Americanization programs imposed on Mexican students during the early 20th century, “California and throughout the Southwest, school segregation facilitated the reproduction of a
cheap labor force and the marginalization of Mexican communities” (Garcia, Yosso, & Barajas, 2012, p. 2). Throughout the history of the U.S., Mexican Americans have been controlled to their social class via an unequal education and socio-economic system, which keeps Mexican workers as a loyal and docile cheap labor force (Donato, 1997).

Although the public education system in the U.S. has historically been viewed as an avenue for social mobility, it also serves, as a sorting mechanism to meet the employment demands of the global market. Drawing on the work of Darder (2002), she argues that, “schools play an important role in the process of capital accumulation as they organize student populations in an economic hierarchy” (p. 2). According to Lipman, she asserts that policies such as No Child Left Behind and Zero Tolerance are

…accountability measures that sort out and certify those who possess the knowledge and discipline identities for lower tiers of the workforce, those designated for selective academic programs and four year colleges or skilled work, and those who repeatedly fail, drop out of school, and have little future in the workforce. (2003, p. 341)

Darder and Lipman both claim that within the current educational and economic structure, those students who are labeled as “at risk” or considered to “have little future in the workforce” are more likely to be placed at the bottom of the economic ladder as a result of the quality of education that is provided to them, the schools they attend, and communities they reside in.

Gonzalez (1990), a Chicana/o historian, states that the “public education of the Mexican community via segregation, tended to reproduce its class character from one generation to the next,” (p. 20) which contemporarily reflects the economic plight and social status of the Mexican American community in urban schools across America. According to another Mexican American scholar, Donato validates that the education system “during the first half of the twentieth century
in the Southwest functioned as a means of social control, an attempt to socialize them into loyal
and disciplined workers, and the instrument by which social relations between Mexican and
white communities were reproduced” (2007, p. 12).

Throughout the 20th century, Mexican Americans were segregated to live in boxcars and
small houses in colonias, barrios, and/or ghettos, (mis)educated in separate public schools, and
polarized to the lower social-economic class. The analysis of six important Mexican American
court cases reveals that public school officials acted deliberately in their intentions to segregate
Mexican children from White Anglo students. As early as 1925, it is evident in the Romo v.
Laird court decision, that the Eighth Street School did not employ state “certified” teachers in the
Mexican school, making it unconstitutional under Arizona’s state law. In 1931, the Alvarez v.
Lemon Grove School District court case demonstrated that Mexican Americans parents resisted
in sending their children to the Mexican school or La Caballeriza’ (‘the stable’) and won the
claim that the segregated school was an “unequal” facility under the California state law. Fifteen
year later in 1946, the Mendez v. Westminster court ruling ordered that the “segregation of
‘pupils of Mexican ancestry’ was prohibited” (Strum, 2010, p. 124). About a decade later, the
Hernandez v. Texas (1954) court case declared that the school districts segregated students
without any scientific testing measures recognized in the field of education, thus making it
unconstitutional to racially segregate Mexican American students as a group. Thereafter, in the
following two court cases of Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver, Colorado (1973) and Diaz
v. San Jose Unified School District (1984), we see that the school districts maintained a “dual
school system” by combining African Americans and Mexican American students and claiming
that racial integration in schools was completed. However, this was also unconstitutional because
the ruling required that Anglo students be integrated with minority students (African Americans
and Hispanics). Although the themes previously mentioned were unique to specific court cases in the past, the overarching theme of educational exclusion and institutional racism was “persistent, pervasive, and disproportionate” for Mexican American students throughout the 20th century (Valencia, 2011). Since the first documented Chicano court case of 1925 to the present (90 years), Mexican children have historically been (mis)educated, marginalized, and excluded in U.S. public schools as a result of their race, class, gender, residence, ethnicity, language, citizenship status, and behavioral characteristics. Thus, the overview of educational court cases for Mexican Americans establishes that the same legal reasoning that was used to exclude Mexican students from equal educational opportunities during the 20th century are currently being utilized today under the guise of colorblindness and meritocracy via the Zero Tolerance policy.

**Structural Racism and Ghetto Schooling**

According to Valencia (2011), he argues that institutional racism originated from a racially segregated society that privileged the dominant culture (Whites) and marginalized racial and ethnic minorities as second-class citizens. He also explains that school failure continues to affect Chicana/o students as a result of the persistence, pervasive, and disproportional outcomes of school segregation. Valencia defines persistency by asserting that even after Mexican Americans gained access to “public schooling at the turn of the twentieth century, major problematic conditions and outcomes emerged and strenuously persisted for decades” (2008, p. 42). He describes that the pervasiveness of institutional racism has influenced our current educational plight in such way that,

wherever Chicano communities exist - from Los Angeles, California to Durham, North Carolina - school failure appears to be widespread among Chicano students’ enrollments-
especially in schools with high percentages of students of low-socioeconomic status (SES) background... Chicano academic performance- on average- is characterized by poor achievement. In sum, the pandemic branches of Chicano school failure are clearly tied to their persistent taproots. (2008, p. 42)

Valencia (2008) claims that the outcomes of persistency, pervasiveness, and disproportionality of color-blind policies and “racial projects” (Omi & Winant, 1994) created the contemporary educational conditions and outcomes of low academic achievement and matriculation to college (Valencia, 2011).

The major reasons why “our schools suck” (Alonso & Anderson, 2009) is complex but Mexican American education scholars provide a holistic overview of the specific educational conditions and outcomes that originated from a racially segregated society (San Miguel & Donato, 2010; Valencia, 2011). Valencia mentions that the following conditions such as school segregation, language suppression and cultural exclusion, school financing, teacher-student interactions/expectations, teacher certification, curriculum differentiation, and teaching force created unfair outcomes in the past and re-created the present plight of the “Chicana/o school failure” (2011). Valencia states that, “when schools are segregated the achievement level, test scores, graduation rates, enrollments in college prep courses, and the matriculation to college decreases for students of color, especially for Chicana/o students” (2008, p. 4). The educational outcomes for Mexican American students are among low-academic achievement, high rates of grade retention, poor school holding power (unable to hold students in school), low matriculation rates to college, impact of high-stake testing, and school stress (Valencia, 2011). Lawrence (1987) states, weather it is conscious or unconscious racism, the politics, policies, and processes of racial and school segregation are still in place today, but are not carried out in the same
manner as they once did during the enslavement or Jim Crow era. As educators, we must draw clear connections on how certain historical racial projects (Omi & Winant, 1994) created the current education system that privileges those in power (Whites) and marginalizes those who are underrepresented (Others). In order to prevent the further (mis)education of students, Lipman (2003) urges educators to critique “the role of education policies in the productions of inequality and racial oppression and the reproduction of a highly stratified, economically polarized labor force” (p. 331).

**Housing, Labor, and School Segregation in Chicago**

Although the majority of the Mexican community resided in the Southwestern states like California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado during the 19th and 20th centuries, many other Mexican nationals and U.S. citizens migrated further north to communities in Chicago and across the Midwest in search of better employment and educational opportunities. Mexican immigration/migration to Chicago, Illinois has been long-standing dating more than a century ago (Arrendondo, 2008). During Chicago’s industrial movement, Mexican nationals were recruited as a cheap labor force where U.S. employers and corporations sought out Mexicans workers, along with Caucasian immigrants (Upton, 1906), for various employment opportunities in industries such as meat packing, agriculture, steel mills, factory line jobs, or service sector (Innis-Jiménez, 2013). During the early half of the 20th century, Mexicans in Chicago comprised of a small population, however during and after the Bracero program (1942 to 1964), there was a huge influx of Mexican workers that migrated to small towns in the Midwest. The mass migration of Mexican nationals to the northern states forced the U.S. government to implement and enforce “Operation Wetback” in 1954, which was intended to curtail the number of Mexicans in the country via repatriation practices. “Operation Wetback” was the second mass
deportation of Mexican people in the history of the United States. In Chicago, Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans first resided in the near west side community, where the University of Illinois at Chicago currently is located (southwest of downtown). In the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, Mexican American residents were then displaced from the near west side to the Pilsen community. Decades thereafter, the Mexican community exponentially expanded outward to “México Town” and the surrounding Chicago land suburbs. Once minority populations entered the city of Chicago in large numbers during the 1960’s and 1970’s, Whites (Bohemian, Polish, Italian, and German immigrants) who resided in Pilsen, “México Town,” and North Lawndale quickly fled the city to the suburbs, constituting the notion of the White flight and the educational and social abandonment of Chicago.

As a direct result of Caucasians fleeing Chicago Public Schools, local communities, and bungalow houses, the incoming or remaining residents suffered from the effects of economic deprivation, an intellectual brain drain, and socio-political instability. According to Férnandez (2012), a Mexican Chicago historian, states that White residents fled “México town” and the population was reduced from 70% during the 1960’s to Whites making-up less than 30% during the 1970’s, a significant decline. Furthermore, Magallon (2010) claims that White flight from “México Town” dramatically impacted the stability of the neighborhood where the white population decreased from 99% to 9% over a two-year period. When White residents moved out from the inner city communities of Chicago to the neighboring suburbs, they also removed their social, cultural, and monetary capital, leaving the incoming low-income minorities with a failing school system and an abandoned inner city such as decaying houses, public building structures, and community centers. Moreover, public schools and parks along with local businesses became sites of disinvestment. Also, the lack of governmental resources, services, and local professional
role models were a few key factors that contributed to the educational, economical, and social
deterioration of the community and its residents. For example, according to Trueba (1998), the
growth of Latina/o student enrollment in Illinois public schools grew from 78,100 in 1970 to
218,658 in 1994, a 179-percentage increase over a span of 34 years. Even after sixty years since
the white flight era, minority communities, like “México Town” and North Lawndale, still suffer
from the dire consequences of the White flight and unequal distribution of school finances,
resources, and services that inherently paved the way for Chicago’s “ghetto schooling” system
(Anyon, 1998). The next sub-section of the literature review examines the history of the Zero
Tolerance policy, the punitive culture inside and outside of CPS, and the overall impact the ZT
policy has on Mexican Boys and Men.

The Collateral Damage of the Zero Tolerance Culture

The History of the Zero Tolerance Policy in Chicago Public Schools

   Historically, the primary laws that influenced the development of the Zero Tolerance
discipline policy in public schools was motivated by the culture of poverty policy, the war on
drugs initiatives, and the fear of violence in schools. The national discourse of poverty, drugs,
and violence in urban America gained a significant momentum during the 1980s and early
1990s. For example, in 1987 the Illinois Juvenile Court Act allowed judges to charge minors as
adults in criminal court rather than the juvenile court. In the following years, there were three
laws that paved the way for the Zero Tolerance policy, which started with the Gun-Free School
Zones Act of 1990, the Safe School Act of 1994, and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and
Communities Act of 1994. In 1994, the Zero Tolerance discipline policy was enforced, which
forced any state receiving Elementary and Secondary Education Act funds must have a law
requiring a minimum of a one-year expulsion from school for possession of drugs, firearm, or
weapon (Zweifler & De Beers, 2002, pp. 3). The purpose of the ZT policy was considered logical because the policy punishes, through a detention, suspension, and expulsions practices, students who bring weapons and/or drugs to school. Since the inception of the ZT policy in 1994 to its termination in 2012, Chicago Public Schools has enforced “punitive and judicial forms of discipline” (Casella, 2003, pp. 874) to control and curtail the rates of violence and drug abuse in schools. In 2012, CPS abandoned the Zero Tolerance policy and adopted a restorative practices model to provide an alternative method to discipline students and to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions in schools. Overall, this sub-section provides an overview of the history of the zero tolerance policy in U.S. public schools. In the following segment, I cover the effects of punitive discipline culture on young males of color inside and outside of Chicago Public Schools.

The Culture of Zero Tolerance Outside of Chicago Public Schools

In addition the laws that regulate students’ behavior inside the walls of Chicago Public Schools, there are other policies that reinforce the Zero Tolerance culture outside CPS, mainly by the Chicago Police Department. For instance, the 1992 Chicago Gang Congregation Ordinance allowed Chicago police officers to stop and frisk any group of three people or more who “looked” suspicious. This public policy allowed beat cops to use their discretion to identify, via racial profiling and stop-and-search practices, those who fit the description of a suspect that has possession of any weapons, drugs, or contraband in or around school grounds. In 1999, the stop and frisk law was ruled unconstitutional and was overturned by the U. S. Supreme Court in the landmark court case of the City of Chicago v. Morales. Since the early 1990s, Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Police Department continue to collaborate with each other to punish and criminalize “disruptive and delinquent” students. The Zero Tolerance policy and the stop-
and-frisk law are proclaimed as race-neutral. However, these laws and policies disproportionately impact the life trajectories of many Black and Brown male youth in public schools and urban communities. In addition, CPD has boosted its police presence inside of CPS with mini-jail rooms in THS for students who break the law inside school grounds. Outside of CPS, police officers on bikes and vehicles that patrol the inner city blocks and policemen in helicopters are used to overlook the community. Lastly, CPD also dramatically increased the number of Police Observation Devices (POD) to monitor certain communities of color. In “México town” alone, the alderman (and his continuants) wasted $740,000 on 37 POD cameras in 2011. Researchers show that the POD cameras have been ineffective in keeping crime and violence down due to the low number of police personnel that oversee the city’s surveillance system. Consequently, the stop and frisk practices, the mini jails in CPS, and the over-policing and heavy-surveillance of Black and Brown communities has played a significant role in the creation of a Zero Tolerance culture inside and outside of Chicago Public Schools.

The Impact of the Zero Tolerance Culture on the Academic Outcomes for Mexican Boys and Men

The most vulnerable students who struggles to cope with the effects of Zero Tolerance in public schools are low-income, minority boys (Reyes, 2006). The outcomes of students who become victims of the Zero Tolerance policy are unfortunate because many students are tracked into the criminal justice system early in their lives. According to the Advancement Project and the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University (2000), the report examined the impact of zero tolerance policy and concluded that the policy “is unfair, is contrary to developmental needs of children, denies children equal opportunities, and often results in the criminalization of children” (p. 5). Lipman (2004) states that, “while these youth are drilled in rules and authorities,
thousands of others like them are pushed out of school through Zero Tolerance discipline policies” (p. 59). As a result, many youth of color are socially labeled as “rejects of our affluent society and misfits in their communities” (Gibbs, 1988, pp. 2). The ZT policy also infringes on students’ civil rights and provides unequal opportunities to public education. Atkinson (2005) and Lipman (2004) both claim that the Zero Tolerance policy effectively tracks certain students in public schools to fill the low-skill jobs and others to occupy prison cells. Despite the abandonment of the Zero Tolerance policy in 2012 by CPS, the Zero Tolerance culture is still in practice under the guise of *dejure*, where the vocabulary of the zero tolerance is no longer in use in the student code of conduct book but by *de facto* the actual practices of detention, suspension, and expulsion are still being enforced in CPS. In theory, the Zero Tolerance policy was intended to keep schools safe, however, in practice the policy was ineffective in curtailing drugs and violence and instead created an unhealthy school climate (Klein, 2014). The goal of this sub-section is to elucidate the racial, class, and gender disparities that are due to the zero tolerance policy and to highlight the policy’s collateral damage on MBM in regards to their educational, social, political, and economical failures.

**Education.** The educational problems that derive from the Zero Tolerance policy are devastating because it creates a host of issues for students in public schools. For instance, Arnie Duncan, the federal secretary of education, stated that those students who are suspended or expelled from school are often unsupervised at home. They also lose instruction time and limits peer mentorship at school. Students who are referred to detention rooms and/or sent home are often given watered-down homework. It is also important to mention that the majority of teachers in CPS do not reside in the communities where they work and typically are White women who teach at predominately minority schools. As a result, there is a strong cultural and
social disconnect between the teachers/administrators and students. Moreover, when teachers or school officials enforce the ZT policy in the classroom, students hold strong resentments towards the teachers that punished them. After students serve their punishment, many students further disengage themselves from school life because of the emotions they feel towards the school official and/or lose hope altogether because they are far behind academically. In addition to the cultural differences among teachers and students, many teachers are insensitive to students’ living conditions, academic needs, and social and emotional concerns. For instance, students who act out in school could be due to a learning disability, language barriers, death of a friend, and/or the course content is culturally irrelevant to the students’ racial/ethnic background. When this occurs, the pedagogical success of the instruction is at risk because the teacher-student relationship is broken. Even when students are pushed out of school altogether and referred to an alternative school to complete their high school requirements, the primary school does a poor job in verifying that the student actually enrolled in the alternative school. Students who are labeled as troublemakers, gang members, or a security threat are quickly removed from school and are referred to the other local high schools. The primary school then passes the “disruptive” student onto the next institution and cleans their hands from students who are a burden to the schools’ testing standards, attendance and graduation records, and overall climate. Thus, it is in the best interest of the school to “pushout” these “troubled boys” so the school can retrieve more NCLB funds for meeting or exceeding the annual yearly progress standards. In essence, schools like THS typically drop “dead weight” students in order to maximize on governmental and state education funds. According to two Chicago Sun Times newspaper reporters, THS was under investigation in 2015 for miscoding, altering, or misclassifying the number of “dropout” students
to “transfer” students in order to minimize the damage of the zero tolerance culture and climate (Fitzpatrick and Spielman, 2015).

**Social.** The community formation of the Mexican American enclave in Chicago has been well documented because Mexican community appeared in Chicago since the turn of the 20th century. Many of them come from Spanish speaking homes and live in hyper-segregated communities, while the majority of them are classified as low-income. Mexican Americans are commonly known as Roman Catholics with traditionally conservative values and beliefs. According to Magallon (2010), he states that a significant number of Mexican Americans in Chicago have reached success in social mobility and moved out of the ghetto/barrio. However, a 2013 report from “Develop Chicago,” a community organization, shows otherwise, claiming that “only 24 percent of residents hold a high diploma, 10 percent have some college experience… only five percent of “México town” residents hold a bachelor degree and less than 1 percent hold an advanced degree” (p. 6). The reality is that the social structure and school conditions continue to contribute to the current status of Mexican Americans in Chicago, which remains as an undereducated, underserved, and underclass population.

**Political.** Students who are “pushed out” of school prematurely early in their lives also suffer from political discrimination in society. It is worthy to note that about half of the populations at THS leave school underprepared and as direct result many of them are treated as second-class citizens. Due to the legal status and criminal backgrounds of some MBM, the combination of these laws and policies severely curtails the human potential of citizens and undocumented people. Those students who are excluded from school are less likely to contribute to the political voting power of Latina/os. Also, it is commonly perceived that Latina/os are a “sleeping giant” because of their increase in population growth. Latina/os in general have
become the largest minority group, surpassing African Americans. However, Latina/os continue to lag behind their counterparts in exercising their political power in the voting polls because they have a limited voting force. The reality is that the vast majority of Mexican Americans citizens, who make up the majority of Latina/os in the U.S., are not a significant voting force due to their lack of understanding and participation of U.S democratic electoral system, their undocumented status, language and cultural barriers, along with other issues pertinent to Latina/os. According to Noguera (2008), he warns America “what will become of children like Miguel Fernández,” who represents the undocumented population that are unable to vote, access college, or secure employment. Moreover, the Mexican American voting force further diminishes as people are convicted as criminals/felons. For those who are undocumented, are arrested, and detained, there is a strong probability that they will be deported if the Immigration Custom and Enforcement (ICE) agency enforces the deportation, repatriation, or removal policy. For citizens with convictions, a significant number of them are unable to vote in major elections (varies by state), which ultimately inhibits civil engagement because their ineligibility to partake in the electoral voting process and local community politics.

**Economical.** The economical consequences of school failure for MBM could pose a myriad of economic concerns for the country. Since certain students in schools are labeled and classified as undereducated “dropouts,” undocumented “dreamers,” juvenile “delinquents,” or “unproductive” residents, then the country as a whole will suffer because in most cases, those same youth will become dependents of the state as public school students, welfare recipients, inmates of criminal justice system, patients of the medical care, and/or clients of social services agencies. In other words, if people are not employees in the state of Illinois, then most likely they will be living off the state’s taxpayers. In order to increase revenue amongst all taxpayers for the
betterment of the city, state, and country, it is important and necessary to keep people educated and employed at all times. Unfortunately, since many of the youth suffer from lack of economic opportunities in their local communities, many young people resort to the criminal enterprise as an alternative source of income. If this trend persists, then America could lose a whole generation of taxpayers, potential professionals, and engaged civil citizens. Overall, the history of social exclusion, urban school failure, mass incarceration, and the economic polarization of the Mexican Americans ultimately impact the livelihoods of Mexican Boys and Men and all U.S. citizens.

The notion of losing an entire population to economic deprivation, political disenfranchisement, and illiteracy poses significant consequences for the nation because there are several financial problems in relation to poverty, (mis)education, and mass incarceration. For instance, stereotypes, misperceptions, and misunderstanding will arise once the social inequities reappear in major sectors of the political economy such as why are most poor, People of Color are employed in blue-collar, low-skill, service sector jobs or are incarcerated? Simultaneously, why do many Caucasians remain at the top of the hierarchy as lawyers, doctors, white-collar professionals, and prison guards? The blatant inequalities among different racial and ethnic groups could pose social and economical problems in society such as the advancement of economic polarization of poor People of Color. Donato (2007) reminds us that under the current education system, the social class of Mexicans will continue to recreate itself for the next generations to follow. If this trend persists, then we could continue to witness the perpetuation of the historical patterns of inequities and the further widening of the achievement and income gap for minority populations.
Moreover, the school to prison track is critical to critique because this educational track literally converts students in schools into inmate workers and a cheap labor force in jails and prisons, constituting the “prison industrial complex” (Gilmore, 2007). Both the youth control complex (YCC) and the prison industrial complex (PIC) are intertwined because the hyper-surveillance, over-policing, and social control of certain communities of color results in the expansions of prisons and heavy recruitment of new prisoners. Under the PIC theory, Gilmore (2007) defines incarcerated people as a cheap labor force for private correctional facilities to profit from the building of prisons, to the management of the actual prison, and to the specific industries inside the prisons that increase income for prison’s stockholders such as the Corrections Corporation of America. The race-neutral policies also become a sorting mechanism to regulate, track, and “push-out” students into the streets, undesirable low-skill jobs, and/or the criminal justice system. Thus, it is important to critique the effects of the school to prison pipeline via the Zero Tolerance discipline policy and its connection to the penal system in the U.S. because it helps educators and scholars understand the phenomenon of how students are “pushed-out,” disenfranchised in public schools and polarized in society’s socio-economic hierarchy.

Chi-Raq’s Social Indicators: The Plight of Mexican Boys and Men

Even after sixty years since the federal landmark court case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, where school segregation in the U.S. was outlawed in 1954, Schools and Communities of Color in Chicago continue to suffer from hyper-segregated public schools. Under the current capitalist society, neoliberal agenda, and the deterioration of public institutions, People of Color have been seen and treated as disposable, expandable, and deemed as unworthy of a quality public education. This sub section of the literature reviews how Chicago
school policy is intentionally perpetuating the historical patterns of school segregation, educational inequality, and a dual-school system that privileges those in power (Whites) and stigmatizes youth of color as “menaces to society.” Overall, this segment of the literature reviews draws on the scholarship of Hoston’s “Chi-raq: Killinois” (2014) to showcase the austerity of the plight for Mexican Boys and Men in regards to their educational attainment, unemployment level, arrests rates, and health-related issues in CPS and Mexican Chicago.

**Education, Discipline, and Recreation**

Within Chicago’s public education system, there are several factors that influence students to leave high school prematurely. In this sub-section, I cover three key issues that contribute to the academic failure and social deterioration of Mexican American Boys and Men in Chicago Public Schools. In Hernandez’s (2002) dissertation, she examines the educational conditions and outcomes for Mexican American students and incorporates the graduation rates in the U.S and the dropout rates Chicago Public Schools during the 1990s. Her findings show that in 1999 Mexican American students in the U.S. were by far the least likely to graduate from high school and least likely to earn a Bachelor degree in comparison to their other Latina/o peers.

Hernandez’ (2002) also documents the dropout rate for Hispanic students in CPS over a 9-year period, which report a slight decrease of dropouts starting from 45% in 1989 to 42% in 1999 (Hernandez, 2002, pg. 271-272). Contemporarily, Hoston’s (2014) research also displays the “dropout” rate among Hispanic high school students in CPS, which was 47% in 2007 and decreased to 35% in 2012. Overall, CPS continues to make academic progress by decreasing the number of “dropouts.” Despite this accomplishment, the “push-out” problem remains an issue in THS. For instance, in 2012, the number of “México Town” residents who are 25 years and over who do not have a high school diploma or equivalency was 50.7%, 27.2% for high school
graduates, 5.8% for bachelor graduates, and about 1% earned a post-bachelor degree (American Community Survey Estimates, 2008-2012, U.S. Census). Although THS cannot be responsible for the total population without a high school degree in the community, they ought be held accountable because THS is the public high school that enrolls that majority of the local students.

Moreover, Friedman’s (2007) case study report compares three Chicago Public High Schools, which are Walter Payton, Northside College Prep, and Tenorio High School. She highlights four key categories such as the students’ demographics, the attendance and graduation rates, meeting or exceeding standards in three core subjects, and the average scores of Academic Placement (AP) exams at each school. Freidman’s work demonstrates the “savage inequalities” (Kozol, 1992), unequal distribution of resources, and academic disparities among the two selective-enrollments elite schools and the traditional non-selective enrollment Tenorio High School. The findings were so “pervasive, persistent, and disproportionate” (Valencia, 2011) that it is impossible to hide the inequities and disparities at Tenorio High School (Schools, 2005; Education 2005 quoted in Friedman, 2007, p. 147). According to the 2013-2014 Chicago Public High School directory, the graduation rate for Tenorio High School was a dismal 47.6%, where more than half of the students left school (dropped or pushed out) before completing their high school degree. Only 38.9% of the 47.6% enrolled in college, which is about one-third of the graduated class pursued higher education.

In addition to the academic disparities across Chicago Public High Schools, Lipman (2003) argues that Chicago school policy is intentionally regulating African American and Latino students through the zero tolerance policy, which is a crucial factor that influences students to leave high school prematurely. According to Kaba and Edwards (2012), CPS has also become a gateway for students to be funneled through the school to prison pipeline. For instance,
a study by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2000) demonstrates the student demographics in CPS and the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions for African American and Latina/o students during the 1990s. The report claims that in 1993-94 there were 10 expulsions and in 1997-98 it dramatically increased to 571 for a total of 857 expulsions over a five-year period. Also, over 60% of African American and about 30% of Latino students were suspended and expelled in Chicago Public School (Keleher, 2000, p. 8).

The third factor that contributes to the academic plight for Mexican Boys and Men in Chicago Public Schools is the lack of green space for recreational activities. Within the past decade, CPS has continuously reduced the distribution of resources for the arts, where many students are forced to find art and sports activities outside the local community. “México town” is “one of Chicago’s two neighborhood most in need of open park space” (Erbentraut, 2014), which infers that if residents want to exercise or seek recreational activities, then they need to go outside their community to access those healthy spaces. It is important to acknowledge that the limited recreational resources and lack of green space that were offered to students at THS and residents in “México town” helps us understand why youth leave school prematurely and engage in negative alternatives such as joining gangs, selling drugs, and/or committing violent acts. Spergel argues in “Reducing Youth Gang Violence,” the importance and the need of “access to local, social, and educational facilities… for targeted youth as a means of reducing gang violence as well as involving residents in other positive activities” (2003, p. 80). Spergel (1995) asserts that if there is no space in school or in the community for young people to play at, then youth will resort to playing in the streets, alleys, or at other parks outside their neighborhood, often in dangerous rival gang territories. This sub-section of the literature review summarizes the educational attainment level in Chicago Public Schools, the discipline culture inside and outside
of Tenorio High School, and the lack of recreational resources in “México town” for Mexican Boys and Men.

**Structural Poverty, Unemployment, and Employment Discrimination**

The poverty, unemployment, and underemployment rates in Chicago are extremely high for Communities of Color, especially in the African American neighborhood in the south and west side of Chicago. In 2012, Illinois ranked in the top ten states for unemployment for teens (Lait, 2014). The Chicago Reporter also found that Chicago’s south side is “the nation’s runner-up for highest unemployment, where only 4 percent of black male teens from low-income households in Chicago were employed in 2009.” Moreover, the poverty and unemployment rates for Latina/os are also very high. The unemployment rate for “México Town” is at 15.8% (American Community Survey Estimates, 2012, U.S. Census). Many MBM also endure the effects of employment discrimination, where formerly incarcerated youth are forced to check the “convict” box on job applications. Other people with criminal backgrounds are banned from specific occupations due to safety concerns at the workplace, such as hiring people with violent convictions. Lastly, people who are convicted of a felony are unable to utilize public benefits such as public housing vouchers or food stamps for groceries. Overall, certain institutional laws and policies directly and indirectly forces specific individuals to seek employment in other sectors of the economy, which includes the solicitation of drugs or stolen good in urban streets.

**Delinquency, Crime, and Gangs**

Since the late 1980s, the Chicago Police Department and Chicago Public Schools have enforced laws and policies such as the Safe School Zone Act and Zero Tolerance policy in schools to justify the presence of having mini-jails in high schools, over-policing of certain communities, and hyper-surveillance inside and outside of schools. According to CPD’s records,
there are four neighborhoods in Chicago that rank as the highest areas for arrest records, which are located in predominately African American and Latina/o neighborhoods (Kaba, 2011). The Chicago Reporter newspaper claims that some city blocks can cost up to a total of a million dollars on police personnel and security equipment, coining the term the “million dollar blocks,” which reflects the amount of money that is spent to police one inner city block or “cell block” in Chicago (Caputo, 2013). Schools officials and police officers are often the key players in exacerbating the situation because they ultimately have the discretion to enforce either a severe or light punishment to youth who break school rules or criminal laws. In some cases, racial profiling exacerbates the situation and the consequences of the infractions could be more severe for certain “at-risk” youth of color than their White counterparts. In addition, certain “endangered species,” Boys and Men of Color those who fit the police’s description, often suffer from various forms of micro aggressions such as police harassment by the Chicago Police officers. These different forms of hyper-surveillance, whether from beat cops in cars, on bikes, helicopters, and/or notorious street cameras (PODs), serve as material and symbolic criminalization to socially control Schools and Communities of Color (SCC) (Jackson & Moore, 2006; Rios, 2011). It is also important to acknowledge that this dire phenomenon of youth violence, crime, and delinquency is a socially engineered conflict and is not due to pathological youth but as a result of structural violence from the state to the people. Critical scholars such as Yosso (2006), Solórzano & Bernal (2001), and Fernández (2002) advocate for vulnerable communities, families, and students that are victims of an unjust and unequal society and hold schools and governmental institutions responsible for the inequities in our urban schools and in our socially engineered ghettos. According to a report by Kaba and Edwards (2012), they document how the Chicago Police Department’s presence and practices in Chicago Public
Schools serve as gatekeepers that track students into the school to prison pipeline. According to the Chicago Police Department, the number of youth (17 and under) arrested in these two adjacent districts of Chicago was 3,489 in 2010, which was about ten arrests per day. Moreover, Kaba’s “snapt shot” of the arrests on school grounds was a total 388 for both districts, is significant to incorporate because the report documents how youth are heavily policed in these two neighboring communities. The hyper criminalization, via police practices, is another leading factor that contributes to the disproportionate number of suspension, expulsion, and high rates of arrests in “México Town” and North Lawndale (2011).

When the War on Drugs went into effect during the 1980s, so did the expansion of certain institutions that functioned as key players in the school to prison pipeline and the prison industrial complex. The criminal justice system is critical to examine because it captures the processes that Boys and Men of Color undergo as they are arrested, detained, and/or incarcerated (Meiners & Reyes, 2008). For instance, the cook county jail, cook county courthouse, and Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) are notorious for the high-profile criminals that enter through the revolving doors of the cook county jail, where both the courthouse and county jail are located. In 2008, the New York Times reported that the “Cook County Jail has a long history of poor conditions” (Davey). The cook county jail is massive 96-acre facility, the largest in the world and consistently remains at capacity. Researchers have demonstrated the impact of harsh, unhealthy, and overcrowding conditions that men and women endure as they are processed and criminalized in “Chicago’s criminal courthouse” (Bogira, 2005). Moreover, formerly incarcerated people also experience the stark reality about recidivism rates and poor quality re-entry programs (West, 2014). Currently, America’s incarceration rate is well over 2.3 million prison population, more than any other country. Thus, the prison boom in Illinois reflects the
tough-on-crime hysteria that occurred during the early 1980s that paved the way for the school to prison pipeline and mass incarceration thereafter. For example, since 1960 to 2001, there were 36 prisons built in Illinois (Scott & Saucedo, 2013). In addition, the incarceration rates for adults in Illinois exponential grew from 589 in 1984 to 11,503 in 2001, which clearly displays the expansion of the criminal justice system and outright recruitment of new prisoners (Griset, 1997, 247).

As a direct result of school failure, many of the Mexican American youth are unable to access job opportunities due to a lack of a high school diploma and vocational training skills. Due to various employment discrimination and exclusion practices, many youth of color are forced to make money in the underground economy such as the solicitation of drugs, stolen goods, or other criminal activity. An outcome that derives from segregated communities is the evolvement of rival gangs who fight over gang turfs, drug sales, or conflicting beliefs. According to the Chicago Crime Commission Gang book (2012), Chicago-based gangs are the primary reason for delinquency and crime. Hoston (2014) states that from 2007 to 2012, the Chicago Police Department arrested a total of 225,193 gang members in five years.

Moreover, “México Town” is also notoriously known as a drug distribution community, where a person can become involved in the illicit market and have easy access to drugs. In addition to the reality of unemployment, Mexican Chicago is often stigmatized as a dangerous place and as a “hub for Mexican drug cartels’ distribution networks” (Horwitz, 2012). This criminal underground economy is a lucrative source of revenue that could appeal to disenfranchised young men of color who resort to criminal activity as a source of income. For instance, the Chicago Police Department (along with other state and local police officials) have convicted nearly 100 gang members from “México Town” for drug trafficking and firearm
charges, over a eight year period (Enews Park Forest, 2014). Alanís’s work on “Gangs are us” informs us that inner city youth are more likely to grow up in gangs because of lack of role models and positive alternatives (1999). Clearly, youth who live in the ghetto are more likely to join gangs than sports teams. Moreover, many urban youth are often stereotyped as “thugs, menaces to society, and troublemakers” inside and outside of schools, which also influences youth to internalize these negative labels and misbehave inside and out of school. Given that there are less than six percent of residents with a bachelor degree in “México Town,” the lack of professional mentors and role models in neighborhood also influences youth to seek guidance from other role models such as gang leaders and drug dealers. The point here is to show how crime, drugs, and gangs intersect in complex ways and how these macro and micro forces contribute to the educational and socio-economic failure of MBM.

Health, Homicide, and Violence

The last social indicators that exacerbate the deterioration of MBM are issues related to health such as diseases, premature deaths, and environmental violence. According a report by a local grassroots organization, “Justice for All,” the study stated that the “México town” community was affected by environmental toxic pollution and a severe lack of green space, which directly contributed to the extremely high rates of asthma, diabetes, and obesity. A report by Harvard University (2000) also confirmed that 41 premature deaths were due to the environmental effects of the two coal plants in the community that were closed down in 2012 by local residents and the “Justice for All” organization. In regards to the asthma crisis, Chicago is ranked as twice the national asthma mortality rate. For diabetes, “México Town” has a one and half more times higher than the Chicago rate and twice as much as the rate of the U.S. In the U.S. the national average for obesity between the ages of two and five is about ten percent. In
Chicago, the average is 22% for ages between three and seven year-olds, marking the city more than twice as obese than the national average. To sum up, the point here is that the environmental racism, such the health effects of the two coal plans, the massive toxic pollution in the soil, and the lack of green space in “México Town” all contribute to the deterioration of MBM in regards to living unhealthy lives, inability to stop the spread of preventable diseases, and limits recreational activities in the community.

Youth in Chicago suffer greatly from major societal issues such as heavily surveillance and harsh disciplinary measures used by CPS and CPD. Youth also experience a great deal of violence early in their lives. For example, from 2001 to 2012, there were a total of 6,094 murders in Chicago (Hoston, 2014). In the figure below, the RedEye newspaper shows a vivid and alarming geographical map of the number of Chicago homicides that were reported from 2007 to 2012. In addition, the Chicago Reporter documented a total of “1,118 people younger than age of 25 were killed between January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2012” (Loury, 2013). According to Caputo (2014)

Chicago has a homicide rate more than double those of New York City and Los Angeles. In Chicago, more than 530 people under the age of 21 have been killed since 2008 and many more have been shot or have otherwise suffered violence—often at the hands of their peers and particularly in the city’s African-American and Latino communities.

Nearly 80 percent of youth homicides occurred in 22 black or Latino communities. In May of 2013, Chicago regained the national attention as the “murder capital of the country,” where “more youth people are killed in Chicago than any other American city” (Lydersen & Ortiz, 2012). Chicago was proclaimed as “Chi-Raq” because of its high rates of homicides in comparison to the number of deaths in the Iraq War. In “México Town” alone, the RedEye
newspaper reported that there were 136 homicides from 2006 to 2015 with 13 homicides in 2014, which was the fifth highest toll among Chicago’s 77 neighborhoods (Swartz, 2014).

Overall, the plight of youth violence does not incorporate the “invisible wounds” (Barker, 2013) that occurs to many of the young people, such as violent injuries that goes unreported, people who are physically disabled due to gun shots, and those who are affected by post and/or present traumatic stress disorder.

In addition to the environmental racism and high rates of youth homicides, The Chicago Reporter announced that Black and Brown communities suffer more from stop and frisk practices and are more likely to be shot by a Chicago police officer that any other community in Chicago. This reality is crucial to recognize because “the number of police-involved shootings fell to a five-year low in 2013. Last year [2012], 42 people were shot by Chicago police officers. The high mark was 61 in 2009” (Caputo, 2014). According to a report presented to the United Nation Committee Against Torture (UNCAT) on November 28, 2014 by the “We Charge Genocide” organization, UNCAT stated that the Committee was…

particularly concerned at the reported current police violence in Chicago, especially against African American and Latino young people who are allegedly being consistently profiled, harassed and subjected to excessive force by Chicago Police Department (CPD) officers. It also expresses its deep concern at the frequent and recurrent police shootings or fatal pursuits of unarmed black individuals. In this regard, the Committee notes the alleged difficulties to hold police officers and their employers accountable for abuses. (UNCAT, 2014)

Given the current situations with Mike Brown and Eric Garner, police brutality has become more apparent in mainstream media and urban America. The statistics previously stated for Chicago
are alarming, which sheds light on the over-policing practices that disproportionally target Boys and Men of Color in urban communities. It has become evident that institutional racism, police brutality, and the code of silence in CPD also contribute to the deterioration of Black and Brown male youth in Chicago.

In this chapter, I covered four key sections of the literature review. First, I provided the history and tenets of the two theoretical frameworks that guide the literature review, which are CRT and LatCrit in education. I also presented the scholarly importance to document students’ lived experiences and the forgotten “counterstories” to critique colorblind policies. Secondly, I provided a historical overview of the educational conditions and outcomes for Mexican American students during the 20th century to showcase how Mexican students have had a history of educational exclusion and institutional discrimination. Then, I showcase the effects of the Zero Tolerance culture inside and outside of CPS and the impact that ZT culture has on MBM in regards to their educational, social, political, and economic trajectories. Lastly, I provided the contemporary state of education for MBM in order to highlight specific social indicators that impact their educational success in “Chi-Raq” Public Schools.
CHAPTER 3
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF MEXICAN CHICAGO

In order to create a study that would uncover the process of criminalization that young people experienced, I combined the methods of critical criminology with urban ethnography to develop an understanding of the punitive state through the lens of marginalized populations. (Rios, 2011, p. 10)

Go to the people, live with them, learn from them, love them. Start with what they know, build on what they have. But of the best leaders, when their task is accomplished, their work done, the people will remark, we have done it ourselves. (unknown proverb)

They will not know I have gone away to come back. For those ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out. (Cisneros, 1983, p. 110)

In an effort to understand the process on how Mexican Boys and Men are criminalized, I selected three specific research sites to examine the punitive policies that target young Latino/Mexican men. The ethnographic study investigated and assessed how the zero tolerance policy and culture impacts the experiences of Mexican Boys and Men at the community level and at a local church. Over the 2012-2013 academic year, I recorded participant observation field notes on the neighborhood and interviewed twenty Mexican Boys and Men (MBM), who are/were current and former students from a particular Chicago Public High School. I also facilitated a dozen focus groups and peace circles with Boys and Men of Color (BMC) at a community church that detailed students’ “telling stories about school” (Féndez, 2002) and
disciplinary stories about the Chicago police officers in “México Town.”

The three primary research questions that guide the study are primarily focused on the factors that contribute to students’ academic success and failure, the experiential knowledge, narratives, and counterstories of Mexican American male students, and the collateral impact that criminalization has on the young male residents of “México Town.” The first research question investigates to what extent did the Zero Tolerance policy inside and outside of Chicago Public Schools influence the Mexican Boys and Men’s’ “dropout/pushout” crisis? Secondly, how did Mexican American male students experience schooling in light of the Zero Tolerance school discipline policy at THS? Lastly, what were the consequences for youth who were “pushed out” from THS? Overall, the research questions aimed to capture the firsthand oral accounts of young Mexican males in “México Town,” the students’ subjectivity and disciplinary experiences at Tenorio High School, and a deeper understanding of how Mexican Boys and Men are oppressed in public schools and spaces during the Zero Tolerance Policy era, 1990s-2010s.

Chapter three is divided into two major sections. Part one describes the rationale for using qualitative methods, explains the significance of the research design, sites, and population, and explicated why the researcher’s positionality of a “native/insider” (Villenas, 1996) matters when “shadowing” urban youth and conducting an “Original Gangster sociology” ethnographic case study (Rios, 2011) in Mexican Chicago. Section two provides an overview of the research design of the three field sites, which are the Mexican immigrant barrio (México Town), a particular Chicago Public High School (Tenorio High School), and a local community church (Sí Se Puede Iglesia). I also define the methods used to conduct and transcribe the individual and group interviews and describe the procedures taken to recruit and build trustworthy relationships with the participants. Finally, I outline how I coded and organized the major themes into
categories and how interpreted the findings that surfaced from the individual and group interviews along with field notes.

**Rationale for Using Qualitative Methods**

The study’s methodological approaches were strategically chosen tools in order to explore and document the lived experiences and/or oral histories of Mexican Boys and Men in Chicago. The methods utilized were individual and group interviews, community participatory observations, and review of documents. As an ethnographic researcher, I investigated the social issues of urban school failure, the school to prison pipeline, and the factors that influenced Mexican American students to leave high school prematurely. The study’s application of methods are unique because the findings yield new discoveries as to why certain Mexican American male students “dropout or are pushed out” of Chicago Public Schools and specifically from Tenorio High School. Moreover, the firsthand testimonies and oral accounts of MBM are of scholarly significance because the students’ stories provide academic insights for teacher development in urban education, Latina/Latino studies, and youth development studies. The students’ narratives also serve as counterstories (Yosso, 2006) that debunk the dominant narrative that portrays young Mexican males as a Latino threat (Chavez, 2008). Overall, the rationale for the usage of qualitative methodologies is substantial and of historical importance because the methods utilized help contribute to the major literature gaps on the educational state of Chicago’s Mexican Boys and Men.

The research settings and specific population of “México Town” were strategically selected because the particular community, school, and group of people in the study reflects what other Schools and Communities of Color (SCC) face in America’s urban public schools and low-income neighborhoods. Although, I recognize students’ multiple perspectives (Chabam, 1990),
the participants interviewed were limited only to Mexican Boys and Men, who attend/attended Tenorio High School during the Zero Tolerance era (1990s-2000s). It is important to acknowledge that the experiences of Mexican male students at THS may not be applicable to all minority populations, Chicago Public High Schools, and/or other urban education systems. We, as researchers and educational stakeholders, must be careful when generalizing the results because the study’s findings are not a one size fits all. However, there are lessons that should be learned from the methods used in this study, which are useful and valid for Schools and Communities of Color that face the same issues and share the similar characteristics as the study’s settings and population.

It is imperative to mention that historically, most university anthropologists and/or ethnographers are (and continue to be) White, mostly males, and outsiders to the particular minority communities that they study and more often than not they employ a “jungle book trope” on the population studied (Lugo, 2008; Rios, 2011), such as Coming of Age in Samoa (Mead, 1928) and Gang Leader for a Day (Venkatesh, 2008). Many educational researchers and/or affluent faculty from the ivory tower often impose a cultural deficit theory when studying a social phenomenon such as the social identity, academic failure, and discipline behaviors of “school kids/street kids” (Flores-González, 2002). In many studies, minority students “are often the objects of our educational research and yet are often absent or silenced within this discourse” (Férrandez, 2002, p. 46), For instance, researchers, policymakers, and school officials often blame the educational “crisis” and “youth gang problem” on minority students for “dropping out” of high school, students’ families as the “real problem,” stigmatize students’ communities with “social disorganization” rhetoric, and are not critical of the larger structures and forces at work that influence certain students to be pushed out of urban public schools (Sampson, 1993;
Spergel, 1995). Those researchers that do enter communities of color and quickly depart once questionnaires and surveys are conducted and collected are not authentic ethnographers. This type of helicopter research does not reflect a model ethnographic study (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1986; 1995) and are not grounded on “critical indigenous methodologies or pedagogies” (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008). Unlike most researchers who live outside the communities they research, I reside in the barrio I study, which is a unique methodological approach in itself and a valuable contribution to fields of qualitative studies, the historiography of Mexican Chicago, urban youth development studies, and criminal justice studies. My methodological principal is to create a sense of community with the participants, which is grounded on the values of solidarity, reciprocity, and community transformation (Dolores-Bernal, 2008).

In order to complicate the positionality, profile, and role of the researcher, I disclose my distinct privileges and dilemmas of a “native” ethnographer (Villenas, 1996), a Chicago researcher who is from the same background, community, race, gender, and socio-economic status as the participants studied. As I was “getting in” (Horowitz, 1983, pg. 5), I felt a sense of “street credibility,” where I was fortunate to have access to the research sites and able to create rapport and trust-worthy relationships with MBM in the community. As a result of my familiarity with the neighborhood, schools, youth culture, and my experiences of growing up in the same community of this type of researcher-participant relationship, I was allowed to tap into students’ experiences in light of the zero tolerance policy inside and outside of THS and “México Town.” The findings gathered as a “native/insider” researcher are promising and important to the fields of urban education, Latina/o youth, and teacher development studies because the stories are instructive for understanding the educational and living conditions students face as they navigate Chicago’s “youth control complex” (Rios, 2011). The results
demonstrate that the profile and role of the researcher (along with the researcher’s ideology) matters when conducting an ethnographic research study in these particular spaces and with these vulnerable populations.

Since the beginning of the academic year of 2012-2013, I departed my university campus in a micro urban community in Illinois and moved back into my inner city neighborhood of Chicago. I reintegrated myself in my community as a researcher in order to establish rapport with students, participants, institutional gatekeepers, and neighborhood organizations. I also worked directly with the “disconnected students,” young adults, families, and community leaders. As a form of reciprocity, I volunteered extensively at the two research sites (community and church), which is where I became a friend, mentor, and role model to young Mexican American males in the barrio. Thereafter, I “shadowed youth” based on what Rios (2011) calls “Original Gangster sociology,” where I collaborated with the participants in community events, school-related functions, and recreational activities. Drawing on my “cultural intuition,” biases, and assumptions of the sites and populations (Delgado, 1998; Yosso, 2006), I asked youth personal questions that many researchers are unable to inquire simply because of their lack of cultural competency, outsider status, race, gender, age, and class along with other factors that hinder their access to theses types of research sites and groups of people.

Ultimately, the goal is to fulfill “LatCrit praxis” (Yamamoto, 1997) where I can bridge theory with practice at the neighborhood level. By building on the work of Freire (1973), Darder (2002), and Giroux (2006), I consciously take the “intellectual responsibility” to treat the participants as self-determined social agents of change and as experts of their own lived experiences. Moreover, as an ethnographic researcher, I conducted this research project based on two core ethical values, which are solidarity and reciprocity. My intentionality is grounded in
what Freire (1990) calls, “authentic generosity,” where I sincerely and collectively work with the population studied and gather information from the bottom-up and not vice versa. The research goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the educational experiences of MBM in order to challenge to the dominant narrative that labels urban school failure as the Mexican “dropout” problem. For example, during my interactions with youth and youth leaders, I willingly offered to serve as a volunteer and tutor at various capacities as a symbol of reciprocity in order to demonstrate that I am not a researcher who intends to collect personal information and then quickly depart the research sites once the valuable stories are gathered from the participants. My sincere intention is to work with community youth and leaders to find alternatives to improve urban school failure and disrupt the school to prison pipeline.

**Research Design**

**Site Selection**

*México town.* “México Town” was chosen as the research site because of the rich historiography of the Mexican community formation in Chicago. It is evident that from the 1950s to the 1970s, there was a major demographic shift that changed the ethnic landscape of “México Town,” which was when white residents left Chicago for the suburbs because there of huge influx of Mexican Americans that moved into “México Town.” During the 1960-1970s and shortly after the civil rights movement, the majority of Bohemian, Italians, and Polish immigrants who dominated “México Town” abandoned the inner city for the suburbs of Chicago, which ultimately took a toll on the future of Chicago’s neighborhoods. Fernández (2012) shows, via U.S. census data, that during the 1960 and 1970s, the departure of European immigrants from Chicago to the suburbs contributed to the deterioration of Black, Mexican, and Puerto Rican communities in the city. She claims that since Whites feared the idea of Blacks
entering their homogeneous schools and neighborhood, Whites used Latina/os (Mexicans and Puerto Ricans) as buffers in order to further segregate Black from White communities. As a result, White residents and real estate brokers intentionally recruited, through banking practices, racial covenants, rearing policies, Mexican Americans into White communities to prevent Blacks from moving into their neighborhood. This period marked a new wave of the perpetuation of urban ghettos for Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans in Chicago. Although the Mexican American community already existed in Chicago since the early 20th century, the increase of the Mexican population posed a “Latino threat” to white residents, which caused Whites to flee Chicago (Chavez, 2008).

Fifty years after the white flight, “México Town” continues to be a predominately Mexican American community and a port-of-entry for recently arrived Latina/o (im)migrants from Puerto Rico, Guatemala, and Honduras. According to 2012 U.S. Census data, the community consisted of that comprises of a rough estimate of 80,000 to 100,000 residents, making it the densest community per capital in Chicago. It is safe to assume that this number is inaccurate and an underestimation because the U.S. Census does not account for all of the residents who did not complete the census forms, who are undocumented, or those who live in illegitimate and/or overcrowded apartments, basements, and/or attics. Consequently, it is safe to overestimate that this five square-mile radius neighborhood has a population over 100,000 residents, where the average age of people is 21 years, marking it as the youngest community per capital in Chicago (American Community Survey Estimates 2008-2012, U.S. Census).

“México Town” is a unique research location because the community suffers from many educational, socio-economic, and health problems, including the lack of recreational resources and green space for residents, which merits the need to further research the problems that hinder
the success of youth and families. For example, in 2012, more than half of the population in “México Town” (25 years and over) did not have a high school diploma or G.E.D., labeling the community as a highly miseducated and illiterate ward (American Community Survey Estimates 2008-2012, U.S. Census). According to Friedman (2007), “México Town” is classified as a low-income community because “the number of families below the poverty line was 3,905 and the median family income was about $32,000” (p. 147). From 2008 to 2012, more than one-third of the households earned less than $24,999 per year (American Community Survey Estimates 2008-2012, U.S. Census), which marked the community as the second highest ranked area on the hardship index (City of Chicago Data Portal, 2008). In addition, the rates of violence, arrests, and crime demonstrate that this particular neighborhood is a hotspot for crime, gangs, and a lucrative hub for drug sales (Horwitz, 2012). More importantly, “México Town” “has the city’s highest percentage of ‘disconnected youth,’ defined as 16- to 19-year-olds out of school and out of work” (Develop Chicago, 2013, p. 2; Chicago Department of Family and Support Services, 2015). According to Hunt and Devries, two urban planners, they asserted that the neighborhood “had the second-lowest ration of open space to residents among Chicago’s 77 community areas, with only 61 acres of green space for more than 91,000 residents” (2013, p. 146).

Despite these depressive statistics and detrimental living conditions, “México Town” is also a place where the culture of people is embedded in the everyday social fabric of life. The neighborhood continues to be special for the Mexican American community formation because people from across the Midwest visit it frequently, labeling it as the Mexican mecca or the Mexican port of entry of the Midwest (Arrendondo, 2008, Develop Chicago, 2005). Many Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals visit “México Town” to participate in cultural gatherings like the Mexican Independence Day parade while other residents attend religious
ceremonies at the local Catholic Church, where a total of 10,000 patrons congregate weekly for Sunday mass. Moreover, Mexican business owners purchase foods and other cultural products in order to distribute the merchandise across Mexican “bodegas” or grocery stores throughout the city, state, and throughout the Great Plains. For example, the community’s main corridor generates a significant amount of retail sale taxes for the City of Chicago, proclaiming “México Town” as the city’s second corridor with the second highest business retail sales, after the magnificent mile on Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago (Hunt & Devries, 2013).

It is also important to mention the scholarship that documented the long history of Mexican migration streams from Mexico to Midwestern states, the community formation, the employment conditions, and the racial relations with other ethnic groups in Chicago (Año Nuevo Kerr, 1976; Arredondo, 2008; Fernández, 2012; Jirasek & Tortolero, 2001). “México Town” also has an extensive record of resistance, resiliency, and struggle for equal and bilingual education that dates back to the Harrison High School student walkouts in 1968 (Alanis, 2010). Moreover, during the 1990s, parents advocated for new high school that lead to a hunger strike in 2005, where community members began to organize and complain to CPS that there were other schools being build in the north side of Chicago yet “México Town” continued to be ignored and not given priority to establish a new school even though the community was promised a new school by Mayor Daley and CPS’s CEO Arne Duncan. This pivotal moment paved the way for the historic hunger strike that took place in the west side of “México Town,” where parents staged a 13-day hunger strike to force Arnie Duncan and Mayor Daley to consider the demands to build a new high school in “México Town” (Cortez, 2008). The struggle of resistance and contestation prevailed and “México Town” was awarded a new high school (Freidman, 2007). This was a monumental victory for “México Town” because it alleviated some academic and
social problems that are persistent in the community such as academic failure, overcrowded schools, and inadequate facilities (Garcia, 2002).

**Chicago public schools.** Chicago Public Schools was chosen as the educational research site because CPS is the third largest public education system in the nation. According to 2012 CPS student demographics, African American students make up about 45% of the student population. Latina/os, which are mainly of Mexican and Puerto Rican ancestry, represent the second largest ethnic group that comprise about 40% of the overall student body. Moreover, White students consist about ten percent, Asians make up about three percent, and Native Americans students represent less than one percent of CPS. Currently, there are approximately seventy-seven Chicago Public High Schools, which included magnets schools, selective-enrollment, military JROTC, and charter schools. It is important to mention that only the top Chicago Public High Schools are able to meet or exceed the No Child Left Behind standards, leaving the remaining high schools on academic probation or performing under the state and national average. Another important factor to mention is the lack of diversity within CPS. For example, White students comprise less than ten percent of the overall student population in CPS. However, a stark contradiction is that the vast majority these white students attend elite Chicago Public Schools like Whitney Young, Walter Payton, North Side College Prep, Lane Tech, and Jones College Prep (among others). The remaining traditional high schools, mostly located in the south and west ghettos of Chicago, continue to be hyper-segregated with a majority of black and brown bodies. These demographics and academic trends warrant the need to research these “ghetto” schools in a case study framework in order to understand what Kaba and Edwards (2012) calls the “gateway to the school to prison pipeline.”
Tenorio high school. Tenorio High School was chosen as the second research site because of its rich history and specific location within “México Town.” Historically, THS was dominated by white Europeans prior to the 1960s but then suffered a decrease of student enrollment as a result of the growing population of Blacks and Latinos. From that point forward, Whites families began to take their children out of the local public high school and fled to the suburbs, constituting the White flight phenomenon. THS demographics quickly changed from White to “Other,” marking it as a hyper-segregated Chicago Public High School. For the following five decades, the majority of minority students in CPS were given an inferior, separate, and unequal education altogether. For example, THS was the only under-served, under-funded, under-resourced high school in the community that suffered from overcrowded classes and a lack of bilingual education programs. Students who lived on the west side of the community were scared and reluctant to attend THS because of the historical reputation as a “drop out” factory, gang-infested, and violent school. The school was also notorious for pushing students out of school and forcing many students to attend alternative high schools in other communities, most often in rival gang territory. Since the THS was on the east side of the community, many students from the west side, suffered from bullying, gang harassment, violence, and safety issues because students crossed rival gang borders to attend Tenorio High School.

THS continues to be a hyper-segregated school with a population of 1,234 students, where Mexican Americans consist of about 86% and African American students represent about 12% of the overall student population. THS also has about thirty percent of students as English language learners (ELLs) and another twenty percent of diverse learners. The high school is positioned in the middle of two neighborhoods with two different racial groups, which are Mexicans Americans and African Americans. Although the high school is located inside the
Mexican neighborhood, the school also caters to the neighboring Black community. Black students must cross a main street to attend THS, where both a major corridor and train viaduct intersect. Theses geographical markers divide and segregate both racial/ethnic communities. THS has historically been stereotyped as a under-performing school, which has been labeled as a high school that remains on the academic probation list or one that fails to meet or exceed the No Child Left Behind standards. For the past decades, THS gained a notorious reputation because the majority of Mexican and Blacks students were not educated adequately, voluntarily dropped-out, or were pushed-out of school via discipline and attendance policies. For theses reasons, THS was examined in a case study framework in order to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to urban school failure and the school to prison pipeline for Mexican Boys and Men in “México Town.”

The “si se puede” church. As a result of the principal’s rejection to research students’ educational experiences at Tenorio High School, the “Si Se Puede Iglesia” was selected as the third research location in order to recruit the participants who attend/attended THS and explore how the church complemented the local high school (Ek, 2008). The “Si Se Puede Iglesia” was historically a masonic building that was sold and then renovated as a community church in 1994. The “Si Se Puede” church is situated in the heart of “México Town” and serves about 100 patrons. The church serves many purposes such as conducting religious ceremonies, Sunday mass, community outreach programs to low-income families, and as a recreational youth facility. The “Si Se Puede Iglesia” also houses a non-for-profit, sports-based youth development center that was established in 2007. The youth center caters to hundreds of residents from different age, gender, and racial groups, where many of the youth use the space for educational, recreational, and social events. For example, the center provides college and career readiness program that
allows students to visit colleges and universities across the city and state while receiving academic tutoring, advice on the admission process, and scholarships for college expenses. At other capacities, the staff members mentor disconnected students to enroll in alternative high schools or GED programs and assist many youth to seek employment through job readiness programs. Recreationally, the center provides space and funding support for various sport programs like regional and national boxing events, basketball and volleyball tournaments, and softball and baseball leagues. The “Si Se Puede Iglesia” also offers health services such as professional training from skilled boxing coaches, classes on fitness and nutrition, and mentoring programs on how to be an effective coach and leader inside and outside the ring. In addition, the youth center mentors students, via formal and informal interactions, on interpersonal issues like social and emotional concerns, conflict resolution training, restorative justice practices, and anger management.

Overall, the “Si Se Puede Iglesia” is an effective, efficient, and resilient community center that serves more clients than what it can handle given its limited number of staff, volunteers, and most importantly the lack of sufficient funds to carry out and execute the many services they offer to both the Mexican American and African American neighboring communities. Despite the limited funds and resources, the “Si Se Puede” Church continues to exceed the neighborhood’s expectations of serving the community. The church’s leadership and space have played a key role in collaborating with different community organizations that focus academic retention and school success for students, street and school violence prevention programs, street safety and gang intervention initiatives, and drug abuse rehabilitation resources while building community relationships and coalitions among the residents and organizations of “México Town” and North Lawndale. Moreover, the pastor is not only a charismatic leader and a
long-standing community resident, but is also a deeply involved mentor who understands, empathizes, and advocates for People of Color in Chicago. It is vital to mention that the senior pastor and two key youth mentors were critical in my success in gaining access to the disconnected youth and/or participants I interviewed because without their support, this dissertation would not be possible.

**Sample Selection and Sampling Strategy**

The study’s sample criterion was based on five characteristics, which were the participants’ class, race, gender, place of residency, and the high school they attended. First, all of the participants were from a low-income socio-economic community. Secondly, all of young boys and men spoke both English and Spanish and self-identified as Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, or Latino. The students were from first-generation, “1.5,” or second-generation immigrant families, where one or both parents were born in Mexico and/or the youngster migrated to the U.S. at an early age. Given the scope and location of the study, only Mexican Boys and Men who lived in “México Town” and attend/attended THS were interviewed as participants.

As an initial step, my primary goal was to access the local high school and interview young Mexican males about their educational experiences inside of Tenorio High School. However, this ambitious objective was abandoned once the principal rejected the research proposal to observe students at THS. Contemporarily, researchers have limited access to THS because it has a historical and infamous reputation as a school that underperforms (does not meet or exceed the No Child Left Behind standards), has a violent school climate, and does not welcome critiques from university researchers. Institutional gatekeepers and/or school administrators continue to reject researchers like myself from conducting a study on this high
school because of fear that the research findings will portray the school in a negative light by focusing on the negative issues.¹

As I attempted to “get in” (Horowitz, 1983, pg. 5) Tenorio High School, the principal rejected my research proposal to observe Mexican male students in the classroom setting. Since it was the principals’ first year at THS, I completely understand the principal’s stance to reject my classroom observation proposal and acknowledge her decision to outright reject me as a community-based researcher. She denied my research proposal and referred me to another underperforming Chicago Public High School that is located in the near north side of Chicago with a predominately Puerto Rican student population. Despite the years I volunteered at Tenorio High School prior to her tenure as the principal and before I proposed to conduct classroom observations, I personally felt a sense of exclusion and discontent from the principal’s research rejection because she often used the secretary as a gatekeeper, messenger, and liaison so that she does not have to communicate with me directly. In total, I invested about eight to ten months providing research documents to Chicago Public School’s central office, Tenorio High School, and the university’s Institutional Review Board. I also waited countless hours at the THS’s main office before the principal gave a minute of her time to thoroughly introduce myself to her. At the end of the ten months, I was able to schedule a short meet and greet meeting with the principal. After a brief two-minute introduction, she asked me to step outside the office and wait for her decision. Shortly after, the principal sent the secretary to inform me that my research proposal to observe the classroom settings was rejected and then referred me another Chicago Public High School. To reiterate, I understand her position at the time to reject my research proposal.

¹ Let the record show that even though I was rejected from conducting classroom observations at THS, my intentions were not malicious in criticizing the principal, school personnel, or teachers. My sincere motive was to serve THS as a resource and advisor to students, administrators, teachers, and local community organization. The study’s goal was to document the lived experiences of young Mexican males in order to advocate for those MBM that are often silenced, marginalized, and criminalized by the Zero Tolerance policy and culture at THS.
proposal but strongly disagree with her method of denial to utilize me as a community-based researcher and academic resource. For this reason, the alternative method of capturing the voices of those students who were pushed out of THS was through the community church where many of the youth went to play and socialize after school hours. At the Si Se Puede Church, I was able to get into the field site and learn from the participants the process of being pushed out of THS and criminalized in “México Town.”

As a result of the research denial at THS, I was forced to follow through with the alternative plan, which was to access a neighborhood church as a way to recruit Mexican Boys and Men who attend/attended THS. The recruitment of participants was based on a snowball sampling approach, in which the participants referred me to interview their siblings, friends, and neighbors who also fit the participants’ criterion (Creswell, 2007; Morse, Swanson, & Kuzel, 2001). I also recruited current students by standing outside of the local high school and asking young males directly about their educational experiences at THS. Moreover, my positionality within the community allowed me to talk to students freely about their disciplinary counterstories, without making students feel uncomfortable while speaking about their stories. Another important factor that influenced my access to the field sites was that I was able to form and maintain my community relationships with key gatekeepers in local organizations throughout my college and graduate career. As an outcome of these long-standing relationships with institutional gatekeepers, agencies, community organizations, and a network of neighborhood youth leaders, I was able to recruit young Mexican Boys and Men from the community and local church. These types of trustworthy relationships certified my credibility and authenticity within the circle of gatekeepers, youth mentors, and the youth in the neighborhood (Lincoln & Guba, 2004).
Methods

In this ethnographic case study, the three methods utilized were individual and group interviews, participant observations, and review of scholarly documents. These specific methods were chosen in order to explore and shed light on the experiences of students who “dropped out,” were “kicked out,” or are currently “at risk” of not graduating from Tenorio High School. As I incorporated qualitative methods, these tools helped to investigate and analyze the issues that Mexican American male students struggled with while remaining in high school and the factors that influenced students to leave high school. In an effort to keep the identity of the participants and spaces confidential, the name of the local high school was changed to Tenorio High School, the barrio to “México Town,” and the church to the “Si Se Puede Iglesia.”

Interviews, narratives, and “counterstories.” First, the in-depth interviews were conducted for the purpose of providing primary accounts on students’ subjectivity inside and outside a particular Chicago Public High School, urban community, and local church (Barnett & Noriega, 2013). The participants’ verbal accounts elucidated the students’ lived experiences, the economic and living conditions at home, the culture and climate at school, and the feelings and actions that students experienced as they were punished and/or pushed out of THS. The interviews “allows the participant to reflect on his or her lived experience” (Fernandez, 2002, p. 48) with someone who is not an administrative official associated with the high school. The in-depth conversations served a special function because I was able to probe participants’ “personal matters, such as an individual’s self, lived experiences, values and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge, or perspective” (Johnson, 2001, p. 104). I also inquired students’ likes and dislikes about the school’s curriculum, personnel, and disciplinary practices. In many cases, students who were suspended, expelled, and/or pushed out, expressed that they and their
parents were often silenced in the disciplinary process, which is also common in quantitative research that often exclude students’ firsthand testimonies. Thus, the objective of the individual interviews was to combine the student’s narratives with the quantitative data on the school statistics to better understand the factors that influence students to leave school. In addition, the in-depth conversations created a safe space for students to provide their “counterstories” (Yosso, 2006) with someone who comprehends, cares, relates, and empathizes with their learning and living conditions. Ultimately, the interviews allowed me to create a sense of community and long-standing relationships with the participants. All of the interviews where conducted outside of school grounds and after school hours. The interviews usually lasted from 30 to 90 minutes and were audio-recorded in spaces such as on the street corners, participants’ porches, inside students’ living rooms, at the local community church, and/or while driving students’ home after a sports game or community events (Horwitz, 1983; Myerhoff, 1978). The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and were based on interactive conversations. The interview protocol was semi-structured and focused on four major categories, which were participants’ personal and family backgrounds, educational goals and aspirations, schooling and discipline experiences at THS, and students’ recommendation for school success and to reform the current discipline policy.

**Prayer, peace circles, and focus groups.** The group interviews also served as a primary source of information because the stories gathered from youth were vividly descriptive and insightful in regards to the school climate and the relationships students had with teachers, administrators, parents, police, and community members (Hedges, 1985; Umaña-Taylor & Bamaca, 2004). There were approximately a dozen focus groups, peace circles, or prayer circles that consisted of Boys and Men of Color (BMoC), where the majority of participants were
Mexican American boys and men. The group interviews were divided into three types, which were prayer circles, peace circles, and focus group circles. In the prayer circles, a youth leader from the “Si Se Puede” Church would usually gather all of the youth in the center of the basketball court (or football field) and would recite a short and general prayer to keep youth safe on and off the court/field. In some cases, the mentors elaborated on the religious teachings and the interpretation of the overall message being conveyed to the youth. In the peace circles, my role as a facilitator/moderator was to balance the discussion and encourage youth to elaborate on their answers, based on the questions from the interview protocol. Here, I would take the lead and would question students about lived experiences of growing up in the neighborhood and school life inside of Tenorio High School. The peace circles were intended to be an informal dialogue, fluid and unstructured in nature, and usually involved a talking piece to keep order and respect each other’s voices among participants. The last type of group interview was the traditional and formal concept of a focus group, where the protocol was semi-structured and I asked all of the questions. The participants were seated in a closed circle format where I was at the top of circle posing specific questions for youth to answer. To reiterate, the purpose of the individual and group interviews served as a primary student testimony to life in Tenorio High School and “México Town.”

**Participant observations.** The second method I utilized in the ethnographic process was participant observations where I recorded field notes to detail the macro and micro context of the neighborhood, high school, and local church (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Ek, 2008). As a participant observer, I observed youth in their natural settings. I participated unobtrusively in sport games, shadowed youth in the community, and documented the issues and conditions that students’ faced as they attended their local high school and lived in their specific neighborhood.
In doing so, I joined several community organizations as an executive board member and/or youth mentor, I partook in peace marches and vigils, protested at city hearings, attended Sunday mass, and celebrated annual ethnic festivals. At the “Si Se Puede” Church, I was heavily involved in various programs and events, such as basketball, softball, and football games, town hall meetings, and weekly gatherings with youth mentors to discuss issues and solutions for specific youth. The four guidelines I followed as an ethnographic researcher and participant observer were to:

“observe and ultimately treat as ‘data’ and ‘findings’ is inseparable from the observational process. In writing field notes, the field researcher should give special attention to the indigenous meanings and concerns of the people studied. Contemporaneously written field notes [were] an essential grounding and resource for writing broader, more coherent accounts of others’ lives and concerns. Such field notes should detail the social and interactional processes that make up people’s everyday lives and activities.” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 11)

The participant observations served as an additional source of primary data to support the testimonies of students inside and outside of school. My goal here was to juxtapose the student interviews with my personal field notes as a participant observer in order to provide a holistic context of the problem.

**Document review.** The last method of inquiry I incorporated in the study was the review of documents. Here, I gathered data from U.S. Census reports, referenced historical landmark Mexican American/Chicano court cases, and school discipline policy briefs that relate to school failure, suspension and expulsion procedures, and/or youth violence in urban public schools. I also collected statistical information from the Chicago Public School Report Card website, the
High School directory handbook, and crime and murder figures from the Chicago Police Department. Lastly, I researched a variety of archival documents including local newspapers, secondary sources (scholarly articles and books), and official published reports from non-for-profit community organizations in México Town. The documents are noteworthy because these figures provide a macro and micro context of the population and sites studied.

Managing field relations

Given my positionality as a community insider and the specific methods used, I was fortunate to gain access to certain participants and settings that are not otherwise accessible by society at large and especially to outside university researchers. Initially, the primary issue I encountered in gaining inside access to THS was having my research proposal to conduct observation rejected by the principal. Thereafter, I was forced to resort to my alternative plan of volunteering at the local church in order recruit participants and capture THS students’ subjectivity in light of the zero tolerance policy. Moreover, gaining access to the Si Se Puede Church was not difficult because I created strong relationships with key gatekeepers who served as youth mentors at the church. In essence, I was welcomed to the community church as a researcher and as a resource for youth. In most cases, the youth leaders would introduce me as their close friend from the community who was in college and dedicated to researching and advocating for marginalized youth. After a few months of volunteering at weekly recreational gathering, the youth became more open to my presence in the church. At this point, I began to recruit eligible youth to participate in the research project as individual and group interviewees. The only significant issue of managing field relations was being rejected from conducting observations inside of THS. Despite the THS rejection, I was blessed with the opportunity to gain access to the field sites, the vulnerable populations, and manage relationships successfully.
Data Management and Analysis

The steps I took to manage and analyze the data information and interviews were as follows: First, I transcribed interviews the old fashion way and without any technical programs like NVivo transcription software. The individuals and group interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1.5 hours. Once all of the interviews and participant observations were transcribed, I identified major themes that appeared in the students’ transcriptions. I tallied the codes into specific categories. I then tested the categories by reassessing the responses with the specific themes to ensure reliability of themes. Based on the major themes that surfaced, I summarized the findings into a report and display the narratives via themes. The instruments used to gather the interviews were the interview protocol, an audio recorder, and a notebook to document field notes along with consent and assent forms from parents/youth. I then interpreted and analyzed the information gathered to provide concrete examples from students. At the end, I discounted irrelevant testimonies and continued to establish relationships with gatekeepers for the following three years after the interviews were conducted and information was gathered.

In conclusion, chapter three was divided into two major sections. In part one, Rationale for Using Qualitative Studies, I described the importance of utilizing qualitative methods in order to document and highlight the oral history of THS students who were pushed out of via punitive discipline policies. Moreover, CRT and LatCrit theoretical frameworks centers THS students’ narratives and counterstories at the center of analysis. I also disclosed my positionality as a “native/insider” (Villenas, 1996) as I “shadowed” (Rios, 2011) urban youth and conducted an ethnographic case study in Mexican Chicago. In section two, Research Design, I provided an overview of the research design of the three field sites, the Mexican immigrant barrio (México Town), a particular Chicago Public High School (Tenorio High School), and a local community
church (*Si Se Puede Iglesia*). I defined the methods used to conduct and transcribe the individual and group interviews and described the procedures taken to recruit and build trustworthy relationships with the participants. Finally, I outlined how I coded and organized the major themes into categories and how interpreted the findings that surfaced from the individual and group interviews along with field notes.
CHAPTER 4
THE CRIMINALIZATION OF MEXICAN “CHI-RAQ”

Chapter four is divided into two major themes. Theme one, “The Conditions of México Town,” highlights the neighborhood’s lack of recreational resources and positive role models, the rise of drugs, gangs, and violence, and the unhealthy relationships between the Chicago Police Department and young Mexican American males in the community. Section two, “México Town on Lockdown,” summarizes the collateral damage of the zero tolerance culture and the youth control complex (Rios, 2011) for Mexican Boys and Men, such as the perpetuation of a low-skill labor class, the mass incarceration, and an early death of young Boys and Men of Color in Chicago.

The Conditions of “México Town”

Recreational Resources and Role Models Missing in Action

Recreational resources. “The Conditions of México Town” summarizes the neighborhoods’ social conditions from the late 1980s to the early 2010s. This section builds on the work of Lockdown America (Parenti, 2000) in order to complement the testimonies of youths’ experiences. Moreover, the youths’ testimonies also elucidates that “México Town” is another example on the over-policing and mass incarceration of young Mexican Americans across America. The Condition of “México Town” summarizes the lack of recreational resources and positive role models in the neighborhood and the impact that these two factors have on the deterioration of Mexican Boys and Men. Overall, the lack of resources and positive role models contribute to the high level of “disconnected” youth in “México Town” (Chicago Department of Family and Child Services, 2015).
The first excerpt describes the response of an older participant, who attended Tenorio High School during the 1990s. Steve mentioned that one of the reasons why there are so many problems in the neighborhood is because there is “no green space” in the community (37, Youth Mentor). Since many of the youth are not engaged in positive youth development activities and/or programs during or after school, the youth spend a lot of their time unsupervised on the streets. Steve elaborated that not having enough “green space” for youth development programs contributed to the high percentage of disconnected youth in Chicago, where the majority of 16-19 years old, are not enrolled in high school and are not employed. Also, “México Town” is one of two neighborhoods with the highest percentage of “disconnected youth” (Family and Children Services, 2015) in comparison to other communities in Chicago.

In the second illustration, Oscar, who attended Tenorio High School during the 1990s, stated that THS suffers from various social issues such as…

“lack of resources… there was nowhere to go, nowhere to kick it [chill], it’s not like the suburbs that you can go kick it at the YMCA, no extracurricular activities, no afterschool programs, none of that shit… no real male influence… there’s no baseball field and the one that is here is far off, not everybody can go” (Oscar, 33, unemployed).

Oscar vividly summarized the reality of living in a neighborhood that lacks fundamental resources for Mexican American youth. Oscar warned us that many youth in the barrio grow up not having an abundance of resources “like the suburbs,” positive “male influence” or positive role models to guide “disconnected” youth, nor any place to play sports because the only green space or “baseball field” available are located in a rival gang territory, where “not everybody can
go.” To sum up, “México Town” suffers from a host of problems that contribute to the academic failure of Mexican males.

**Role models.** According to the oldest participants of the study, Leo discussed the issue of not having enough positive role models in the neighborhood and how the lack of youth guidance influenced his decisions, actions, and opportunities. Leo stated:

“the gangs were our little league baseball. We didn’t have that in high school, we didn’t have no baseball, no team, no football, so my ball team was [gang] banging. My park was the corner. So if I would have something like that then maybe it would have been a little different. That’s what a lot of people don’t understand, especially when they are living in the suburbs. They don’t understand why we gangbang. They don’t know that because they don’t live in this type of neighborhood. Over there in the suburbs, there’s a park or 2-3 in a five-mile radius. Everywhere you go, there’s a north or south park, they play baseball there or have something there for the kids like a field house. Here, we don’t. We have to go farther away into another neighborhood to go and play” (Leo, 40, factory worker).

Since Leo is the oldest participant in the project, his testimony carries a significant level of credibility in regards to his living experiences in “México Town” and how the community, school personnel, and police perceive him as a “gang member” and/or as a “Latino threat” (Chavez, 2008) by outsiders, like those who “are living in the suburbs.” Leo’s “counterstory” (Yosso, 2006) supports Alanis’s (2009) work on *Gangs Are Us* because it sheds light on the reality that gangs played a similar role that sport teams played in other communities like “over there in the suburbs.” As a result of unequal distribution of recreational resources and lack of professional role models in “México Town,” many of the youth in the community resorted to
gang involvement as an alternative to sport teams, after school clubs, and/or other extracurricular activities.

Moreover, many of the youth romanticized, admired, and glorified gang leaders and drug dealers in the “México Town.” Manuel mentioned that he admired the local drug dealers as role models in the community because he has been exposed to these types of leaders early in his life. He stated that,

“I started hanging out in the streets more. I started paying more attention out here looking for how I could move up, sell more drugs, you know, follow orders, take orders, get things done, like take care of my hood… I never really had any role models here in the neighborhood, nobody really, but I would hear about successful drug dealers like Al Capone. So they did it so I can do it too but in my own way in the hood” (Manuel, 31, restaurant manager).

Manuel provided an exceptional perspective as to why certain youth in the community idolized and worshiped drug dealers and gang leaders as role models “like Al Capone.” Many of the youth in the neighborhood imitated and mimicked “successful” gang leaders that they see everyday, which also contributed to the bad decisions that lead youth to the criminal enterprise, imprisonment, and/or an early death sentence.

**The Rise of Drugs, Gangs, and Violence in “México Town”**

**Drugs.** “México Town” suffers from structural poverty, institutional racism, and employment discrimination, which these conditions limit the opportunities for youth to earn legitimate income. Many of the youth believed that the sale of drugs was the easiest method to make money, while others believed that the sale of drugs was inevitable for the majority of youth in the barrio. These same youth testified that the sale of drugs was a survival strategy to eat and
support their families. However, only a few people were able to sell drugs because as a drug dealer one needed to be affiliated with the gang who controls the neighborhood’s territory and drug sales. Victor asserted that he believed that he is the “drug problem” in “México Town.” He stated, “problems! I was the problem. I would hang out, sell drugs, steal radios, and stand in the corner all day hustling” (Victor, 32, unemployed). Victor’s testimony showed how he internalized the idea of being “the problem” because of his actions as a young misguided teen. He expressed that he is the community’s problem because he often loitered, stole, and sold drugs on the street corners. Although there is a strong level of personal responsibility for committing a crime, there are also other forces at work that lead Victor to commit these criminal acts.

In the second example, Roberto explained that living in the ghetto negatively influenced many of youth in regards to drug abuse and drug trafficking. According to Roberto, “people around you with all this negative stuff right here. All you got right here is sell drugs and join the gangs. That’s it, that’s all you see when you look out your window, motherfuckers selling, smoking. You grow in your mind seeing the same image until you just fall into your own game. And that’s it, you’re fucked” (Roberto, 28, Contractor).

Roberto urged other youth in the community that sooner or later, many of the male residents in “México Town” fall into the social pressures to “sell drug and join gangs.” Roberto explained how so many of the Mexican Boys and Men become involve in the criminal enterprise, such as a gangs, drugs, and physical violence.

Moreover, all of the participants along with Nicholas articulated on the reasons why young people in “México Town” sell drugs and stolen goods as a source of income. Nicholas explained:
“I needed money because I couldn’t even eat nothing after school because I didn’t have
money in my pocket… lack of people trying to help kids stay in school, not having parks,
more activities, and money basically makes a lot of guys go out there and make their
money illegally… Its like they [my parents] gave up on me… there’s no money, no jobs,
no positive role models…We get stopped to check if we got drugs or guns because
there’s a lot drugs around here. That’s on a daily basis, ever since I was 12… since I
wasn’t making money I had to figure out a way to make money to feed my family or
whatever so I had to do stuff illegal, you know. Around here you can’t do stuff illegal if
you ain’t part of the gang, you know. It’s harder for you to work if you don’t, they will be
like who the fuck is this, who’s making money? So you have to be affiliated” (Nicholas,
19, unemployed).
Nicholas summarizes the structural living conditions of a low-income household and poverty-
stricken neighborhood like “México Town.” Nicholas expresses that he had to care for himself as
early as 12 years old. He also explains that the reason he joined the local gang is “a way to make
money” to feed himself “after school” and his “family.”

**Gangs.** Moreover, youth shared their stories and the impact that the gang culture,
involvement, violence, and territorial borders has on their livelihoods. Many of the participants
expressed that gangs played a significant role in how it impacts their thoughts, decisions, and
actions. Youth constantly feared for their safety as they watched their backs while going to
school, as they walked their dog down, as they crossed the street, and/or as they walked past
gang territories. Youth also testified that they were forced to learn early in their lives, the social
norms, lifestyle, and culture of the gangs that controls “México Town.” For instance, Manuel
described the severity of the gang problem in the community and the impact it has on him going
to Tenorio High School. Manuel stated that, “there was always a gang problem so you walking to school in the winter, it’s slippery, so when you’re running, you can get shot. That’s pretty much a problem in the morning when you walk to school” (Manuel, 31, Restaurant manager). Manuel explained that as he walked to his local high school “in the winter,” he constantly had to worry about his safety, regardless of the time of the day or season of the year. In essence, weather it is rain, sleet, or snow outside, many of the youth feared for their lives while they walked to school, to the corner store, or on their way to a friend’s house. The students’ voices reflected the reality of the community and sheds light on the traumatic experiences that shaped youths’ perception of the neighborhood and their life trajectories.

Another youth mentioned that he never left the community until he was an older teenager because he did not want to cross rival gang neighborhoods for fear of his life. He stated that he, “didn’t go to Wal-Mart until I was 16, I was caught up with [“México Town”] that I wouldn’t go pass borders” (Gabriel, 21, unemployed). The gang culture remains so powerful and pervasive in “México Town” that it shapes and influenced the decisions and actions that youth make on a daily basis. Gabriel said that he physically restricted himself from going past gang borders because of the repercussion that he might face if he encountered other youth from the rival gang who would recognized him.

According to a young participant, William stated that many of the youth in the community “don’t see that [“México Town”] isn’t the whole world, they think that this is going to be their lifestyle forever. It’s kind of sad, it’s the mentality of the neighborhood” (18, unemployed). Since many of the youth do not pass the imaginary gang boundaries of their neighborhood, where many of them were literally trapped to a few inner-city blocks, their exposure to other neighborhoods, cultures, lifestyles, and professional role models was limited.
As a result, these youth are structurally kept in their geographical space, which hindered their opportunity to acquire social, political, and economic success.

The next excerpt described the culture of gangs in “México Town.” Charles asserted that it is tough living in this type of neighborhood because:

“gang violence, drugs, all kind of shit… I just learned that, all the time, no matter what. You have to see everything, when cars pass you have to look at who's inside. If you don’t recognize them you have to be ready for anything. I don’t even gangbang but I know. At the end of the day, they don’t care. Right here, if you’re a male, drunk ass hell, or don’t know them, it’s just crazy you have to be on it. That’s why I’m saying, you never know what crazy N***a you can run into out here. You can run into a stick head [drug abuser] or whatever, get your ass cut or something. Esta cabrón (it is tough)” (Charles, 17, THS student).

Youth like Charles, who “don’t even gang bang” (those are not involved with gangs) are also a target for violence by rival gang members and police officers simply because they fit the description of a young Latino male in a high crime inner-city area.

The culture of gangs contributed significantly to youth’s perception, decision-making, and behavior in the community. Lorenzo, a current THS student, states that the main problem in the community is gangs. For instance,

“gangs is the number one [factor] because everyone wants to fight for turf that is not even theirs. All these streets are crowded with nothing but gangbangers. We can’t even walk outside, I can't even walk my dog without worrying about somebody coming to hurt me” (Lorenzo, 15, THS student).
Youth like Charles and Lorenzo constantly worried about their safety in the community. For example, youth must be cautious “when cars pass you have to look at who's inside” or “I can’t even walk my dog without worrying about somebody coming to hurt me.” These stories elucidated the fear that youth felt towards a drive-by shooting, harassment from the local/rival gang members and/or drug addicts.

**Violence.** The next section summarizes the impact that physical violence has on youths’ experiences and livelihoods. Structural and physical violence played a critical role in how rival gangs and Chicago police officers targeted young Mexican males in “México Town.” The findings demonstrated that the culture of physical violence desensitized residents’ feelings towards death, the neighborhood’s structural conditions, and how these factors influenced the traumatic experiences and life trajectories of Mexican Boys and Men.

According to a teenage youth in “México Town,” he stated that a major problem in the neighborhood was the violence. Arturo asserted that,

“growing up in this neighborhood, you see the violence all the time, it’s weird to see it, it’s sad to see, but it happens all the time, it’s normal. I don’t know it’s one of those things; it’s normal because it’s there… The drugs and it looks like there ain’t no money here. People are not helping us or our community” (17, actor).

Arturo’s excerpt highlighted how youth experience and witness a great amount of violence early in their lives and as a result youth become numbed and desensitized of violent acts they see in their everyday lives, to the extent that it becomes normal to witness, experience, and internalize violence.

Many of these local youth also endure the dire consequences of juvenile incarceration. For example, Lorenzo’s vignette shows how some community youth fall into negative peer
pressures. He also explains how the culture of physical violence impacts his community in various ways. Lorenzo states:

“I started hanging out with the bad crowd and it got me in trouble… Possession of a gun and a thousand feet close to a school… Four of my friends already got shot. They telling me that the summer is supposed to get way worse… Well it’s hard for people to get out gang banging or stuff like that and mostly everyone is dying nowadays. Even the people who ain’t even with it [gangs] die anyways” (15, THS student).

Lorenzo identified that even innocent by-standers are also likely to suffer from gang harassment, gunshot wound, and/or an early death in “México Town.” The conditions that Mexican Boys and Men describe demonstrated that the culture of violence is so persistent, pervasive, and disproportionate (Valencia, 2011) in the community that violence became part of the daily fabric of society and became normal for youth to witness and experience violence early in their lives.

According the mother of a deceased youth, who was killed by gun violence in the community, she expressed her feelings at her son’s street vigil. Her testimony was aimed at her son’s killer and the community at large, especially to the other mothers in the neighborhood. Most of the people in the audience ranged from young teenage males to older men. Some of the youth that were present at the street vigil were associated with community organizations that focused on street interventions programs while other youth who attended the vigil paid their respect to their deceased friend. There were also a few women present, such as the mother of the deceased and other women (possibly his sisters and/or friends). In addition, there was another woman that looked from her house’s doorstep, as if she wanted to see and hear que onda (what is going on) but did not want to partake completely with the vigil. The on-looking mother who did not partake in the vigil was probably keeping a distance from the people at the vigil because
gang violence remains a taboo topic in the community. The mother of the deceased concluded her statement and aimed her speech towards the mothers of misguided youth and to the overall community. She urged the mothers and community members that:

“las madres de los otros hijos que abran las puertas a los que no dejan a sus hijos juntarse [the mother of other sons to open their doors to the children they do not let their sons socialize with]. Most of these kids don’t have father figures in their households and most of the parents of the kids who hang around these troubled youth, continuously close the doors to them. Rather than welcoming them ‘at risk, pandillero- [thug] looking boys’ into their homes, they close the door on them. Rather than asking the boys what’s going in your life, or how can we help? Rather than asking your neighbor about their problems and how we could assist each other, we always close the door on each other. I am not mad at the boy who did it and I don’t want to know who did it. But it’s unjust that the offender’s mother will not have to endure what I will. I forgive the offenders who committed this crime and want the violence to stop. Please don't let my son’s name be in vain. Don't let him die for nothing. Let him be remembered” (Observation note recorded and translated on Thursday, November 20th, 2012).

The mother’s testimony was tremendously powerful because she highlighted an important point, which is how community members perceived and treated young Mexican males. For instance, the mother of the deceased targeted her comments towards the other mothers in the barrio, who continuously closed their doors on the local youth, restricted their sons from hanging out with so-called “thug-looking boys,” and to those who did not help to guide youth in the right direction.
Manuel vividly described the culture of violence and the zero tolerance culture in “México Town.” He informed us how youth experience violence and punitive policing practices on an everyday basis:

“it all comes out to your circle of friends, if one of them gangbangs or has a brother that does, then you have a little clique of homies [friends] that hang out together are now known as not only as a target for other gang members but also for the police… Like cliques that fight the opposition because they think you’re in a gang and you’re out here, then you gonna get shot. Then you start to put more emphasis on the street than on the school” (Manuel, 31, THS student, 1998-1999).

As a result of the structural conditions of poverty and the culture of violence in the city, many youth, directly and indirectly, became involve with gangs as a result of lack of positive alternatives. Manuel mentioned that he became affiliated with gangs because of his older brothers and peers who became active gang members during his adolescence years. Since Manuel thought that he was already guilty by association, he thought that he might as well joined the local gang because rival gangs and police officers in the neighborhood targeted, racially profiled, and harassed him as if he was an official gang member. Manuel’s gang involvement showed how he internalized the punitive practices that were imposed on him and how why he decided to live up to the gang’s culture, expectations, and norms.

**Chicago Police Department and Youth Relations**

The next major theme examines the relationships between the Chicago Police Department’s officers and young Mexican Boys and Men in “México Town.” This section documents how the Chicago Police Department enforces the Zero Tolerance policy and practices in “México Town.” Many community youth stated that police officers abused their power in
various ways, such as street cops (police officers in blue uniforms) constantly harassed and racially profiled young Mexican males in the streets of “México Town.” Youth also expressed that the constant police surveillance, illegal stop-and-frisk searches, and over-policing practices became normal experiences similar to a rite of passage for teenagers in the *barrio*. For example, beat cops in known and unknown vehicles and bikes, police cameras (POD) on street poles, and the helicopters (ghetto birds) in the sky, lead to many youth arrested that are non-violent, non-drug affiliated crimes, such as mob action, loitering, disorderedly conduct, obstruction of justice, drinking in a public way, or for lack of respect towards police officers.

**Racial profiling.** Manuel’s testimony clarified that the punitive policing practices specifically targeted young Mexican Boys and Men in the neighborhood:

> “the neighborhood, we know it, you know it, there’s always been that watch out, be aware that’s if you’re a teenager. I do remember hearing stupid comments from the police, talking about, ‘walk like a duck, talk like a duck, you’re a duck.’ This is what they would say even before I was in a gang. If you look like a gangbanger, talks like one, then you are a gang member… I pretty much grew up hating cops, I dislike cops. I can honestly say that more than a dozen times I got in jail for little arrests that I got. In total, I probably have 27-28 arrests in my life, maybe 4 of those times they actually caught me doing something stupid. 4 out of 27 times were the only times. Unlawful Use of Weapon, fighting on A. street, narcotics charge on 2nd Main Street, and tagging on the border. All the other times, were for walking around with a group of friends” (Manuel, 31, THS student 1998-1999).

Manuel explained that the over-policing conditions in the “México Town” are so severe and mundane that he was often labeled and racially profiled for most of his life, but especially as a
young Mexican male in the *barrio*. Manuel’s criminal record showed the number of arrests, which was 27 times throughout his lifetime, were mostly for misdemeanor charges, such as gang loitering, mob action, and graffiti. Manuel’s story reflected the punitive culture that Mexican Boys and Men experience early in their lives from Chicago police officers. He also explained how these interactions and policing practices negatively impacted the police-youth relationships in the neighborhood, which influenced many youth to grow up “hating cops” throughout their lifetime.

**Harassment.** Roberto expressed his experiences with the constant barrage of police harassment in “México Town:”

“all these fucking corrupt cops. Fucking cops just be harassing a motherfucker… Hell yeah, they already know who you are and they still be harassing or embarrassing you in front of your kids. They already know who you are. They know what kind of car I drive. They pull you over just to piss you off. They destroy your car for no reason dog. Who tells them anything? Nobody can tell them shit. They be breaking shit in the car… Probably four times a week. It could be every other day or two times a day. It all depends. You get harassed most of the time” (Roberto, 28, contractor).

Roberto’s testimony echoed a sense of anger towards the cops. His tone of hostility regarding CPD was a result to how the police officers profiled, harassed, and degraded him in front of his children and neighbors. Roberto goes on to say that these “fucking corrupt cops” destroyed his car when they pull him over, which can be multiple times per day or week. Most importantly, Roberto posed a critical question that is important to critique, which is: Who tells them [CPD] anything?. Roberto concluded that CPD are not held accountable for their actions and are not transparent with their policing practices, which posed a significant threat to the livelihoods of
young Mexican Boys and Men. Moreover, Lugo (2008) stated a similar critique about the border patrol agents that are unsupervised as they targeted, profiled, and mistreated undocumented people along the Mexican-U.S. border. Lugo reinforced Roberto’s point on who patrols the border patrol and/or Chicago police officers.

**Hostile Relationships.** Community youth expressed that many of the interactions between youth and police officers created feelings of hostility and resentment towards cops in the “México Town” and vice versa. Rigoberto, a former THS student, shared his experiences with police officers in the neighborhood. As Rigoberto shared his story, he said that it all started when, “I threw a snowball at a taxi and he went around and caught us. He [taxi driver] called the narcs [narcotic detectives]. They [cops] grabbed us by S. Street. He made us do pushups in the snow” (Rigoberto, 14, did not graduate from THS). Since an early age, Rigoberto attributed his dislikes concerning police officers as a result of his negative interactions with detective cops in the neighborhood.

**“México Town” on Lockdown**

**The Collateral Damage of the Zero Tolerance Culture**

In theme two, I summarized the impact and outcomes of the zero tolerance culture in “México Town” and how these practices forced many Mexican Boys and Men into a criminal and prison trajectory. The collateral damage of the culture of punitive practices lead particular youth into three distinct life outcomes, which were the perpetuation of a low-skill labor class, the recruitment of urban male youth for incarceration and deportation, and the factors that contributed to the early death of Mexican Boys and Men.

**Cheap labor force.** The findings demonstrated that many of the local youth struggled to find a good, paying job, especially without a high school diploma or general equivalent degree
(G.E.D.). Other participants disclosed that they often suffered from employment discrimination because of their criminal and/or gang background. In addition, local youth shared their families’ living and working conditions, such as a parent or sibling that worked as a construction worker, auto mechanic, and/or factory line worker. Many youth believed that their parents’ low educational attainment level, social class, and lack of job training resources limited the families’ professional success.

According to Leo, who attended THS during the 1980s and 1990s, he said that the gang culture was different in the sense that it is not heavily dependent on guns but was mostly based on fistfights against rival gangs. He also said that most of his peers are in prison now and those that remain work in low-skill manual labor jobs. Leo stated that, “we had the gangbanging but it was more of a fistfight than shooting at each other. Those that were with me are mostly incarcerated now. The other ones are just working” (Leo, 40, factory worker). Also, Leo served a 20-year prison sentence and warned the local youth of the lifetime consequences of gang involvement, imprisonment, and employment discrimination.

Luis’s story illustrated that he only became a construction worker because his dream career of a drug dealer did not work out as he planned. According to Luis, his goal was to become:

“a drug dealer, it didn’t work out so now I’m a construction worker. It always goes back to what you know and what you’re comfortable with. That’s why a lot of people that drug deal and come out of jail go back to it because it’s so comfortable and they already knew it, and that’s the only thing they know how to do that’s why they go back to it” (Luis, 35, contractor).
Luis decided that he did not want to lose his liberty so he became a construction worker. He stated that, “my freedom, lack of freedom. When they snatch your freedom, you don’t have anything, you can’t be drug dealer or construction worker or anything else. You have a life in the system and life in the system is not a life” (Luis, 28, contractor). Luis warned youth in the neighborhood to learn trade skills in order to secure employment and avoid imprisonment at an early age because a “life in the [criminal] system is not a life.”

Moreover, Manuel elaborated the attitudes youth have towards the police officers, the criminal justice system, and the overall experiences with employment discrimination:

“fuck, yeh its ‘charge it to the game’… I think that saying goes well with that, charge it to the game. But now that I’m older and looking for a job, some places have access to that because I haven’t expunged any of that [criminal record]. They got access to that stuff and its only going to make me look reckless. There were several charges of reckless conduct, disorderly, gang loitering. So all those altercations or little incidents with the police never helped me man, it just made me hate those motherfuckers” (Manuel, 31, restaurant manager).

It is evident that Manuel was critical of the damage that a criminal record had on his livelihood and professional success and claimed that his interactions with the cops only “made me [Manuel] hate those motherfuckers [cops].”

According to a youngster, he disclosed that if he ever got kicked out of high school his mother would force him to go to work. For example, Rigoberto stated that, “I have to go to work with my uncle. If I get kicked out my mom says, ‘I have to go to work every single day with my uncle.’ He works as a mechanic at a gas station. It’s hard work” (Rigoberto, 14, THS 2012-2013). Rigoberto urged youth to think twice before they get in trouble at school, decide to leave
school prematurely, or get “kicked out” of school because most parents in the community forced their children to work in manual labor jobs. Ramon, another young THS student, said that, “if you go years without school, you going to be nothing and end up working in a factory with a pay check that sucks and hard work.” As a result, many of the local youth internalized the idea that they do not want to end up like their parents with minimal wage jobs, which was hard work. Students preferred to stay in school in order to get a “good-paying job” (Cammarota, 2008).

Arrests, convictions, and deportations. Youth in the neighborhood expressed feelings of resentment towards with the Chicago Police Department, Cook County Juvenile Center, Cook County Jail, and Illinois Department of Corrections. Local youth proclaimed that their negative interactions between police officers and/or criminal justice personnel created hostile relationships and contributed to the high number of arrests and convictions in “México Town.” The vast majority of the participants sincerely believed that they will eventually end up in jail, prison, or deported back to México because of their gang involvement, drug sales, and/or undocumented status. Some participants expressed that it depended on the police officers who stop and search you because “they [CPD] have the ability to ruin peoples lives” with their zero tolerance culture, such as their over-policing practices, racially profiled attitudes, and harsh sentencing laws.

One particular youth shared a key finding in the study, that those youth, who are detained in the cook county juvenile center, have one thing in common, which was that none of them had a high school diploma. According to Nicholas, who was kicked out of THS and later incarcerated in the Cook County Juvenile Center, stated that, “I guess we had one thing in common, none of us had our high school diploma, we were all trying to get a GED” (Nicholas, 19, unemployed). Misguided youth, who get in trouble with the law early in their lives and are labeled as
“delinquents” are more than likely to become a part of the “disconnect youth” population, where many of 16-19 years-olds do not hold a high school diploma and do not work in “México Town.”

JT’s testimony summarized the consequences of deportation for gang-involved youth. JT described his childhood experiences, as a young undocumented Mexican male in “México Town:”

“if you would go to the rival park, they would fuck you up too. No gyms open and the ones that were estaban bien (fully) packed, so I ended up banging n***a on the streets… gangbanging without no papers, you gonna get locked up for some shit and that’s it you going back to Mexico” (JT, 36, factor worker).

It is critical to highlight that “México Town” was a Mexican immigrant enclave in Illinois and across the Midwest, where about one-third of the residents are undocumented, which posed several immigration issues for youth who were involved in criminal gang activity. The legal consequences were dire for Mexican Boys and Men because they can be detained and deported to México by the Immigration Custom Enforcement (ICE) Agency, regardless if youth were “dreamers” and/or spent most of their lives in the United States.

Moreover, young Mexican males were conscious and considerate of the police officers’ job duties in policing a high-crime community. However, Manuel was also analytical about the consequences of certain policing practices that infringed on residents’ legal rights. Manuel stated that, “I know all they [CPD] trying to do is do their job but I think they abuse their power. They pretty much ruin some peoples’ lives like that. I’m talking about the Police” (Manuel, 31, restaurant worker). Even though Manuel was aware of the complexity of policing million dollar “cell blocks” in inner-city neighborhoods (Caputo, 2013), he also shed light on how certain policing practices ruins people’s lives. For example, CPD’s racial profiling attitudes and stop-
and-frisk practices had dire consequences and hindered the life trajectories for Mexican Boys and Men well beyond their jail and/or prison sentences.

**Early death.** Most importantly, all of the youth expressed that they did not want to die at an early age. The testimonies demonstrated the impact of that physical violence negatively influenced the perceptions and life outcomes of Mexican Boys and Men. Youth explained that living in this type of neighborhood only leads to three common outcomes for young Latino/Mexican men, which were incarceration, hospitalization, and/or an early death due to gang, drug, and/or police violence. It is worthy to emphasize that many of the participants suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or what some scholars call the “complex post traumatic stress disorder” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008) because the vast majority of urban youth of color continue to live under these complex and violent war-zones conditions. PTSD also contributed to youths’ fatalist perceptions of life in prison, physically disability, or an early death. Moreover, Hoston’s work on “Chi-Raq: Killinois” (2013), the Children’s Defense Fund notion of “America’s cradle to prison” (2007), and what Tupac coins, from the “cradle to the death” (1994), complements the participants’ testimonies as accurate representation of the hostile living conditions in Chicago’s impoverished communities of color.

According to Roberto, he expressed his personal experiences with gang violence and how it impacted his decisions and actions in the neighborhood. He shared that he constantly had to witness and experience his friends’ deaths at an early age:

“All these killings over here, all these shootings… Well right here yeah, I always had a couple of friends that I used to hang with but gone now. They killed ‘em, they murred ‘em. They died, they shot ‘em… yeah it is nothing but gang violence right here. I got shot two times, that’s gang violence for you. I got shot on the main street and S. Avenue on
my legs, ankle and thigh. They both went in and out. I’m telling you it’s rough out here” (Roberto, 28, contractor).

Roberto claimed that “it’s rough out here” in “México Town” because he survived two different gunshots. Another participant shared his thoughts about the life outcomes for male youth in the neighborhood. Gabriel mentioned that young Latino males who get kicked out of high school usually end up, “I forgot the saying but it was institutions, jails, or death” (Gabriel, 21, unemployed). Many of the youth that grow up in this type of violent neighborhood, constantly live their lives with their guards up and worried about their safety as they walk Down These Mean Streets (Thomas, 1997).

According to Nicholas, he responded to the following question: Where do you want to be later in life? He replies, “I know where I don’t want to be at!.” He continued:

“in the grave yard, in a motherfucking hospital, or in jail, that’s where I don’t want to be at! There’s so many ways, the way we see it, it’s so messed up. You only think about three things of being in jail, hospital, or underground. That’s messed up because we all think that’s the end” (Nicholas, 19, unemployed).

Nicholas’s vivid description of the common life outcomes for Mexican Boys and Men in “México Town” reinforced Tupac’s “cradle to the grave” notion that many urban youth of color were tracked early in their lives to bear the burden of a life in prison, to suffer in a “motherfucking hospital,” and/or die at an early age and buried six-feet deep “in the graveyard.”

In chapter four, I focused on the Mexican immigrant community. At the community level, I participated in local events and attended gatherings, such as peace and immigrant marches, numerous recreational games, youth art galleries, town hall meetings, and silent vigils (among other activities). Drawing on my observations and cultural intuition of “México town,”
the findings gathered elucidated the collateral impact of the zero tolerance culture and heavy policing practices that contributed to the “social death” (Cacho, 2012) of Mexican American male youth in “México Town.” Notwithstanding the community conditions of an poverty-stricken inner city neighborhood, Mexican American students demonstrated that they had high hopes for their future and family financial stability (Easley, Bianco, & Leech, 2012; Hooks, 2003).
Chapter five is divided into three major themes. Section one, “The Plight of Tenorio High School,” describes the physical features of the building, the punitive culture and hostile learning conditions, and the overall plight of teacher-student relationships and expectations. Section two, “Subtractive Schooling and the School to Prison Gateway,” summarizes the impact and outcomes of certain school policies and practices, such as the Zero Tolerance discipline policy, that hinders the life trajectories of Mexican Boys and Men at THS. Section three, “Additive Schooling and Student-led Discipline,” highlights students’ recommendations for academic and discipline improvements at THS.

**The Plight of Tenorio High School**

Section one examines the physical conditions of the school’s environment, the zero tolerance culture, and the overall state of teacher-student relationships at Tenorio High School. Theme one, the Plight of Tenorio High School, covers the conditions of the under-resourced high school that suffers from a myriad of complex educational issues, such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources, a hostile learning environment, and punitive practices, which influences the academic failure and social exclusion of Mexican American male students in “México Town.”

**The (Mis)Education of Mexican American Male Students**

**Overcrowded classrooms.** Mexican American male students often complained about Tenorio High School because they believed it was an under-resourced school and was a hostile space to learn. Many students’ asserted that these factors influenced many youth to leave school
prematurely before they completed their high school requirements and graduate. Leo, who is the oldest participant and also a returning citizen, who served a 20-year prison sentence, stated that THS was so messed up because “it was too many people, too overcrowded, classes were maybe about this room [small living room size] with 25 of us so they [teachers] didn't have a one-on-one with students, the teacher didn’t spend enough time explaining” (Leo, 40, Class of 1985-1987). According to another participant, who attended THS during the 2000s, Nicholas explained that THS’s school officials often labeled students like him as a gang member. Nicholas stated that teachers and administrators at Tenorio High School:

“wanted to get me out of school simply because I was set as what they call a ‘gang member,’ they wanted me to go, they don’t want to figure out what was wrong with me, they just wanted to get me out of there. Simplest way, you know… I also didn’t like the black people there… The staff, the lack of afterschool programs, the lack of equipment for sports, limited sports activities, and lack of help from teachers not staying after school hours to help students” (Nicholas, 19, did not complete high school).

Nicholas articulated the various educational problems that were prevalent at THS during his high school years, such as inadequate resources, teacher profiling practices, and racial tensions between two different racial/ethnic groups. Leo also targeted other key issues, such as the classroom size and the teachers’ inability to provide one-on-one instruction and/or tutoring for students after school hours.

**Resources.** Mexican American male students also shared their experiences at Tenorio High School during the 1990s to the early 2010s. The first excerpt sheds light on the lack of resources, such as the quality of books and physical appearance of the building. According to Oscar, who attended THS during the early 1990s, stated that THS had, “no books, if you had a
book that motherfucker was all tagged [graffiti] up” (Oscar, 33, Class of 1994-1997). Arturo stated that during the early 2010s, THS continued to suffer from several educational issues such as “our books suck, the hallways are shit, and the bathrooms smell like shit” (Arturo, 17 Class of 2010-2012). Charles, who also attended THS during the early 2010s, expressed that the CPS budget cuts affected THS in complex ways, “it’s just that we had budget cuts so they took away those programs. I don’t know why would they take them out. They had cosmopolitan, wood shop, they had a couple classes, and it was something. Now they don’t have shit. Now they don’t have shit” (Charles, 17, THS Student 2010-2013).

Charles was conscious that THS suffered from a lack of academic, vocational, and recreational resources and as a result the THS (mis)educated students because the school was unable to provide a quality education and/or additional academic resources to all their students. Oscar, Arturo, and Charles summarized some of the key factors that influenced Mexican male students to do poorly in their academics and/or leave school prematurely.

**Push-out practices.** Many youth disclosed that THS also suffers from harsh suspension and expulsion punishment, which prevented many students to excel academically and graduate from THS. Luis, who attended THS during the early 1990’s, clearly remembered the statistics of his graduation class during his time at THS, he stated that, “988 students enrolled in 1993 and only 112 graduated in 1997… everyone else dropped out” (Luis, 35, Alumnus 1993-1997). Luis demonstrated that only about 11% of the incoming freshman class of 1993-1994 was able to graduate in four years. The remaining students either graduated in five years, graduated from “alternative” high schools, and some did not return to school at all. It is also important to note that Luis indirectly blamed students for “dropping out.” He failed to mention that these dreadful statistics were a result from structural conditions and unequal distribution of resources and not
necessarily based on personal responsibility of “failing” students who decide to “dropout.”

Charles, who attended THS during the early 2010s, argued that certain teachers at THS were, “setting up kids for failure because they make us think college when in reality some kids aren’t supposed to go to college” (Charles, 17, THS Student 2010-2013). Charles’s testimony reflected how many THS students felt when it came to access to higher education. He said that teachers do instill the idea of college in student’s minds, but believed that statistically it is almost impossible to enroll all of THS students in colleges and/or universities. Charles was critical of the structural and economic reality of his neighborhood and especially in his Chicago Public High School. At THS, many students are not academically eligible to apply to college and the vast majority of students also do not have the financial advantages to pay for higher education.

**Regulating and Policing Students**

*Zero tolerance culture and punitive practices.* THS students often complained about the punitive culture that they were forced to endure and the punishment that they experienced as they attended their local public high school. According to an older participant, who attended THS during the late 1980s and early 1990s, he stated the consequences for fighting at Tenorio High School:

“For fighting, you get 10 days suspension. If you miss more than 10 days, you automatically fail your semester… it didn’t help because you already failed… Everything I went through got me through life, me getting suspended, making my own mistakes, got me where I am at now. That’s not far at all…” (Jorge, 39, Class of 1989-1994).

Jorge suffered from a learning disability and unfortunately school officials did not diagnosed him during his K-12 schooling. As a result, Jorge did not earn his high school diploma until the age of 39. THS students also claimed that they are severely punished “for fighting, for cutting school,
for going to daytime parties” (Steve, 37, Class of 1989-1993).

Arturo, who attended THS during the early 2010s, expressed how he ultimately left high school altogether because of the punishment of suspension. Arturo, who was an ROTC student, stated that, “they made me shave once inside the washroom, I think that’s what topped it off. I had to shave my face, I felt like that was bogus” (Arturo, 17, Class of 2010-2013). Arturo’s tone of voice depicted a sense of anger towards ROTC’s school personnel. He said he left high school prematurely as a result of the strict rules and norms that ROTC imposed on THS students. For example, students must dress and act like a U.S. soldier at THS, which included a strict uniform, grooming, and behavior expectations. According to Rigoberto, he stated that often gets in trouble at THS for, “cutting class and walking around the hallways,” and as a result, “you get a PC [parent conference] and get suspended for 2 days out of school” (Rigoberto, 14, Class of 2012-2013). Although THS does not tolerate students cutting class and walking around the hallways, the two-day suspension for certain students was counterproductive and unusual punishment for a non-violent and non-drug related infraction.

**Racial relations among Latino and Black students.** Most of the Mexican Boys and Men, who attended/attend THS, complained about the racial tensions at school, which played a significant role in how students treated each other inside and outside the classrooms. According to Luis, who attended during the mid-1990s, he said that the racial tensions between Mexican and Black students’ impacted the school in complex ways:

“the race riots, black eyes y todo [everything]. It was always like that. It was fucked up to see a defenseless person getting fucked up by a bunch of blacks because they could take advantage. Us, as Latinos, can’t be held down, we need to rise to protect ourselves or at least not to be disrespected. That’s our biggest shit, for men, our ego is the biggest thing.
Back then in the early 1990s, you know it was at least a 60% drop out rate coming out of THS only… Fighting and the lack of commitment of going to school… It started with gangs then race. If you see someone getting fucked up by black people then you going to help out regardless, especially if they are “brothers” [gang members]. I got suspended like 4 times out of the 4 years I was there. All for fighting… In THS, it’s bad because it has a reputation for violence” (Luis, 35, Alumnus 1993-1997).

Although Luis vividly described the race relations and graduation rates in THS during the 1990s, race issues between Mexican American and African Americans students continued to be a prevalent dilemma at THS.

According to JT, who attended THS during the early 1990’s:

“they [Blacks] always pick on us and we ended up boxing [fighting]… it was always fighting or pushing you around so you gotta back yourself up, you can’t just let that shit ride… They [friends] dropped out for the same reasons too because of the fighting and had reported them already so if they went back to school, they were gonna get locked up… For fighting! That’s why nobody went back no more… Lets just say they were already on the shit list” (JT, 36, Class of 1994-1997).

JT elaborated on the complexity of race relations inside THS and how it impacted students listed on the “shit list.” As a result, teachers, administrators, and staff targeted and profiled certain students as a safety threat in school. JT also said that the school personnel’s practices hindered Mexican American male students’ ability to complete high school.

Moreover, Oscar detailed his experiences with Black students inside of THS during the mid-1990s:
“we [Mexican students] were racist against the blacks or we were always going at it with them so that was one of the things I hated the most… kicked out twice for fighting, they gave me a chance to come back in so I came back in but it was a race war… That’s how I got kicked out of school because of those crazy as race wars… I got kicked out again, never went back so stopped going to school” (Oscar, 33, Class of 1994-1997).

Oscar articulated how much he hated the feeling of “a race war” in school and why he “stopped going to school,” which led to his social exclusion at Tenorio High School. Another youth, who attended THS during the early 2000s, said that, “you can’t let yourself be bullied…. you have to grow up tough here” (Roberto, 28, Class of 2002-2004). Roberto’s state of mind reflected how many students feel and how they were unable to focus on their academics as a result of safety issues and racial tensions inside and outside of Tenorio High School.

**Gang involvement and drug abuse.** Other prevalent issues that forced students to leave school prematurely are gang involvement and drug abuse among youth in “México Town.” An older participant, who attended THS during the mid-1990s, stated that, “I was hanging with the boys, the gang. So I decided to stop going to school for a couple of days. They [guards] used always used to pick on us [Mexican students]” (Jose, 31, Class of 1997-1998). Jose mentioned that as a result of hanging with gang members, school guards often profiled and harassed him during school hours, which led him to leave THS altogether. In another case, Nicholas asserted that the, “dean [of discipline] told me personally I’m gonna get you out of here, you’re a brother [gang member]” (Nicholas, 19, Class of 2007-2009). Nicholas claimed that the dean of discipline always targeted him as a gang member and argued that Nicholas was a school threat to other students, teachers, and staff. Camerino said that he would, “skip school to kick it, smoke, drink, find the b****** [girls], and to find out the party plans” (Camerino, 36, Class of 1994).
Camerino, who attended THS during the early 1990s, mentioned how drugs influenced him to pursue a lifestyle of vice, which heavily depended on drug abuse, underage drinking, and teen sex. He further explained that he intentionally would cut class, ditch school, smoke marijuana, drink alcohol, became a local gang member and convince girls to have sex during “day-time” parties. “Day-time” parties were social events during school hours, where students leave school to party at an unsupervised environment and possibly indulge in criminal behavior like the use of drugs, underage drinking, or trespassing on private property.

**Student and Teacher Relationships**

**Student body and teaching force.** Students were also critical of their relationships with teachers and school officials. Students asserted that teachers often ignored students with behavior issues because they posed the most problems for classroom management. According to Jorge:

> “if you’re a troublemaker, than stay away from that guy. So they [teachers] don’t pay attention to you, they give more attention to the ones who they put as their favorites. They would ignore you or wouldn’t pay attention to you, it was more to the other people and leave you out to the side… it’s them kind of pushing you out or leaving on your own” (Jorge, 39, Class of 1989-1994).

Jorge used the words “pushing you out,” which reflected the forces at work that lead students to leave high school voluntarily or involuntarily. Another older participant asserted that an additional factor that contributed to the negative student-teacher relationship is that there are some “out of tuned teachers… just absorb what I have to offer” (Steve, 37, Class of 1989-1993).

Steve refers to what Freire (1970) calls the banking concept of education, where the teacher is the beholder of knowledge and children are empty vessels that teachers deposit with pieces of information. The banking concept often relies on memorization, reiteration, bombardment of
worksheets, and is not based on dialogue between the teacher and students. Steve also referred to the reality that many teachers were insensitive to students’ living conditions and are culturally incompetent because many of the teachers did not live in the neighborhood where they taught, are not aware of the day-to-day violence between gangs, and are not familiar with the socio-cultural conditions of “México Town.”

Other students complained about THS’ curriculum and instruction. For example, “some major reasons were that they [peers] started not to go, it was so boring, the teachers were messing with them because of grudges and they wanted you out” (Nicholas, 19, Class of 2007-2009). Nicholas said that some of his friends stopped going to school because the class “was so boring” and many of the teachers held “grudges” against their students, which directly impacted the student-teacher relationship and art of pedagogy. Another young student claimed that, “my teacher, she likes to incorporate her political views in the lesson plan” (Charles, 17, Class of 2010-2013). Charles said that he often got in heated debates over his teacher’s political views, which also influenced how she treated him as a disruptive student. As a result, Charles often cut this particular class as a way to avoid his teacher, which explicitly affected his attendance record and academic grades. As a result of the negative teacher-student relationship, Charles left Tenorio High School during the middle of his sophomore year.

**Relationships and expectations among teachers and students.** Students from the 1990s consistently critiqued teachers and said that, “they [teachers] weren’t there mentally… they already knew you as a gang member then they didn’t want to deal with you at all. They think of you already lost anyways so they don’t bother with you” (Luis, 35, Alumnus 1993-1997). Luis, who attended THS during the 1990s, mentioned that the teachers were ineffective in teaching because they were not there mentally and often gave up hope on those students who
were labeled as “lost” or as gang members. According to a justice-involved youth, Gabriel stated that, “since I was on house arrest, they [teachers] right away blamed me… for stealing $8” from the teacher’s desk (Gabriel, 21, left THS during the 2007-2008). Gabriel defended himself against the teacher and told the teacher he did not steal the $8 and showed her his empty pocket. It is unfortunate that the teacher did not believe Gabriel because she already knew about his criminal record and probation situation.

Moreover, younger students, who attended THS during the late 2000s and early 2010s, described the negative relationships between teachers and students. According to one student:

“a lot of that has to do with the relations with the teachers and staff. Most of the time the security guards can run the school better than the teachers because the security actually talk to the students, they sit down and ask the students why they acting up. They talk to them, they ask them question, then they let them talk. But with teachers, its more like put your ID on or pull your pants up. They just argue and talk shit… After a while it seemed that the teachers became more mean so I didn’t want to be there anymore” (Arturo, 17, Class of 2010-2012).

Arturo talked about the relationships between teachers and students and how the security guards were more effective on how they targeted the root cause of student discipline issues and how they deescalated student conflicts. Arturo did not continue in THS and left school altogether because the teachers’ attitudes became unbearable to endure.

According to another former student, he elaborated on teachers’ expectation of certain students. Pedro stated:

“one teacher said if I was planning on dropping out? I told her no. Why? because I wear baggy clothes, does that mean I want to drop out or something? She said no but I knew
that’s what she was trying to say that just because I wear baggy clothes I’m going to drop out. I told her I was going to stay in school. Then she just walked away… It’s like they don’t think I’m going to succeed, they think I’m going to dropout, they don’t believe in me, you know, they believe in themselves and what they say, they usually don’t believe in other people” (Pedro, 15, Class of 2012-2013).

Pedro eloquently articulated how he experienced teachers’ lack of high expectations for him to finish high school. Moreover, Pedro reflected on the culture of hopelessness among teachers and students and what Freire (1970) referred to as fatalism. Pedro testified that teachers often racialized him because he wore “baggy clothes” and expected for him to “dropout.” Pedro also demonstrated that teachers were fatalistic because some teachers gave up on particular students.

Care politics. Students depicted the politics of teachers not caring about students’ success at THS. Roberto, who attended THS during the 2000s and a survivor of gun violence, stated that:

“teachers wouldn't explain shit, they would just write on the board, copy and it read from the book and that’s it. You’re on your own. It was too ghetto, it’s a ghetto school… They [teachers] didn’t like me dog they were assholes… The teachers, I had a problem with them.I don’t know, them screaming at you. They used to get mad when you would ask them to repeat themselves. They be like, ‘you have to pay attention…’ Teachers not caring and not explaining good. It’s the whole system, it’s a fucked up system. Nobody cares” (Roberto, 28, Class of 2002-2004).

Roberto’s story reflected the day-to-day experiences for particular THS male students. The students and teachers’ attitudes demonstrated a sense of fatalism, where youth gave up hope for the education system, and as a result, teachers also gave up hope on their students. It becomes
evident that fatalism was contagious because both students and teachers reinforced this fatalistic state of mind with negative attitudes, practices, and comments.

Other issues that were prevalent about teacher and student relationships included how certain students experienced schooling within the ROTC programs at THS. For example, one participant said that, “after most of the problems with the majors and sergeants of being harassed by teachers like verbal attacking me, she [mom] said it was on me if I wanted to stay or not” (Arturo, 17, Class of 2010-2012). Ramon, a young former student stated that, “yeah some of them [teachers] they really believe in you. Then there are some of them that don’t give a fuck, they are just there for the money” (Ramon, 14, Class of 2012-2013). Ultimately, this type of attitude, whether from teachers or students, reinforced what JT stated, “they [teachers] weren't trying to hear me. From there, I started saying fuck that school, you know what I’m saying, the teachers, the students, I didn’t give a fuck no more, that’s when I got a grudge” (JT, 36, Class of 1994-1997). JT showed a strong sense of resentment towards the Tenorio High School and its’ teachers.

Let it not be misunderstood that although some of youth in the study demonstrated fatalism in their thoughts and actions, many students showed different forms of resistance, hope, and resiliency. According to Sandra Cisneros (1984), she believed that the simple act of survival is an act of hope. This notion can be applied to Mexican Boys and Men in “México Town” because although some of these male youth were pessimistic about their education, dreams, and future, many of them were indeed hopeful simply because they were survivors of a poor schooling system. Throughout the findings, youth showed that despite their experiences with educational exclusion, marginalization from community members, and harassment from police officers, youth persisted to get back into high school and/or complete their G.E.D., acquired a
permanent job, and exhausted community resources in order to overcome the social, political, and economic barriers that hindered their professional success.

**Subtractive Schooling and the School to Prison Gateway**

Section two summarizes the impact and outcomes of subtractive school policies and practices, such as the Zero Tolerance discipline policy, that tracked certain Mexican Boys and Men at Tenorio High School into the prison pipeline.

**Subtractive Schooling in Light of the Zero Tolerance Culture**

**Attendance.** Some students complained about THS’s attendance policy and how it severely affected students’ academic progress. According to Victor, he stated that “I was already absent for like 20 days… after that I said fuck that I didn’t want to go back to school anymore. After those 20 days, I felt like why go back for” (Victor, 32, Class of 1995-1999). Victor’s testimony reflected a sense of hopelessness because he felt that it was pointless to continue with high school. Since Victor was so backed up with assignments, grades, and attendance, he thought that it was nearly impossible for him to catch up and graduate on time with his peers. Another student mentioned that he cut classes so many times through his freshmen and sophomore years that eventually decided to “drop out” because “at the end of the day it reflected in my grades” (Charles, 17, Class of 2010-2013). Victor and Charles decided to “drop out” because the attendance consequences were so severe that it became impossible for students to return to high school and recover missing credits.

**Academics.** Many students struggled academically to meet and exceed the high school graduation requirements. Some students believed that the hardest thing to do was to graduate from THS. According to a former THS student, who left high school on three different occasions, stated that:
“I just had trouble finishing. I started but I can’t finish it now. It’s hard. There was a time when I dropped out just to go to work, I started working a couple months but then went back to school… this last one I finally realized I can't wait two years and I can't graduate when I’m 20” (William, 18, Class of 2010-2013).

William’s attitude and demeanor demonstrated his determination to finish high school but with time it became harder for him to graduate from THS. William said that he left high school because he had to work as a landscaper to provide financial assistance to his single mother. William realized that he was going to be 20 years old before he could graduate high school, then he realized that he would be too old by the time he graduated from THS. According to another former student, he mentioned that a 10-day suspension severely impacted certain students because “within those 10 days you miss a lot of work… those days count for points” (Ramon, 14, Class of 2012-2013). Ultimately, both of these participants mentioned how issues of attendance, discipline, and grades influenced students to leave school prematurely because some students felt that it became too hard to graduate.

**Education Under Surveillance**

**Harassment and resentment.** Students often criticized the teachers, security guards, and school officials that enforced the Zero Tolerance policy in THS. According to an older participant, who attended THS during the 1980s and 1990s, Steve expressed that the security guards played a significant role in how schools upheld the zero tolerance culture at THS. He stated that,

“I think that some the students who were targeted once they got into trouble by security guards. They were constantly harassing dudes they were not doing anything wrong in the hallways. Security guards always found a reason to point them out and talk shit to them…"
I was already known as a "brother" [gang member] along with a whole bunch of us. So I just dropped out because I already knew I had messed up” (Steve, 37, 1989-1993).

Steve mentioned a key issue that reflected the zero tolerance culture that profiled students who looked suspicious and/or posed a school threat. Steve believed that school officials and security guards labeled him as a gang member, which justified his harassment at THS. Steve then decided to “drop out” of high school because he felt that he “had messed up.”

**Prison-like school spaces.** According to Arturo, who was a former ROTC student that left school during his sophomore year, he described THS’s prison-like culture as a jail and an airport in relation to the security practices that THS enforced inside and outside of school grounds. Arturo said that:

“I hated the feeling of walking by all those windows and feels like you locked up. Yes I’m going to get out at 3:15 but it feels like I’m locked up or arrested. I guess the hostility. It’s so hostile. When you walk around the halls you have to have your guards up because someone might jump you. If you bump into somebody people want to fight right away because they want to be a hardass. Everyone has these fronts, these mean faces, all the time. They only laughing when they are in their groups but when they walking they mad, mean mugging. People are walking around just ready. It’s so crowded, people are always yelling at each other to move the fuck out the way like what the fuck. It’s going to be crowded” (Arturo, 17, Class of 2010-2012).

Arturo sheds light on the overcrowded and hostile learning environment of Tenorio High School. He vividly described how students walked around the school with their “guards up,” “mean faces all the time,” and “just ready” to fight with anyone who gets in their way.

**Consequences of Zero Tolerance Culture on School’s Climate and Stress**
Poor school holding power and school stress. According to Luis, an older participant who attended THS during the early 1990s, he mentioned that THS suffered from various discipline issues, which many of them are a result of community pressures and conditions, such as fights, gangs, and drug abuse. He stated:

“It all rolled over inside of school because the mayhem went from outside to inside, including fights, drug dealing in school, smoking weed in the locker rooms, that shit rolls over, everything that happens in the streets rolls over into the school… That’s why a lot of people that drug deal and come out of jail go back to it because it so comfortable and they already knew it, and that’s the only thing they know how to do that’s why they go back to it… They are trapped in the hood, they are prisoners of their own mind but they in their own hood. They don’t want to go anywhere because they think something is gong to happen, so they don’t go nowhere. 20% of the hood is like that” (Luis, 35, Alumnus 1993-1997).

Luis’s story targeted the issue of community pressures that spill over into the school and how these factors affected students’ academic progress. Roberto mentioned that THS was ineffective in keeping their students in school. He said that school officials often “push out” older students that missed too many school days. Roberto stated that, “they [attendance officials] drop us for not going to school a few days. As soon as you get a certain age, that’s it, they would send us a letter for us not to come back” (Roberto, 28, Class of 2002-2004). Both Luis and Roberto articulated their experiences with attendance issues and how school personnel encouraged older students to “dropout” of THS.

Care politics ruins students’ lives. The next section described how students expressed their feelings towards THS and how the lack of caring adults in the schools impacted their
academics and life decisions. Arturo said that, “the streets became the place where I wanted to be there more. The tables turned on me where school was my best friend and now it’s my worst enemy” (Arturo, 17, Class of 2010-2012). Arturo held resentment towards THS because of how ROTC officials often harassed him, which lead him to leave school altogether. According to Pedro, another former THS student, he said that his parents forced him to finish school:

“my dad and mom, they be telling me about their jobs. If I do good in school I’m going to achieve and get a good job. If you drop out, you going to be like me and your dad with messed up jobs and not that much money we make. I told myself that is true… No future, if you drop out what are you going to do with your life? Now that you dropped out you don’t have any education” (Pedro, 15, Class of 2012-2013).

Pedro briefly mentioned his parent’s employment conditions and the implications of not finishing high school, which motivated him to complete his high school degree in order to be financially stable. According to another young THS student, Ramon said that, “if you go with years without school, you going to be nothing and end up working in a factory with a pay check that sucks and hard work” (Ramon, 14, Class of 2012-2013). Both Pedro and Ramon identified that not finishing high school has life implications and hindered the economic success and livelihoods of Mexican Boys and Men.

Students often responded with a list of bad outcomes that results from “dropping out” or being “pushed out” of high school. According to an older youth, Gabriel mentioned:

“the point is that not going to high school leads to bad holes. It’s like an enterprise to failure. Its just so many ways how to fail, it’s sad to say but it’s a common occurrence with these kids in [México Town]. They don’t want to learn, they want to be out here in
the streets... I guess the kids are more into life in the streets than life in school, you know” (Gabriel, 21, Class of 2007-2008).

Lorenzo, a young and former THS student, also believed that his life outcomes are:

“I could either end up in jail or 6 feet under. Well it’s hard for people to get out gang banging or stuff like that and mostly everyone is dying nowadays. Even the people who ain’t even with it die anyways… Be out, smoking, drinking, being out at odd hours of the night. Doing stuff they ain’t suppose to [while on 10 days suspension] (Lorenzo, 15, Class of 2012-2013).

Lorenzo provided a dire description of the life outcomes for students that suffered from behavior issues at THS. Both Gabriel and Lorenzo shed light on the living conditions that youth endured as they live and grow up in “México Town,” such an “enterprise to failure,” the possibility of “jail or 6 feet deep,” and “even those people who ain’t even with it [gangs] die anyways.”

Gabriel and Lorenzo targeted THS as the root cause for these outcomes, such as “not going to school leads to bad holes” and “doing stuff they ain’t suppose to while on 10 days suspension.”

Although THS cannot be responsible for all of the negative outcomes in the community, the school did contributed in many ways to the deterioration of Mexican American Boys and Men.

**Recommendations for Additive Schooling and Student-led Discipline**

Theme three provided students’ recommendations for school improvements at THS. Students suggested that THS should improve theirs academics, recreational, and vocational opportunities for students. Moreover, the participants recommended that the local school should also provide professional development classes on restorative practices for faculty, administrators, and staff. Students also proposed that the school should develop a network of student leaders and
peer mentors to assist teachers and administrators in order to foster a safe and healthy learning environment for all students at Tenorio High School.

**Additive Education**

**Additive academics.** In light of the racial tensions between Black and Mexican students at THS, the oldest participant mentioned that in order to bridge the gap between these two groups, there must be positive activities and initiatives to bring Black and Mexican students together in schools. Leo stated that:

“we had the blacks and Hispanic Mexicans, there was nothing in there to bring both us of together, there wasn’t a class or something that would have African Americans and Latinos interact with each other or learning from each others. They don’t have that anywhere you go. That was the main thing, it was a race thing” (Leo, 40, Class of 1985-1987).

Leo provided a great recommendation to build healthy relationships between both racial groups, such as a “class or something that would have African Americans and Latinos interact with other or learning from each other.” He believed that this type of schooling brings both groups together and has the potential to decrease the number of discipline infractions and/or fights between Black and Mexican male students at THS.

Another student criticized THS’s classrooms, books, and the need for more academic help, especially for those students who really need it. Nicholas stated that:

“I think they need to start assigning more things or doing more renovations to rooms, little ass rooms that don’t even have AC in them. The books are not the best ones, computers or ipods, stuff like that they should be doing… Another thing is that they need
more people to help out those who are doing bad… Make it more fun to go to school…

Try to bribe them [students] to go in there [school]” (Nicholas, 19, Class of 2007-2009).

Moreover, Arturo suggested that the school should improve their physical appearance in order to make the building feel more welcoming. The youth also recommended the school to do something in order to improve student academic attendance and overall testing outcomes. Arturo stated:

“honestly if the environment looked prettier or better or nice. Where I would feel better about going to school, if it felt more like an open environment. There’s need to be more of an open mind space. Less grey and brown walls, there needs to be more color, emotion, sense of being there because it honestly feels like jail. When you get there it feels depressing. Others kids tell me it feels depressing and I feel it too, it’s a downer. The environment would need to change in order for the attendance to go up” (Arturo, 17, Class of 2010-2012).

According to another THS student, Ramon said that, “you can make a program where kids can do whatever they want without fighting. They want to tag in their notebooks without getting penalized, an afterschool program, where they can do their homework and get help from people there” (14, Class of 2012-2013). On one hand, Arturo recommended that the school personnel should target the issue of the physical appearance of the building and classrooms, such as “less grey and brown walls.” On the other hand, Ramon said that the school ought to provide “an afterschool program” or elective classes that allows students to practice different forms of art, graffiti, and/or receive academic tutoring.

Additive recreational resources and vocational opportunities. According to an older participant, Luis was extremely passionate about his recommendations to provide more programs
afterschool. Luis stated that, “we need some more programs. Period. Because motherfuckers ain’t even got no basketball courts, like other afterschool programs” (Luis, 35, Alumnus 1993-1997). Another former student, who attended THS during the 1990s, stated that teachers need to:

“make things fun, dances in school, have clubs, have sports events, get kids into basketball and soccer. I know they got a basketball and soccer teams but I'm saying things on the side where you win a trophy or a meal at a good restaurant with all your team, whoever wins gets freebees but more like a dinner at a boat, maybe money… An organization can partner up with CPS to keep that gym open or the park district to keep the parks open at night” (Manuel, 31, Class of 1998-1999).

Manuel suggested that THS should provide more practical solutions and programs to the complex educational problems, such as make instruction fun, reward students for attendance, and maintain the school building open after school hours in order to keep students engaged in positive recreational activities and deter them from the streets.

Two other former students mentioned that the THS should have more things for children to do inside and outside of school. Since many of the youth were not involved with extra-curricular activities after-school, many male students were more likely to engage in negative behaviors. Roberto stated that THS should, “probably have more stuff to do for these kids, open more parks, waterparks or some shit, we don’t have nothing here. No gyms where kids can go after school to kick back” (Roberto, 28, Class of 2002-2004). Roberto highlighted the lack of green space in the neighborhood and argued that THS needed to provide more recreational resources for students and local residents. Lastly, Jorge said that a key way to increase the attendance rates at THS is to, “reward them with something…give them something to do after school like job training programs or involve more sports and afterschool programs to get them
ready for work or life skills” (Jorge, 39, Class of 1989-1994). Jorge provided a few solutions that keeps students engaged in school, such as teach students to be “ready to work or life skills.” Since the school and the community were predominately low-income, Jorge’s suggestions to provide paid training programs to high school students can help students learn the skills they need to choose a career and/or decide a major and/or minor in college.

Restorative Justice and Practices

Restorative conversations and circles.

Steve believed that training teachers and school personnel on restorative justice and practices was the key to alleviate some of the major discipline issues at THS. According to Steve, a former THS student from the 1990s, he stated that, “to be honest I think we need more restorative justice, and people that know how to do it” (37, Class of 1989-1993). He said that the school needed key “people that know how to do it.” Roberto, another former THS student, said that,

“I think they should not kick the students out and talk to them or take them to counseling. Talk to them instead of telling them they can’t come back. Approach them or talk to them because no one really does that. They just kick you out, so I guess talk to the student or do something to see what’s going in his life to see what’s the problem” (28, Class of 2002-2004).

Roberto described the basis for restorative practices, where the goal is to target the root cause of the behavioral problem, talk to students through personal issues, and provide therapeutic solutions to students’ needs by taking students “to counseling.” Another practical solution that alleviates some of the behavior issues at THS is the art of listening on behalf of the schools’ staff. Charles said that the teacher or dean of discipline should, “just listen to what they [student]
want. If they would just listen to the kids, the kids will tell them what will help them succeed” (17, Class of 2010-2013). Moreover, restorative justice provides a space for students to voice their side of the story; it provides a space for student-led solutions, and an opportunity to repair the harm that was done between the affected parties.

**Restorative relationships and team-building projects.** Some THS students provided clear alternatives to suspension and expulsion practices. According to Leo, he stated that THS should:

“put them [students] to do something like community service. I thought about that if kids that get in trouble at a young age, instead of locking them up right away or throwing in the Juvenile home or whatever system right away. Like lets go clean up an abandoned home… leave them in school, don’t sent them home because if you send them home that’s not a suspension, it’s a vacation… what about a case worker that can knock on the door (he literally knocks on the coffee table) what you doing? Did you do your homework already?” (Leo, 40, Class of 1985-1987).

Leo argued that schools should be held accountable as students served a suspension punishment. He mentioned that school officials, like a social worker, can do home visits in order to deliver homework assignments and to verify that said student is at home.

Jorge and other former students provided suggestions on how to deal with fights and other discipline issues at school. According to Jorge, he said,

“I got it, instead of kicking them out, getting them all together to find the solution of why they are in trouble. In other words, whoever was fighting, put all of them in one room for the 10 days so they can figure out their solutions or why they were fighting and how they can work together” (Jorge, 39, Class of 1989-1994).
Ramon, a young and former THS student, said, “I think get both of them in a room together where they have no where to go. Put them to do a team project where they have to work together” (14, left THS during 2012-2013). According to Luis, he preferred to see students “lets say clean up the wall of tagging or graffiti,” rather than a suspension punishment, which lasts for a few days.

**Teacher Development**

**Cultural competency and community creditability.** Steve elaborated that the current teachers at THS need to be more culturally competent as they deal with specific students from the neighborhood. Steve states that, “they [students] don’t see their own people right there. So its school but its not really like a neighborhood, or it doesn’t feel home. So I think personally, I would like to see more teachers that... communicate with students” (37, Class of 1989-1993). He recommends that THS teachers need to be more sensitive and aware of community conditions in order to establish quality rapport with students. Manuel says that THS needs, “counselors that relate to students background, tell them that cutting school is not good. When you have that street creditability or maybe you know about the streets, then it’s a big plus when being a teacher or a counselor” (31, Class of 1998-1999). According to Manuel, he believes that in order to empathize with students’ learning and living conditions, teachers and counselors, along with all other educational stakeholders, need to become better educated on the issues that relate to schooling for urban Mexican Boys and Men.

**Motivation, encouragement, and remembrance.** In most cases, students critique teachers’ ineffectiveness but they also provide practical ideas to improve the state of education at THS. Leo says that,
“the teachers make it so difficult for a kid you learn. Especially teenagers but if you make it interesting for that kid, he might learn and want to be there… you just have to interact with the students more, get them a little motivated, not fun, well yeah fun but not as much where they going to goof around but make it interesting for the kid so he can go to school and want to be in class. If not, you lose them like that (he snaps his fingers)” (40, Class of 1985-1987).

Leo warns educators that if teachers do not make their curriculum fun and interactive, then THS can lose generations of students. According to Victor, he mentions that another way to get students engaged in school is to, “pay a little more attention to the students… so teach them, motivate them. Be the motivation that you have to be… keep up with the parents. If you have control of the parents, then you have control of the kid” (32, Class of 1998-1999). Victor suggests that educators need to inspire and motivate students and involve parents in their children’s education because this can alleviate some of the issues that strains teachers, such as attendance, discipline, and grades problems.

**Student Development**

*Stay in school/don’t “dropout.”* The theme detailed the *consejos* (advice) that former THS students offered to future THS students. Jose stated that, “you gotta stay in school and make something out of yourself. Esta carbon (it’s hard). Life is harder now then before, get a job” (31, Class of 1997-1998). According to Gabriel, he encouraged youth to “try to stay in school, try to stay out of the gangs, I know it’s going to be real hard but I would request ROTC, even though I don’t like that shit, that’s one only way kids are going to succeed in all reality” (21, Class of 2007-2008). Gabriel said that “even though I don’t like that shit [ROTC],” he believed that is the only way to graduate from THS successfully. According to Pedro, he provided a compelling
count to motivate students to stay in school:

“believe in themselves, just because you been through a lot doesn’t mean you can drop out, believe in yourself and ask for help. Always ask for help if you need help in something, don’t be afraid always ask… Go to class, if you ditch or cut, you won’t get nothing out of it. You might as well go and try your best in class. Don’t just leave, go to class and get good grades… Don’t get in trouble, think about what you going to do and say. Whatever you say you going to get caught and in trouble… Don’t get in trouble and stay in school because they going to end up like me messing up in school. Try your best, because if you don’t then you will get bad grades. Don’t get in trouble either because its going to mess up your school record, if you drop out, no other school is going to want you. Don’t fuck up in school and try your best. I told myself I wasn’t going to dropout because if I do I’m not going to do nothing with my life. I’m just going to be home, lazy, shit to do, no job, no money, mamas’ boy” (Pedro, 15, Class of 2012-2013).

The consejos (advice) that THS students offered to future THS students demonstrated that they care about the next generation of students and hope that students complete their diploma from Tenorio High School.

**Education for employment.** Current and former students encouraged current and future students to value their education because it is necessary to secure a “good paying job.” An older participant expressed that current students need to:

“go to school because that’s where the girls are at. Stay in school because that how you gonna make the money. And whoever got the money is who the girl is gonna go with. That’s the best advice I could give them… And no girl want to be with no dumb n***a [laughs]” (Jorge, 39, Class of 1989-1994).
Jorge explained that in order to be financially stable later in life students must finish high school. He advised youth to stay in school and get a good job in order to be a marketable bachelor. Although Jorge’s advice was controversial, his comment does hold some validity about the importance of financial stability. For example, many Mexican Boys and Men believed a man without an education or employment was seen as an undesirable bachelor for women to date. Jorge’s advice to youth was also based on heteronormative assumptions that Mexican men were intended to be the financial provider.

Manuel provided another example that illustrated the value of education. Manuel, who attended THS during the 1990s, encouraged youth not to get:

“influenced easily, always try and don’t give up, just know that education is very important… So ponle importancia (put importance) into school cause we need more role models out here that are going to school and getting degrees… If you don’t want an education, well then get a trade, get certified in something like be a mechanic, Plummer, electrician, construction manager. Be something and get somewhere because you have that Mexican American stereotype of hard working or we the ‘help’ jobs” (Manuel, 31, Class of 1998-1999).

Another older participant stated that his parents always motivated him to stay in school:

“Aww man lo que me dician mis padres que (my parents say to) hit the books and graduate n***a if you want to come up, be somebody in life because it’s hard n***a, y horita (and right now) with no HS diploma or nothing like that it’s hard, you could barely survive with that shit” (JT, 36, Class of 1994-1997).

JT stated that his parents provided emotional support and motivated him to stay in school. JT, who left THS early in his life, came to the realization that without a high school diploma, it
became extremely hard to find a good paying job and claimed that “you can barely survive with that shit,” as he referred to a minimum wage job.

Another THS student suggest to current students that they need to stay in school in order to avoid backbreaking jobs. Roberto advised youth to:

“stay in school because if you don’t its hard. You going to end up working in a factory or be a yonquero (person who picks up junk or steel in the alleyways) like half of these people out here. [laughs] Ain’t nobody gonna give you money, once your parents get older, that’s it you on your own. You better start thinking about your future and stay in school. Because right here you need money in this world, or you’re fucked, pretty much. All you have to do is stay in school, don’t follow the bad steps. That’s pretty much it, you have to stay in school no matter what you doing” (Roberto, 28, Class of 2002-2004). Roberto warned current and future students not to leave school because this decision leads to a factory job, a trash-picking job, and students run the risk of living the rest of their lives in poverty.

Ganas (hard work) and respect. The last sub-theme sheds light on the work ethics and value of respect for Mexican Boys and Men in “México Town.” All of the participants shared that their parents, siblings, and mentors advised youth to work hard to achieve their goals like staying in school. In addition, the parents instilled the value of respect into their children and enforced certain expectations, such as respecting their elders and teachers. According to one student, Victor said:

“que le hechen ganas (work hard) at school. If they want a better future, not suffer, and not be broke well hit them books and get a little part time job. Make money the right way. Hit the books and study. Try to get an education. They want to drive nice cars, they
want nice cribs (houses), then they gotta study and work. Life gets only harder. Life gets hard” (32, Class of 1998-1999).

Victor informed students that in order to have money and “drive nice cars… nice cribs, then they gotta study and work.” Victor warns students that they need to get a good paying job because “life gets only harder.”

According to Nicholas, he elaborated that his dad motivated him with a famous proverb, such as “Ponte al tiro’ mijo (get on it son)… the most important thing was respect, respect, respect. Respect your elders” (19, Class of 2007-2009). Nicholas asserted that his dad values his education and constantly encouraged him to stay on top of his studies and show his teachers respect, which was the most important value for the family. Another THS student, Rigoberto stated that his mom always encouraged him to stay in school:

“She [mom] tells me in the morning that to be good, not to do bad things, not to fight… My big brother says not to join the gang and to finish high school… yeah like not to follow your brothers step and to do good… Like my brothers told me, not to drop out of school. Just do good and at least finish high school” (Rigoberto, 14, Class of 2012-2013).

Rigoberto’s brother and mother wanted him to “at least finish high school.” Unfortunately, Rigoberto left THS during his sophomore year and now works at a local retail store without any plans to return to school.

In chapter five, I presented the results from the interviews with Mexican Boys and Men from Tenorio High School. I documented the narratives of Mexican American students who were either punished, suspended, expelled, or “pushed/dropout” of THS. The chapter provided a space for marginalized youth, who were often generalized by statistics as “dropouts” or expelled
students, to voice their educational experiences inside of THS (Robbins, 2008). The findings showed that many MBM were labeled as a security threat, bullies, gang members, and delinquents in high school, which justified their suspensions and expulsions from THS and Chicago Public Schools. Overall, Mexican Boys and Men were “telling stories about school” (Fernandez, 2002) on how many of the youth remained hopeful (Burciaga, Pérez, & Solórzano, 2010) despite how they were (mis)educated in class, pushed-out from high school, and thereafter tracked from school to prison.
CHAPTER 6

THE POWER OF AGENCY INSIDE THE “SI SE PUEDE” CHURCH

Chapter six is divided into three major themes that highlight the significance of the church and students’ recommendations to improve the lives of residents in the community. The first section, “Building Values, Character, and Community via Biblical and Prayer Circles,” summarizes the morals and values that youth mentors and religious leaders teach students at the church. Segment two, “Assessing Students’ Dreams and Conditions via Focus Groups,” highlights the dreams and aspirations of youth, the neighborhood’s social conditions, and the stories that students share about their experiences at Tenorio High School. Part three, “Youths’ Advice and Recommendations,” provides students’ suggestions on youth development programs, community building opportunities, and academic recommendations to improve Tenorio High School. Overall, the chapter examines the core values that students are taught at the church, acknowledges youths’ hopes and goals for the future, and documents the advice (consejos) and recommendations from Boys and Men of Color in “México Town.”

Building Values, Character, and Community via Biblical and Prayers’ Circles

Core Values

At the “Si Se Puede!” Church, Boys and Men of Color participated in a host of programs that focused on recreational activities, academic advising, and youth development initiatives. Since the church was located in between an African American neighborhood and an Mexican American community, many of the younger Black and Mexican youth (12 to 18 years olds) used the church space to gather among their friends and play sports in a safe place after school. Although the majority of the youth mentors and religious leaders, formally and informally, instilled in the youth Christian beliefs and morals, most of the youth expressed that they utilized
the church as a recreational, social, and political network system and not necessarily for religious and spiritual purposes. According to Brother Martin, youth were able to “develop more that than just basketball skills but character values that will help them propel in life.” As previously stated, the church and youth mentors constantly attempted to instill in the youth that they must become responsible leaders on and off the basketball court. For example, Brother Martin said to a group of church youth that, “if you want to be treated like an adult, you have to act like it. Be responsible and make smart decision.” According to another youth mentor, Brother Pablo, said to the youth at the church, “apply yourself whether it is arts, school, or whatever you desire.”

Brother Pablo also encouraged youth to utilize the church as a community resource for guidance, mentorship, and academic tutoring.

The value of respect was an important moral, which church mentors prioritized as they educated youth. For example, Brother Pablo said to the young people who entered and used the church to play basketball that, “as you know, when you come in here, we ask you to respect the space… we also have to show respect for this place and each other.” According to Brother Steve, he said that he intentionally mentored neighborhood youth, especially those who used the church space on a weekly basis, that they need to see the church as if “this is your house and you have to respect it like if it is your house.” These examples demonstrated that Brother Pablo and Brother Steve educated young people on a variety of issues that focused on Christian values and morals.

It is imperative to highlight that the advice and guidance that students received at the church complements the messages youth gathered at home and/or at the local high school.

**Leadership Building**

Church leaders also encouraged youth to set goals and create an action plan in order to solve some of their personal, social, and financial problems. According to Brother Pablo, he
describes what he talks about with youth, such as, “we talk about goals… whatever applies to your life, you need to grab a hold of it and run with it. Then take action.” In addition, Brother Martin shares with youth the importance of setting goals. He emphasized that, “in order to know where you’re going, you need to know and train yourself to get there.” Brother Martin also told the youth to “train yourself to reach your goals and learn the rules of the game.” Brother Steve, along with the other church mentors, taught youth important character values and morals and also assisted youth to set goals and create an action plan to accomplish specific personal and academic objectives. Moreover, youth mentors also go out of their way to influence and inspire youth to accomplish their life goals, including myself. For example, Brother Steve says that, “my goal is to help Miguel accomplish his goal.” Brother Steve’s statement that his “goal is to help Miguel accomplish his goal,” is a reflection of the type of work ethic, dedication, and authentic generosity that church mentors embody as they mentor young Black and Mexican males. The youth leaders also shed light on the lessons that youth needed to learn from neighborhood and church leaders. For instance, according to Brother Steve, “being Pastor of the church comes with a lot of responsibilities. He’s [Pastor Cesar] been a real big voice in the neighborhood for as long I known him. Taking on a lot of leadership activities.” Another mentor advised youth to find a mentor in the community and at school, who can “helps us make right decisions, helps us seek wise counsel” (Brother Martin). Moreover, I also suggested to the youth and church mentors during a prayer circle, that we needed to “teach each other survival and leadership skills in order to live” (Researcher). The mentors and I sincerely believed that we needed to educate each other to make better decisions in our lives and become good role models for the younger generations of Latino and Black males in the neighborhood.

**Biblical Messages**
Youth mentors consistently instilled Christian biblical messages and moral values in youth before and after they played sports and/or as mentors discussed personal issues with students. For example, church leaders mentored local youth to obey God’s principals and wisdom, as it is stated in the Holy Bible. According to a woman youth mentor, Sister Ashley, who was a volunteer referee for the boys’ summer basketball league, quoted the Holy Bible and proclaimed that, “Proverbs provides us with wisdom on how to live successfully… it’s the ability to live life in complete submission to God using his principles.” Brother Pablo encouraged young boys and men in the gym that they should follow God’s principals. Brother Pablo told the youth that they, “should not show vengeance but to forgive others” because he believed that any violent retaliation was not the key to healing from trauma, solving anger management issues, and/or rival gang problems. Brother Martin emphasized to youth on the importance of becoming God’s ambassadors. He described God’s ambassadors to youth as “being an ambassador… You and I have the responsibility to how the world is supposed to come about… I’m responsible to respect my parents and to honor them, that's part of my responsibility” (Brother Martin).

Youth leaders attempted to educate youth on the lessons and values that are important to learn from biblical passages. The youth mentors taught youth athletic and sportsmanship skills on the basketball court, baseball field, and/or football field. In addition, they also deliberately implanted the morals and values from the Holy Bible in youths’ minds. Church leaders dedicated their efforts to feed the souls of young people in the “Si Se Puede” Church through biblical stories. Youth mentors’ argued that it was a disservice to allow youth to access the gym for recreational purposes without the development of youths’ characters. The church mentors believed that it was imperative to nurture the minds and souls of the youth and not solely on their physical, recreational, or athletic development.
**Prayers Messages**

Youth mentors also gave thanks to God for the church space, the youth leaders, and all of the young students in the community who utilized the church. According to Brother Jo Jo, he was grateful for the space and wants to “thank you [God] for allowing us [mentors and youth] to come together in this gym and giving us the time to get in touch with you Father.” On a different occasion, the Pastor Cesar said in a prayer circle, “thank you for a place where we can come to play for a little bit. To receive your word and motivation to help each other.” Moreover, as Brother Martin closed one prayer circle, he stated that, “we thank you for allowing us to use this court, we appreciate this church. Help us learn how to appreciate it in different ways.” All of the youth leaders, including Pastor Cesar, were extremely appreciative of the church, which provided a safe space for local youth to come together and play.

Furthermore, Pastor Cesar and all of the mentors also asked God to bless youths’ dreams and families. The Senior Pastor prayed, “God, we thank you for everyone here, for the dreams represented here… we honor them and pray to make steps towards their dreams and desires. Bless us all who are here and their families.” According to Brother Pablo, he asked God to bless us with guidance, wisdom, healing, and peace. Brother Pablo prayed to God, “teach us how to respect and use our free will to act right. We need you guidance and wisdom… We pray for peace… We encourage healing, we pray to find peace. We pray that you bless us and give us peace.” The prayer circle testimonies’ demonstrated that the mentors in the “Si Se Puede” Church developed youths’ moral character and molded them into responsible family members, student, and community leaders. The youth mentors also educated students to understand the role that the church plays in providing a space for community resources and services.

**Assessing Students’ Dreams and Conditions via Focus Groups**
Youth Dreams

**Dream careers.** In the second segment, I cover students’ dream careers and the people that supported and inspired youth to excel academically and professionally. The findings showed that the dreams and aspirations of youth, who participated at the “Si Se Puede” Church, were both promising and concerning. Most of the youth responded to the question: What do you want to be when you grow older? Common career options were reflected in statements such as, “after high school, I want to go to the marines, after that I want to be a cop” (FG 1). Another student stated that, “I want to be basketball player, if not I want to go to law school and get a Masters” (FG 1). In many cases, youth remarked that they want to become successful in order to care for their families. For example, one youth stated that, “I want to be an electrician and support my family and myself” (FG 1). As a participant observer and as a symbol of solidarity and reciprocity, I also shared my dream career with the youth, which was that “I wanted to be a lawyer so I could take my brother out of jail, that was my dream as a shorty [young kid]” (FG 1).

Other youth mentioned how they planned to be leaders in the community once they grow older and become more mature. One Mexican American boy stated that, “I wanted to be a lawyer, fire fighter, teacher, but what I really wanted to be was be a good role model” (FG 1). Other students responded to the question and asserted that, “I want to be a professor” (FG 2), “orthopedic surgeon” (FG 2), and “a detective” (FG 2). Despite the community and school’s conditions, lack of resources, limited number of positive role models, and the students’ voices reflected that most of the youth aspired to be successful professionals.

**Inspiration.** It is worthy to note that the vast majority of these young people hoped to be great professionals later in life and wanted give back to their families and communities once they acquired a good-paying job and were financially stable. Most of the youth recalled that it was a
family member that motivated them to find a profession of their dreams. For example, one African American youth mentioned that it was his family that encouraged him. He claimed that “my parents [motivated him] because they push[ed] me to finish school even though they never did” (FG 2). Another Black youth also referred to his family as the key source of motivation to stay in school and become successful. He said that it was his family that encouraged and pressured him to make wise decisions. For instance, he said, “my grandparents, my mom motivated me the most [be]cause they always told us to do the right thing even though we never listen” (FG 2). Again, as a community-based researcher, local activist, and youth mentor, I shared my story with the participants, which was that my sibling encouraged me to pursue college and pre-law as a major and career. I asserted that, “my brother, who is locked up motivated me” (FG 2) to apply to a university and pursue a law career. The stories that the youth and I shared reflected the important people that influenced youngsters in the community to be successful professionals. Moreover, the findings also showed that the parents and grandparents of these young people placed a high value on their sons’ education and encouraged them to make the right decisions, despite the living conditions and educational attainment level of their parents and community residents.

Moreover, two other youth specifically highlighted how the youth mentors and church space were two key factors that motivated youth to do well in school and to stay off the streets, especially as a way to avoid “dropping” out of school or falling as a victim to physical (gang, gun, and/or drug) violence. An African American high school student mentioned that he was grateful for one church mentor “because he opens the gym, keeps us off the street” (FG 2). Another high school student stated that, “people like pastor [Cesar], my other youth leaders, people who are around everyday and who worked for prevention programs. People like that
inspired me because they put others before themselves a lot of the times” (FG 2). Conversely, not only did the parents of Boys and Men of Color motivate students to do well in school but the youth mentors in the church also encouraged youth to excel in school and acquire life skills so they can become successful later in their lives. At the church, youth leaders mentored students as they opened “the gym” on weekly basis, mentors often put “others before themselves,” spent time with students, and are “around everyday.” The findings showed that the church was a safe space for youth to learn, play, and develop into responsible neighborhood leaders.

**Fatal dreams.** This sub-section highlights the stories of youth and mentors who demonstrated signs of “fatalism” (Freire, 1970). Unfortunately, not all of the local youth shared the same hopes or aspirations for the future. For example, one youth was not able to answer the question: What do you want to be later in life?, He stated, “I don't know what I want to be because I might not make it to then” (FG 1). The young Mexican American boy clearly stated that he did not envision a dream career because he “might not make it to then.” His response reflected his life perception that he will die at an early age, which is why he cannot imagine his dream career as a young teenager. According to a youth mentor, he stated that as he was growing up:

“I looked up to my father who was a gang member when I was 8 years old, so I studied everything he did so I ended up choosing the wrong path at the end of the day. As I got older, I did the same thing, I had my priorities messed up. I was seeking the pleasure of taking the easy way out not going through the hard stuff like school… That's me when I was using drugs, alcohol, partying, having fun, having sex, and not working hard, spending my money on stupid things” (FG 3).
The youth mentor blamed his father for setting the wrong example as a father, which influenced him to pursue the criminal path later in his adult life like his father. According to Brother Steve, he stated that, “I wanted to be like or have things that my uncle who was a gang member had” (FG 1). As a kid, Brother Steve wanted to spend his life on the streets and follow his uncle footsteps because his uncle was a “successful” gang leader that people respected in the neighborhood. He also wanted to have the expensive “things” that his uncle had as a drug dealer. The one youth and two mentors highlighted in this sub-section demonstrated that some youth and adults in the neighborhood are mentally and physically imprisonment within their own community. In this particular case, both the African American and Mexican American neighborhoods are modeled after prisons, where residents (or prisoners) are constrained to their invisible borders, such as the way of life in urban settings in which the working classes, especially the men, are constantly under surveillance, being inspected by institutional inspectors or modes of inspections that go beyond the state of policing. Many of the young males must follow the culture and norms of local gangs that control specific territorial borders that also constraint residents.

The Conditions of “México Town”

Likes and dislikes about “México Town.” In this sub-section, I provide an overview of the conditions of “México Town” in relation to the youths’ perspectives about the community. Many of the participants responded to the question of what they liked about “México Town” with positive reactions. According to one youth, he stated that he felt good about being “back in school… stay[ing] focus and step[ping] up my game with grades” (FG 3). Another youth claimed that he enjoyed the summer sports and especially the “Wednesday’s basketball games”
An older participant said that he was pleased to have “a new job” and was grateful that his “children and family are healthy” (FG 3).

When youth were asked about what they did not like about “México Town,” the majority of the youth criticized the conditions of the community. The pervasiveness of summer violence, gangs, and the death of family members and close friends were prevalent issues, according to the youth. Two youngsters specifically referenced that, “summer is getting hot so it’s getting dangerous” (FG 3) and another students warned local youth to “be cautious because of the gangs” (FG 3) in the neighborhood. A THS student commented that he constantly worried about his safety because “the parks are full with gang bangers” (FG 3) and “even though I’m off the street, there’s gangs everywhere, which I still have to worry about dying or other friends dying” (FG 3). The stories demonstrated that many youth suffered from Post and Present Traumatic Stress Disorder (PPTSD) as a result of the physical violence that occurs in their neighborhood. It is also critical to mention that the structural conditions and unequal distribution of resources in the community influenced students’ academic failure and hindered youths’ professional livelihoods.

In addition, the community suffered from the impact that imprisonment has on families, youth, and communities. For instance, many families and children endured the experiences of family separation, which is a result of incarceration and/or deportation practices, the lifetime consequences of gang involvement, and lack of re-entry programs that prepares returning citizens to successfully reintegrate into society and secure employment. According to one youth mentor, he stated that, “my younger brother is losing his babymama because she ain’t trying to wait until he gets out prison” (FG 3). The youth mentor briefly mentioned some of the effects that incarceration has on his brother’s family. The youth mentor’s sister-in-law cannot stay with
his brother anymore because of the number of years he was sentenced to serve in prison. It is also imperative to underscore the effect that mass incarceration has on women because the imprisonment of Boys and Men is also a feminist issue, which indirectly and directly creates a host of gender concerns for both men and women. For example, the youth mentors’ sister-in-law and especially the children also endure the collateral damage of having a loved one “locked up.” In many cases, those women who suffer from having a loved one in prison must become financially independent, head of the household, and serve as the family liaison between the incarcerated father and children.

Another youth mentor shared how he negotiated with his wife about family problems as a result of his former involvement with gangs. He stated that, “my babymama has a lot of bitterness, anger, and resent me towards me because of all the things I put her through while I was on the streets so she’s trying to take my kids away, it’s a hard struggle to come up with agreement with her” (FG 3). In this case, the youth mentor expresses how his partner is threatening to terminate his father rights because of his criminal record, which also sheds some light on the issues and concerns that are prevalent for women. The youth mentors’ testimonies demonstrated the intersections of complex issues, such as poverty, gang involvement, imprisonment, gender implications, and collateral damage that families and children must endure as a result of having a loved-one incarcerated.

**Family support and community pressures.** Despite the negative experiences that youth endured as they grow up on the streets of “México Town,” youth also shared the academic and emotional support they received at home from parents and siblings. The findings demonstrated that some youth struggled to balance between the academic and familial support at home and the
peer pressure that they were exposed to from “at-potential youth” in the community. According to a Mexican American student, he stated that:

“my older brother got an education, I’m trying to pay more attention to him because most of my friends are gang members but I don't want to do the bad things like drinking or smoking because my parents worked hard to raised me good, they came from Mexico, so I want to make something out of myself. I want to help them once they become elderly like show that I love them and do my best so they can feel proud of me” (FG 3).

The Mexican American student attempted to negotiate between the pressures from parents at home and influences from peers in the community. The findings showed that, on one hand, the student did not want to fall into the negative peer pressure from his friends who were “gang members.” On the other hand, he wanted to “to make something out” of himself in order to care for his Mexican immigrant parents “once they become elderly” and he also wanted his parents to “feel proud” of him, which showcases the two social pressures he was negotiating as he navigated through the educational pipeline.

Moreover, many students in the community who have a high self-esteem were able to convert the negative factors and pressures in the neighborhood into a source of motivation to become responsible leaders at school, at home, and in the community. For example, according to one youth, he said that, “you can use the neighborhood to motivate you on what not to be, like strive to be something better” (FG 3). Another young man asserted that, “being in the hood influenced [me] to stay in school and not be like the rest of the people in the hood that are doing nothing with their lives” (FG 3). The structural conditions of the community and local schools, directly and indirectly, motivated some youth to finish school and become successful. For instance, one youngster said that, “the [neighbor]hood motivates me to stay in school so I can
make something out of my life” (FG 3). Despite the negative conditions that youth describe about “México Town,” many local youth remained hopeful about their future. It is important to elucidate that while some of the youth were able to use the negative influences in the barrio to motivate them to do something positive, other youth did not share the same attitude, level of self-esteem, and/or optimism for their future, rather some youth shared a fatalistic perception for their future.

Unlike the youth previously mentioned above, other youth were exposed to a variety of negative social pressures in the community in comparison to their counterparts, such as cutting class, teen sex, drug abuse, and gang involvement. For example, a youth mentor stated, that the community pressure “affected me because I followed the wrong friends, like cutting class, fucking *******[girls], so the [neighbor]hood affected me” (FG 3). According to an older participant, he mentions that the barrio has:

“a lot of influences. For a lot of guys, school was not a priority to them, people I looked up to. Those were the guys that would say, ‘Why go to school?’ . So at 13 years old, I would take packages to grown men at parties and slang [sell]. So how serious would I take education when the whole point was trying to get a job but I was already making money, like $150 on a Friday night. It did affect me because I wasn’t paying attention. I was paying attention to Scarface, the movie, man he got rich from slanging so that’s the mentality I had. It wasn't really about school, it was about money” (FG 3).

Another youth shared that he fell into the negative peer pressure in the neighborhood and ended up leaving high school as a young teenager. He stated that “I started letting people influence me to drink and smoke, I ended up leaving that school [THS], which influenced me in a bad way” (FG 3). The stories showed in this sub-section the influences that students were exposed to in the
barrio and the consequences that they were forced to endure as a result of their involvement, actions, or misconduct.

Other youth said that they would prefer to leave Tenorio High School voluntarily and resort to gangs as an alternative because they believed that gangs offer youth the love and attention that was absent at school. One youth testified that, “you see the gangs and the love they give each other. You see that and you say, that’s what I want to get as I get older, that’s what I want for myself. I rather get love and forget about school” (FG 3). This particular youth, and many others like him, preferred to “forget about school” and participate in the gang culture in “México Town,” as a way to avoid the punitive, subtractive, and non-caring practices at Tenorio High School.

Youth and police relations and the effects of criminal records. The following subsection sheds light on the negative relationship between young Mexican American Boys and Men and police officers from the Chicago Police Department. The zero tolerance culture inside and outside the Tenorio High School has led to a high number of school and misdemeanor arrests in “México Town,” including the adjacent African American community (Kaba & Edwards, 2012). For example, one youth said, “I got arrested for tagging and taking a hammer to school” (FG 1). Another student stated that, “the first time I got arrested was for criminal vandalism, then this year at school for aggravated battery but the case got dismissed because the witness couldn't properly identify me. They blamed me and my brother” (FG 1). According to another THS student, he asserted that the actions students’ committed inside of school, “can affect your life because if you’re actually doing bad stuff in school, then people are going to think of you in a negative way. So the teachers will treat you differently or worried about how other students are going to be treated” (FG 1). The last excerpt clearly identified the possible consequences of a
school arrest and the perception that school personnel have for the arrested student. It is also important to mention that if teachers and police officers are unfamiliar and/or are not sensitive to the community’s conditions, teachers and officers could easily mislabel and profile youth as gang affiliated students and/or as a school threat, which justifies students’ classification, suspension, expulsion, and/or arrest.

Moreover, the lack of positive relationships between the Chicago police officers and security personnel inside of THS and the local students in “México Town” hinders the social, academic, and professional trajectories of Mexican Boys and Men. One youth expressed how he felt about the stop-and-frisk policing practices in “México Town.” He stated that, “every time I get pulled over, I hate it, its embarrassing. When I have my hands on the car, all the cars that pass by only see another banger getting stopped by the 5-0 [police]” (FG 1). Another youth also shared his experiences with local police officers. He mentioned that has been arrested in the past for, “for mob action, tagging… jumping on somebody” (FG 1). Moreover, one youth claimed how he “got arrested for reckless conduct for not doing anything” (FG 1) and another youth “got arrested for battery for fighting in the festival” (FG 1). The testimonies highlighted youths’ experiences with the over-policing practices in the community, such as stop-and-frisk searches, racial profiling, and police harassment. As a result, many youth in “México Town” have criminal records early in their lives and are forced to endure the effects of employment, voting, social, and political discrimination.

The majority of the Mexican Boys and Men in the neighborhood were well aware of the consequences of a criminal record on their academic and professional success. For instance, many of the youth shared their thoughts about the issue and concluded that the “bad thing it’s going to affect you in the future because of your past” (FG 1). According to two youth, they
mentioned the impact that a criminal record has on your employment opportunities. One young man says that, “the only bad thing is that it’s going to look bad in your resume. I don't really care about them stopping me. The bad thing is that they got me as a gang member” (FG 1). The other youth expressed that “you can’t get a job because of your record. If something comes out missing at work, suddenly I’m getting blamed for it so it does affect you” (FG 1). The youths’ stories validated how a criminal record hinders students’ economic and professional success and also helps to understand how youth suffered from criminal stigmatization and social exclusion from certain professional careers and political involvement.

**School Conditions**

**Teacher-student relationships.** This next sub-section examines the conditions of Tenorio High School and the relationships between teachers and students. According to one student, he commented that that he did not like his teacher and as a result his grades suffered: “I don’t like my teacher because she doesn't teach us anything. She just sits there and makes us write shit down. If we don’t do it right, she starts yelling or kicks us out for no reason. Other students influence me, which keeps me off focus then I get bad grades” (FG 3). The findings showed that a few THS teachers were ineffective in keeping their students engaged in the classroom, such as “makes us write shit down” while “she just sits there,” which the teachers then resorts to push students out of the classroom “for no reason.” The story also reflects on what Freire calls, the banking concept of education (1971). Another student asserted that, “there’s one teacher who’s always on my back, she be doing too much. I don’t like it when she tells me what to do a lot, that just gets me mad” (FG 3). This particular student commented on how he dislikes the teacher because she always ordered him what to do something. Although teachers are directly responsible for instruction, in this case, the student did not have a good relationship with this
teacher. As a result, the Mexican male student did not listen to her as she instructed him to do his assignments.

**Teachers’ expectations.** The next set of stories highlights the expectations that teachers have for their students and how teachers’ ideology, perception, and attitudes influenced students to disengage from the classroom’s instruction and Tenorio High School altogether. According to one student, he declared that, “I think a lot of teachers don’t expect us to graduate because they really don't care about us” (FG 1). Another student shared his thoughts as to why teachers act like this towards certain students. He asserted that, “the reason they [teachers] be like that is because after some many years the teachers don’t care anymore. Students treat teachers with the same attitude” (FG 1). The stories youth shared shed light on the pessimistic and fatalistic culture of THS and attributed most of the school failure to teachers’ and students’ attitudes. One youth mentor summarized teachers’ expectations and attitudes. He believed that some THS teachers were unsuccessful and ineffective in teaching because:

“I didn’t like that the teachers didn’t understand the neighborhood, like the circumstances were, like sometimes when things would happen in the hood like someone or friend getting killed, then we go to school salty [emotional] or some would be sad. Teachers didn’t really know how to handle those students, they didn’t know what happen right outside of school and how it affected us when we came back. Teachers didn't really understand us bro. So since they didn't understand us the things we were going through, then we were really a distraction to the class. So they didn’t want us in here. So the majority thought we weren’t going to graduate. It wasn’t that we weren’t paying attention it’s just that things happen in the hood and it affects us for the next couple days. So a lot of them expected us to fail bro” (FG 1).
The youth mentor shared an insightful analysis on teachers’ lack of cultural competency, teachers’ unfamiliarity with the community’s living conditions, and students’ social-emotional needs, especially those who live in a single-parent household, are gang-affiliated, drug abusers, teenage parents, and/or suffer from post and present traumatic stress disorder (PPTSD).

**Students’ struggles.** Many of local students expressed their “counterstories” (Yosso, 2006) about THS and the main factors that influenced youth to do poorly in school and/or leave high school altogether. The youths’ stories focused on students’ who struggled to pay attention inside the classroom and the consequences that they endured as a result. One youth stated that, “I get distracted easily so I’m just trying to stay focused” (FG 3). Another youth admitted that he misbehaved in school and says that, “I be acting up in school and getting in trouble with teachers” (FG 3). Another youth claimed that they always got into trouble with the teachers. One youth alleged that, “I have been getting in trouble because I talk a lot and yell back at my teachers” (FG 3). The findings showcased that those students who struggled to focus in the classroom sooner or later were labeled as the “disruptive students,” which students were then excluded from instruction and sent to the discipline office for misbehavior issues.

Youth also shared the consequences that they experienced as a result of leaving or being forced out of Tenorio High School. One older youth replied that, “I wasn't focused, my priorities were not set on school, I was on party mode” (FG 3). Another youth expressed that, “I never paid attention in my classes, just worried about how I looked instead of how my grades looked. I was worried about girls, not my classes and books” (FG 3). According to one youth, he attributed the lack of attention and involvement in school to him leaving high school. He stated, “I lost focus in high school, lost my grades, after that I gave up” (FG 3). This student described how difficult it became for him to catch up academically and why he “gave up.” In many other cases, older THS
students felt that they do not want to graduate at the age of 20 and preferred to leave high school voluntarily, while others resorted to alternative schools to earn a G.E.D. degree.

**Students’ suspension, expulsion, and push out stories.** Many THS student shared their personal stories on school punishment for smoking marijuana, vandalism of school property, fist fighting with peers, cussing at teachers, and/or loitering inside and outside of school grounds. According to a youth mentor, who attended THS during the late 1980s and early 1990s, he shared that he was:

“suspended like 16 times, for fighting mostly, from 89-93, those were the bad years at THS because of racial tensions, I had some black friends but you know when the fights break out, we had to do what we had to do. One guard didn't like me, every time he would see me would stop and search me. Like there were dudes who looked a lot more gangster that me but he would always target me. So I got suspended a lot” (FG 1).

Another youth commented that ever since his first year in Tenorio High School, he became involved in many incidents: “I got suspended a lot for tagging, fighting, pulling fire alarm, talking, respecting teachers, talking shit to security guards, for some petty stuff like dropping the flag polls, being in places I’m not supposed to be at school or wrong time” (FG 1).

Another student said that he “used get suspended a lot, my attitude was really bad with teachers, after the punishment, it had to be my attendance” (FG 1). Once students were labeled as the school’s “troublemakers and safety threats,” many of the youth were profiled and harassed as soon as they enter the school building. According to one youth, he shared that school officials knew him as a “high flyer,” and stated that, “I was getting in trouble for attendance, my grades got affected, then I dropped out” (FG 1). The findings signified that these particular students were seen as gang members, high truancy students, and/or marked as “high flyers,” which
justified their detention, suspension, and/or expulsion from school. Other students’ felt that they were so far behind with their grades and attendance that it became impossible to catch up and graduate from THS in a timely manner.

**Family and friends push out stories.** Most of the Boys and Men of Color also shared their friends and family members’ stories and the various reasons they left THS. Moreover, participants shared the hostile and punitive practices at schools, the social pressures from gangs and drugs in the community, and students’ struggles to pay graduation fees and balance school life while fulfilling their employment obligations. One youth mentor stated that:

“half of my family dropped out of THS. My oldest brother, who is 39, still don’t have his GED. A few others brothers and sisters along with my peers and friends dropped out. They didn't finish because of gang banging, they were demos [retained students], they weren’t cool with being in there because they felt too old” (FG 2).

Another youth shared his story about school and said that:

“I dropped out, my older brother, and a bunch of guys from the neighborhood that I know. I know at least like 40 people who dropped out from THS. Some females got pregnant but a lot of guys were not motivated to go to school… Nobody really took it serious, everyone had a low GPA, everyone wanted to sell drugs and gang bang, bad influences was also another reason why a lot of guys didn't finish” (FG 2).

According to one youth, he:

“dropped out twice, my little brother got dropped too. That's both of us. Me I stopped caring for a while. My brother was the same thing but his attendance was what killed him. I had a couple of my cousins and uncles that dropped out too. My mom and my dad, really my whole family” (FG 1).
The stories showed that “dropping” out of Tenorio High School was common in students’ families and among other peers in the community. In many cases, the stereotype effect of THS affects the perception of many local youth even before they enter Tenorio High School. Since THS endured from high rates of school stress and poor holding power (Valencia, 2011), the school was known among the local community as a “dropout school” because many of the students are “pushed out,” as a result to the zero tolerance culture.

Moreover, other factors that forced students and their families to leave school prematurely were also due to financial issues, such as high school graduation fees, teen pregnancy, and employment obligations. One student said that his sister “dropped” out of THS because “she didn’t like the school because they made her pay extra money for her diploma” (FG 1). The student said that his sister did not earn her high school diploma because she was unable to pay THS’s graduation fees. Another young man asserted that he left school because “I got kicked out or dropped because I had my son” (FG 2). The young man missed too many school days because he needed to find a job to financially support his newborn child and his family. According to another youth, he stated that both his siblings did not finish Tenorio High School because, “my two brothers, one wanted to be a gang banger and the other wanted to work already” (FG 2). Overall, the findings explicated that there were a host of issues that pushes, directly and indirectly, particular Mexican American students to leave Tenorio High School.

**Youths’ Advice and Recommendations**

**From Youth, For Youth**

This major theme focuses on the advice and recommendations that former and current THS students’ offered to current and future THS students, community leaders, and school officials. Students shared the importance of education in order for students to establish core
character values, secure employment, and prepare for professional success. One youth responded to the question: Why is school important to you? The student claimed that the “school is important because it teaches you the core values like hard work, determined, dedicated. It also teaches you rules” (FG 3). According to one participant, who was a teen father, he expressed that school:

“is important because school can help you get a good job man. You don't have to worry about buying ‘micas and shit’ [fake social security cards]. I’m 17 and I have a daughter and I’m looking for a job to support my daughter. It’s hard for me to get a job because I’m young. Man I wished I was back in school so I can at least get my GED and get a good job” (FG 3).

It is also worthy to note that this young man has an immigration barrier, where he was forced to buy a “mica” (fake identification card) in order to work a factory job that pays minimum wage.

Another youth said that school was important because “it will determine how successful you will be in life. If you go to school, you can basically be whatever you want in life” (FG 3). The findings showed THS students value their education but regret their misbehavior and academic mistakes in school. The youth hoped that future THS students take advantage of their local high school because THS can “teach you core values… rules” and provided you the skills to “get you a good job,” which also determines “how successful you will be in life.”

In addition, all of the youth shared their personal consejos (advice) for youth to stay in school, such as join afterschool programs and seek advice from mentors in the school to help student make wise decisions. Students recommended that current and future THS students to “stay in school” (FG 2). A youth mentor noted that THS students need to “take care of business, get a C average at least to pass your classes” in order for students to graduate on time. A youth
suggested that students should “join programs” (FG 2), such as extra-curricular programs, athletic teams, and social clubs. Youth also needed to become involved with community organizations after school and/or “find a girl that can keep you out of trouble” (FG 2). One student said that THS students need “make smart decisions” and learn how “to be independent” because young people can easily be influenced by peers inside and outside of Tenorio High School.

Former students also encouraged future THS students to become autonomous because if not, then they are more likely to fall into negative peer and community pressures, such as criminal activity, drug abuse, and gang involvement. According to one youth, he urged current and future students not to “fall into peer pressure and leave at the right time” in order to avoid getting in trouble with the police or falling as a victim to street violence (FG 2). Another youth suggested to current students that they need to, “stay in school, stay out of the streets, [and] do good in school” and avoid the criminal path in life (FG 3). The recommendations that youth offered demonstrated that former and current youth were concerned about the academic plight and professional livelihoods of current and future THS students. They also advised students to “stay away from drugs and streets” because gang and drug involvement have lifetime consequences for young Mexican American males in “México Town,” such as illiteracy, imprisonment, deportation, unemployment, physical injuries, and/or an early death.

For Community Building

Community relationships. Moreover, students’ also offered suggestions for community organizations and neighborhood leaders to improve the livelihoods of students and the overall conditions of the community. According to an older youth mentor, he described the plight of the neighborhood and recommended that the two neighboring communities work together in order to
strengthen relations between African Americans and Mexican Americans and simultaneously uplift both neighborhoods:

“in our city we still segregated. It's a bigger issue because that's how the city is set up. I think that is by design, they don't want us to interact because if we really got together, those that don't have the resources, no ones is going to give it to us. We gotta fight for it. So it’s systematic how they set it up because the more people that vote, then we have a better chance of getting someone who represents our best interests. Right now it’s not happening. As a result, the whole neighborhood suffers so for me I would like to continue doing what we have here and broadcast it to a higher level. Like using this [church] space to come together and figure out how we can better communicate, I don't know what that looks like, maybe through sports or cultural workshops or watching a movie or documentaries. I think this is the best place in the neighborhood to do it” (FG 2).

The youth mentor’s testimony sheds light on Chicago’s urban landscape and the unequal distribution of resources for particular Communities of Color. He also advised youth to use the church space for community building and as a place where people can “come together and figure out how we can better communicate” between both racial/ethnic groups. In this case, the youth mentor sees the church as a safe haven, academic support center, and recreational facility for youth to utilize in an effort to keep kids off the streets, help them to excel academically, and instill sportsmanship skills on and off the court.

Moreover, another youth leader motivated youth to become the leaders they wish to see in their community, such as “lead by example” and/or “help others like others have helped us” (FG 1). He stated that, “you guys can be the mentors and leaders of the community, that’s why
we are here to encourage you to be better. You guys are the future so we have to make that difference” (FG 2). An older youth suggested that students from both communities should come together in order to learn from each other. He said, “I think attending black and brown male summits… peace seminars and orientations can help build relationship with our neighbors” (FG 2). Another youth said, “I think a parade down O Street will bring people together” (FG 2) and could be a great opportunity to unite both racial groups because O Street is literally the border street that divides the two adjacent neighborhoods.

Recreational safe havens. This sub-section focuses on the suggestions that youth have in relation to recreational safe spaces for youth to utilize in the neighborhood. Participants’ voiced their concerns that in order for youth to be safe and successful in the community, students needed more access to recreational opportunities and green space. According to one youth, he said, “I think having more programs like gyms, churches, [and] sports” (FG 2) open to the public can help kids be more involved with positive alternatives after school hours. For example, a youth stated that, “y’all can help by opening the gym more so I can keep off the streets” (FG 3). Another youth expressed that he does not, “really care about field trips, as long as you keep the gym open so we can play basketball” (FG 3). This particular youth cared more about keeping the gym open than going on educational field trips because the church space was one of the only safe havens for youth to feel comfortable as they played sports in the community. Two other youth also urged youth mentors to “stay involved with us, keep us away from a lot of stuff” (FG 3). Many of these youth informed church mentors to focus on mentoring the young people in the community. For example, one youth stated, “keep the young ones closer to you because they get influenced faster and easier… bring in youth into the center [church]” (FG 3) as a way to keep students off the streets and engage kids in positive youth development programs.
Youths’ gratification for church’s space and mentors. This sub-section focuses on the messages that elucidate the positive remarks that youth shared about the Si Se Puede Church and its’ youth mentors. One youth showed how grateful he was for the church’s space and leaders. He stated, “thank you to all the mentors for giving us all these chances, doing stuff for us, providing us food, and keeping us off the street” (FG 3). Another youth remarked, “I thank [leader] for helping me with school” (FG 3) and that “[leader] does a lot for me, like takes me out to eat” (FG 3). According to another youth, he was thankful for his mentors and friends because they provided a social and emotional support system when he lost his mother to a health illness. He shared that, “all you guys and [leader] helped me when I lost my mom to cancer” (FG 3). The next youth showed his appreciation for the youth mentors and stated, “I thank [leader] for helping me a lot, hopefully I can do something better with my life other than smoking and gang banging everyday” (FG 3). According to another youth, he claimed that the youth leaders in the Si Se Puede Church go out of their way to help youth in the community. He said, “I think yall are doing enough for us already” (FG 3). The youths’ testimonies described a host of the services that the youth mentors provided for students in the Si Se Puede Church. Moreover, youth mentors intentionally and consistently empowered youth to become responsible citizens through positive development programs, recreational activities, and politically active. Overall, the youths’ perception of the church space was primarily seen as a safe haven from street violence, an academic support center where students can receive free tutoring services after school hours, and as a recreational communal space where young and older people can congregate and have fun through sport programs. Although the Church’s pastor and youth mentors intentionally attempted to instill religious beliefs, values, and a Christian ideology in youth via biblical and prayer circles, the majority of the youth did not utilize the church for religious purposes or
motives. Rather, the youth accessed the church’s space for educational (tutoring, reentry to high school), recreational (gym space and sport equipment), social services resources (State ID, library card, welfare), economic opportunities (jobs, internships, resume advising), and local political involvement (community services, leadership roles).

For School Officials

**Culture and climate.** This sub-section focuses on the recommendations that students offered to THS’s administrators, teachers, and staff personnel. One youth said that school officials needed, “to give kids incentives to attend school on time like no uniform days” (FG 1). Another student recommended that school administrators should organize students’ schedules as ways to keep students engaged in school. He asserted that school counselors should allow students to “make your own schedule like in college” (FG 1). Another participant recommended for students to join social and athletic clubs after school. However, one of the limitations for extracurricular activities was that most or all of these clubs or programs require a specific G.P.A. requirement in order to participate (above a 2.0 GPA). One youth suggested that THS should “lower G.P.A. [requirements] for sports involvement for students” (FG 1) in order for more youth to access recreational resources and as a way to keep students engage in their academics. They also suggested that the school should keep their doors open after school hours for open gym nights like basketball or volleyball games open to students who are not involved in athletic clubs.

**Building relationships.** Students’ recommended that the school should build healthy relationships in the high school and across both communities. As I asked youth: What are some tips you have for fixing some of the issues inside of THS? One youth stated that teachers should, “listen to students” (FG 2). Another student replied, “student leaders should speak to the
principal about students’ concerns,” such as a student government representative that speaks on behalf of the students’ needs to the school’s administrators. Another student suggested that the principal should start “a program where parents and teachers can come together and talk” (FG 2). According to a youth mentor, he offered his idea for building relationships between the two main racial groups:

“I say more one-on-one talks with people who have conflicts in schools. I think as youth, you also need to educate your family about Latinos or Blacks because sometimes people be like f**k them Latinos. I think it comes from your household. I figured talking more one-on-one with each other can help us come together” (FG 2).

The participants offered a few practical solutions to complex educational dilemmas and community issues, such as administrators and teachers need to listen to students’ needs via a student government or student representative in the Local School Council meetings. Youth also provided suggestions to create a space for teachers and parents to listen to each other. Youth also said that there should be opportunities to build relationships across racial groups in order to create a healthier learning environment at THS and in “México Town.”

**Alternatives to suspension and expulsions.** Finally, youth also provided a host of recommendations to alleviate some of the issues of suspensions and expulsions for Boys of Color at Tenorio High School. One youth said students should not get suspended right away because “it depends on what they do… give them detention for simple stuff” (FG 2). Two other youth replied with similar ideas, such as “make them [students] do community service instead of kicking you out. I rather put you to work” (FG 2). Another student said, “make them [students] do something they hate doing like clean the bathroom… community service, clean the hallways” (FG 2). Although these ideas do not holistically solve the complex issues of suspension,
expulsion, and misconduct, these students did provided some practical alternatives to suspension and expulsion practices, such as detention, restorative conversations, and community service projects. If given the opportunity to voice their ideas in regards to consequences, students are able to create student-led solutions that more effective than the school’s discipline policy.

Moreover, a youth mentor provided a key solution that has the potential to improve the suspension and expulsion practices and outcomes at Tenorio High School. According to one youth leader, he stated that,

“I think a suspension center outside of school and have a community agency lead the center so if someone gets suspended, instead of letting them kids go home for a few days, force them to go to the center. That center can have anger management classes to help them. Like a two-hour class on restorative justice with kids who got into a fight. You have to be creative because some administrators think that its better off if we suspend the kid for ten days because it gives the teacher ten days to work with the students they know are going to be paying attention because they don't have to worry about the kids creating distraction like every time I have to tell you to pick up your pants, go to class, stop throwing paper, stop talking, every time there’s a disruption, time is wasted from learning. So administrators would prefer to suspend you for ten days to avoid dealing with you so that way the rest of the class can learn. That's why it’s better for the center to worry about them [students]. It would be like school but not so much like in school but more like learn life skills for kids who are dealing with anger and can’t count to ten. Little stuff like that would help” (FG 2).

The youth leader advocated for THS to build relationships with community organizations in order to assist students to get back on track academically while students are suspended or
expelled. For instance, if a student is expelled from school, then all the instructional minutes are lost. If Tenorio High School allows organizations to complement their education efforts, then it is a win-win for all parties involved.

To sum up, I discussed the results from the focus groups, peace circles, and prayer circles with Boys and Men of Color in a neighborhood church. In this context and with this specific population (both Mexican American and African American Boys and Men), I focused on “restorative circles” that were held pre, during, and post basketball, softball, boxing, and football events inside and outside the church. I documented the different forms of resistance and resiliency that youth demonstrated as they were excluded from public school, parks, and other community spaces. The findings revealed that even though many BMC/MBM were excluded from educational and social services, youth remained hopeful and resilient agents of change in relation to creating their own spaces for educational, social, and recreational opportunities (Freire, 2004). The “Si Se Puede Iglesia” was an exceptional community center and research site because the church complemented the local high school in numerous ways.
CHAPTER 7
LOVE, HOPE, AND RESILIENCY IN MEXICAN CHICAGO

In order to build a better today and a greater tomorrow at Tenorio High School in “México Town” and neighboring communities, my greatest hope is to utilize the findings in this dissertation to address, confront, and disrupt America’s “cradle to prison pipeline” and to provide alternative prevention and intervention programs that can deter the educational and social exclusion of Mexican Boys and Men at THS in Mexican Chicago. In this final chapter, I conclude with a final word on the study’s contributions and the short and long-term implications for Mexican American children in America’s public education system. I then provide my professional recommendations, based on students’ testimonies, for school officials and community youth mentors. Building on the scholarship of Daniels (2012), Villenas & Deyhle, (1999), and Yamamoto (1992), I also suggest new directions for future work that can help to decrease the suspension, expulsion, policing, and criminalization of Chicago’s Boys and Men of Color. To reiterate, I argue that Chicago has a long history of criminalizing Youth of Color and Chicago Public Schools have been used as a space where “troubled or at-risk” students are systematically excluded from public schools via the Zero Tolerance discipline policy and culture of practices.

Significant Contributions

This ethnographic research study contributes to substantially, theoretically, and practically to the existing body of literature for urban education studies, Latino/Mexican American studies, youth development studies, and criminal justice studies. First, the dissertation was intended to produce any meaningful findings about the factors that influenced Mexican American male students in “México town” to leave prematurely from Tenorio High School. In
doing so, I documented students’ *testimonios* (counter narratives) about the issues that forced them to leave school early, to be suspended, or expelled from Tenorio High School.

Substantively, the findings from the twenty interviews and a dozens focus groups and prayer circles were rich and significant because the testimonies elucidated the complex issues of pedagogy, discipline, and “pushout” practices at THS, which adds to the existing body of scholarship for Latino and Mexican American male high school students in Chicago Public Schools.

Theoretically, I expanded the CRT and LatCrit theoretical assumptions as to why minority students were “pushed out” from a Chicago Public High School. Based on the students’ testimonies, I provided a variety of experiential knowledge that demonstrated different factors and issues that forced Mexican male students to leave high school early. I also built on the shoulders of the CRT and LatCrit’s scholarship to further complicate and challenge the Zero Tolerance policy’s colorblind assumptions and the impact it has on African American and Mexican American Boys and Men. For example, the Zero Tolerance discipline policy was intended to be race-neutral in theory but in practice the policy further perpetuated the academic exclusion, social disenfranchisement, and economic polarization of Students of Color in Chicago Public Schools and across urban America.

The study’s recommendations also contributed to the body of literature in relation to applied research and/or praxis. For instance, the often untold stories of the participants and the various settings in which the interviews took place (such as the local community, church, and outside of Tenorio High School) were unique and the study’s finding are likely to advance the knowledge in the fields of urban education, Latina/o and Mexican American studies, and criminal justice studies. Moreover, students’ offered recommendations to the school officials at
THS and community leaders in “México Town,” in an effort to reduce the number of at-potential, suspended, and expelled students at THS and to alleviate some of consequences of students who left or were pushed out of high school. The applied contributions are promising because they are student-led solutions and alternatives to punitive discipline policies and practices. Overall, the youths’ recommendations are purposely intended to disrupt the academic tracking of male Students of Color and the perpetuation an already economic polarized polity.

**Implications.**

The Zero Tolerance discipline policy was ineffective because the policy categorized all school discipline offenses into one category. The policy disproportionately targeted minority students, was detrimental to children’s developmental needs, and denied students equal access to educational opportunities. Ultimately, the policy sorted and regulated minority students into undesirable jobs to meet the demands of a capitalist society and the prison industrial complex. The policy hindered the professional and economic potential for poor, minority students to develop into critical citizens who could have contributed to the prosperity of our democratic society. Therefore, rather than prioritizing the demands of a neoliberalism agenda in public schooling, we ought to transform the current schooling system into a environment where students developmental needs are met and youth are prepared to be engaged citizens, community leaders, and professionals. Rather than students being sorted, regulated, and disciplined into undesirable careers, specific sectors of the workforce, and/or prison, schools ought to be a space where students can exercise their civil liberties and independently choose their future careers. It is imperative to address the educational exclusion of Mexican Boys and Men in Chicago Public Schools because if not, then there will be several dire implications that will negatively impact our schools, communities, and society at large. To sum up, the outcomes that derived from a zero
tolerance culture in schools and communities resulted in the perpetuation of educational failure for Mexican Boys and Men via pushed out, suspension, and expulsion practices. The consequences of the Zero Tolerance policy resulted in the increase of crime rates, stop-and-frisk searches and arrests, incarceration and recidivism, violent injuries, and homicide rates in Chicago. Lastly, the zero tolerance policy created several economic concerns because those “disconnected youth,” who were not enrolled in school and not employed, contributed to an already hyper-polarized polity. Those Mexican Boys and Men who have a felony conviction on their records must endure the effects of a “social death” (Cacho, 2012) because of the employment discrimination (Alexander, 2010). Returning citizens also experienced the impact of political disenfranchisement because the voting rights are eliminated for citizens’ with convictions. It is also critical to mention the impact that the ZT policy and culture has on families and communities. For some families, the ZT consequences are felt for the rest of their lives. For example, those disconnected youth never acquire a GED as they grow older, some are forced to work low-wage job as a result of not having a GED or high school diploma, and many times it also produces hostile relationships among family members where those at potential youth are stigmatized among their own relatives and peers.

Recommendations

Based on Valencia’s scholarship (2011), he urges educators that in order to alleviate some of the academic outcomes that hinders the success of Mexican American students in U.S. public schools, all educational stakeholders need to work on the conditions that contribute to the “Chicana/o school failure.” The move towards a prevention approach rather than a punitive discipline system is one aspect to transforming inner city public schools that are suffering from the effects of the Zero Tolerance culture. Noguera (1995) argued that “schools must seek ways to
create more humane learning environments, both to counter escalating violence and to transform social relationships within schools, so that those who spend their time there feel less alienated, threatened, and repressed” (p. 191). Rios (2006) research showed that the monitoring and policing of our youth through surveillance, police, and prisons are not effective in correcting the issue of student misconduct and violence in schools and communities. Ginwright, Noguera, and Cammarota (2006) argued that, “the penal state threatens the vitality of democratic engagement among youth and that we should invest in building mutual trust, democratic participation, and community building as a form of correcting the problem of youth violence in schools” (xx). All of these scholars refer to the implementation of values that restorative practices offer to all schools as a way to build relationships and prevent student misconduct.

In addition to all the recommendations mentioned in the previous findings chapters, there are three other key ideas and values that also need to be incorporated in Tenorio High School’s mission and vision statements and/or everyday practices. First, love should be the foundation of all of our thoughts and actions when interacting with students. It has come to a time where we need to care for each other in schools and our communities. Neighbors need to open their homes to youth that have no place to play because “the hate we give little infants hurts everyone” (Tupac, 1999). Secondly, hope is necessary to keep us, as human beings, motivated for the future. Without it, it is like the blind leading the blind and with no sense of direction. We must be willing to believe that our dreams are possible to accomplish and “Si Se Puede” despite the economic crisis of the Chicago Public Schools. We must listen to Cisneros as she tells us that, “I have gone away to come back. For those ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out” (1983, 110). We must embody Gandhi’s message as he urges us to “be the change that you wish to see in the world.” Lastly, we, as parents, educators, and community leaders, need to train our
students to be resilient and be the “rose that grew from concrete” (Tupac, 1999) because the reality is that there is no other option but to keep hope alive and keep moving forward.

**Restorative practices.**

The logical recommendation is to eliminate the Zero Tolerance policy in U.S. public schools and move towards a more humane approach to student discipline, such as restorative practices (RP). The philosophy of restorative practices is to provide leadership support that educates school principals, administrators, and educators on the principles and practices of restorative justice, such as relationships, respect, responsibility, restoration, and reintegration. RP aims to restore the harm that was caused between two or more parties, fosters relationships, trust, and respect among all educational and community stakeholders, encourages voluntarily active student participation, and creates a sense of community that cultivates our future generations to be engaged citizens in their schools and communities. It is evident from scholarly research that the implications of the Zero Tolerance policy demonstrates that it was ineffective and calls for immediate reform and/or substitution of the Zero Tolerance discipline model for a more effective one that can follow the above scholarly recommendations. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to document the race/ethnicity of student offenders in Chicago Public Schools as a way to juxtapose historical data to current rates of suspension and expulsion in order to keep school accountable and responsible for meeting the new expectations of restorative practices culture in public high schools. There is also a need to follow up on the implementation of the restorative practices in Chicago Public Schools and the *de facto* punishment that is taking place now that the CPS Board of Education abandoned the Zero Tolerance policy and language from their student code of conduct in 2012. The following recommendations are intended to reform the student code of conduct, based on scholarly suggestions and the philosophy of restorative practices:
• The U.S. commission on civil rights should recommend the incorporation of preventative approaches as an effort to eliminate the “push-out” practices in U.S. public schools, such as the implementation of restorative practices, especially in schools with the highest numbers of suspensions and expulsions

• The U.S. commission on civil rights should conduct a re-investigation on the racial disparities related to Zero Tolerance policy in Chicago Public Schools to verify if ZT practices are not continuing despite the abandonment of the ZT policy in 2012

• The U.S. commission on civil right should require schools to conduct comprehensive, consistent, and centralized school discipline reporting to eliminate racial disparities in urban public school districts and confirm that the new policy is not targeting African American and Latino boys disproportionally

• U.S. public school districts should set and meet measurable and quantitative goals to reduce the overall number of suspensions and expulsions

• Chicago Public Schools should develop and implement a suspension/expulsion/transfer plan for students who are suspended, expelled, and/or transferred out of school

• Chicago Public Schools should be responsible for tracking transfer and/or expelled students by verifying that the alternative school(s) indeed enrolled transfer/expelled student(s)

• Chicago Public Schools should create a plan of preventions and interventions efforts that incorporates students-led solutions in the school’s continuous improvement work plan that focus on the high school’s climate conditions
• Chicago Public Schools should provide additional academic, recreational, and vocational resources and services for students during/after school, such as offer more AP courses and one-on-one tutoring, sport teams, summer internships, and job training opportunities
• Chicago Public Schools should develop an Latina/o and African American studies curriculum for high school students in order to strengthen community relationships across the two minority student groups in the local high school
• Chicago Public Schools should implement student-led suggestions to repair relationships between Latino and Black students in CPS and create numerous community-led projects that can unite both racial neighborhoods
• Tenorio High School should partner with community organizations, parent clubs, educational researchers and foundations to implement restorative practices, community improvement projects, and other intervention strategies inside and outside of THS
• Tenorio High School should partner with federal and state agencies, counseling providers, and community organizations to advice and reconnect “disconnected youth” in the neighborhood
• Tenorio High School should create a “safe space” or peace room in the building where students can benefit from 1 on 1 mentoring or a restorative conversation.
• Tenorio High School should beautify the interior and exterior of the high school (including classrooms, bathrooms, hallways, front and rear of building) to brighten the school’s learning environment

Future work.

Given that the scope of the ethnographic research study was solely focused on Mexican Boys and Men at Tenorio High School and “México Town,” I decided to expand my future work
by encompassing the voices of African American students (boys and girls), school personnel (teachers, administrators, and staff), students’ parents and neighbors (mothers, siblings, and residents), and neighborhood organizations and youth leaders in order to document various perspectives on complex issues, such as urban school failure, street violence, and mass incarceration in Chicago. My objective is to analyze and compare three to five Chicago Public High Schools in order to further explore and complicate the findings gathered in the dissertation. The future work would be based on a participatory action research methodology which includes, in-school and out-of-school observations, in-depth interviews, focus groups, surveys, and questionnaires with current and former students, student’ parents, school officials, and community leaders. My future work is based on the principle of solidarity and reciprocity, where I am transparent on the steps taken to gather the testimonies and intentionally collaborate with the community organizations in an effort to produce meaningful scholarship.

Ultimately, I would love to revisit the work of Irving Spergel (2007), who dedicated a whole manuscript to the issues of gangs, violence, and crime, entitled “The youth gang problem: The Mexico Town project.” Spergel was effective because he collaborated with numerous key institutions to develop a gang suppression and intervention project to decrease the rates of crime and violence that occurred within this specific community. It is important to mention that Spergel was a tenured faculty from the University of Chicago when he published his work on “México Town.” Unfortunately, he is now deceased. Spergel was particularly successful in gathering the quantitative data on crime and gang involvement because he was connected to a prestigious university that had political clout in the city of Chicago, where he collaborated with governmental and criminal agencies, such as the Chicago Police Department, Cook County Juvenile Center, Cook County Jail, and Illinois Department of Corrections. In essence, my future
work will slightly draw on Spergel’s gang intervention model in an effort to re-develop and implement a new project that is focused on the education conditions and outcomes of “México Town” and based on my native/insider scholar’s point of reference.
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Do you identify as a Mexican, Chicano, and/or Mexican-American?

Calling all Current and Former
Farragut Academy High School Students

- Are you a Mexican male?
- Are you bilingual?
- Do you live in the Little Village community?
- Have you ever thought of leaving school or did you ever leave school before graduating?
- Have you ever experienced any discipline/attendance issues?

If you answered yes to ANY of the above questions, then we would like to hear about your experiences at school.

Project Goals: Miguel A. Saucedo, from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is interested in hearing about your educational goals, challenges, and strategies as a student of the Chicago Public School (CPS) system. You will need to contact Miguel at the information below and schedule an interview. The interview will last from 1 to 2 hours and you will need your parent’s consent to participate. By participating you can contribute to policy changes, community projects, and share your ideas, strategies, and suggestions with your peers and teachers.

For information or if interested please contact:
Miguel A. Saucedo
saucedo2@illinois.edu
(773) 704-2154
(Please note that this interview protocol is based on a semi-structured interview and the wording of each question will be delivered in the present tense or past depending on whether I am interviewing current students or adult former students).

Interview Protocol:

Personal & Family Background

1. Where were you born?
2. What ethnicity do you identify with? Why?
3. How old are you?
4. What year are you in school?
5. Where did you graduate from (8th grade)?
6. Tell me about your family structure, who do you live with?
7. Do you speak Spanish at home?
8. How many years of school did your parents and/or guardians complete?
9. What is/are your parents’ and/or guardians’ occupation(s)?
10. How many siblings do you have?
11. How many years of school have they completed?
12. What is their occupation?
13. Do you have a job? Why or why not?
14. Are you involved in any groups, clubs, or teams in or out of school?
15. How are decisions made in your family about you?
16. What are the rules in your house? Who sets them?
17. How do you feel about those rules?
18. What happens when you disagree with your parents or when you disobey the rules?
19. What are some problems you see in your community?
20. Do you think these problems influence your academics? If so, how?

Goals

1. What do you want to be when you grow up?
2. How did you decide on these plans?
3. Will school help you achieve these goals?
4. What obstacles do you think you might have in reaching these goals?
5. Do you talk to your parents about these plans? Why or why not?
6. What are your parents’ goals for you?
7. Do you think you will achieve these goals?
8. Do you have anyone who inspires you to do better in life?
9. Have your parents ever given you any that kind of advice such as consejos/dichos?
10. Is this advice important to you? If so, why?
11. How do consejos/dichos (advice) influence what you do in or out of school?

Education

1. How do you feel about school? What do you dislike/like?
2. How has your experience in school been with teachers? counselors? peers? classes?
3. Do you feel that your teachers expect to graduate or drop out of school?
4. Do you feel that your parents expect you to graduate or drop out of school?
5. What have been some of your biggest problems with school?
6. How do you deal with them?
7. What would you say are the most common issues Mexican students face in school?
8. What have been some of your positive experiences in school?
9. Are you involved in projects, groups, activities outside of school?
10. Do your grades prevent you from participating in after-school activities?
11. Where do you get your information about educational resources (college, scholarships)?
12. Do you expect to graduate from high school?
13. Do you think some students decide to drop out or are they kicked out involuntarily?
14. Why do you think some students stay in school and others drop out?
15. Who do you turn to for help when dealing with school problems?
16. Do you know anyone who has dropped out? What were their reason(s) for leaving?

**Discipline**

1. Have you ever been in any discipline trouble at school? If so, what happen?
2. What was the punishment? What happen?
3. Did your parents get notified about your punishment? If so, what were their reactions?
4. Have you ever been suspended? If so, for what reason?
5. What did you do while you were suspended? Give me some examples.
6. Have you ever been expelled? If so, for what reason?
7. How do your parents cope with your suspension, expulsion, or dropout?
8. Have you ever been arrested in or outside of school? If so, for what reason?
9. If so, what was the charge for your violation?
10. Did you getting arrested affect you in any way?
11. If you get in trouble with the police, do you think his might have some effects on you?
12. Do you any of your friends who have dropped out due discipline problems?
13. Tell me about it; what was their punishment? What were the results? Lessons?
14. What is the connection between behavior/discipline placement and race/ethnicity?
15. What is the connection between behavior/discipline placement and gender?
16. In your experience have you seen more students from specific background or gender in in-school suspension classrooms? Can you think of any reasons why this is?
17. What are the short-term or immediate results of being placed under an academic track of “at risk” or in-school or out-of-school suspension, expulsion?
18. What do you think will be long-term outcome of being academically placed under an academic track of “at risk” or in-school or out-of-school suspension, expulsion?
19. Will this academic/discipline placement be beneficial or disadvantageous?
20. How do you think this academic/discipline placement will impact your future goals?
21. What placement do you see yourself in? How do you think this will impact you?
22. Have you ever been treated differently because of your academic/discipline placement?
23. Do you think that students who are punished have the same exposure to educational opportunities as students who don’t get punished? Why or why not?
24. Do you know any of your friends or siblings who dropped out of high school? If so, what where their reason(s) for leaving school?
25. Have you considered dropping out? Why or why not?

**Policy Recommendations**

1. What suggestions can you offer to improve the Mexican American male drop out problem in your school or community?
2. What suggestions can you offer to improve student attendance?
3. What suggestions can you offer to improve the discipline problem at school?
4. Do you have any consejos/dichos for future students (at risk boys) who will attend FCA?
5. Is there anything else that I did not ask you that you would like to share?
APPENDIX C
STUDENT ASSENT
FORMER STUDENT (ADULT) CONSENT
PARENT CONSENT
Dear Students,

Miguel A. Saucedo invites you to take part in a University of Illinois research project exploring the experiences of Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, and/or Mexicano students. We want to learn what kind of issues students in the Chicago Public School System (CPS) face and experience in their daily lives. This letter tells you what the project is about so you can decide whether or not you want to be involved. In order to participate, you must have parent consent, be a current student of Farragut High School, and identify as being from Mexican descent. The project is directed by Dr. Yoon Pak and Mr. Miguel Saucedo from the Educational Policy Studies Department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, contact information is below.

If you want to participate, you will take part in a one-on-one interview at the location of your choice, at a time that does not interfere with school activities. The interview will include questions about different parts of your life, including experiences, culture, school, family, and everyday challenges. The interview will last from one-to-two hours and will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes.

**Risks and Benefits**

There are no risks beyond those of everyday life to the participants in this project. If you do not want to answer any of the questions in the interview, you may skip them. You can even withdraw from the project if you decide you no longer want to participate.

The results of this project will be used to document the experiences of Mexican students in the CPS system. In addition, suggestions and results will help researchers compile a report that can help identify and improve issues affecting Mexican students, families, and teachers which can then be made available for educators, administrators, parents, and students.

**Privacy**

Your privacy is very important to us, and we will take steps to protect the information you share. You will be assigned a secret ID number that will be used to keep track of your answers without your using your name or any information that might identify you. Only researchers will have access to a list linking your name and ID number. This list will be destroyed after the project is over. All answers and information will be kept in a secure place that is accessible only to researchers.
Your right to ask questions

If you would like to ask questions about the project before agreeing to participate, call Miguel A. Saucedo at (773) 704-2154 or saucedo2@illinois.edu. You can also contact Mr. Saucedo’s advisor, Dr. Yoon Pak at (217) 300-2819 or via email at yoonpak@illinois.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at (217) 333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu

Freedom to stop

Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your grades or status at Farragut High School.

Assent

Your signature shows that you understand the information in this letter and want to be part of this research project. You will be given a copy of this letter. Anticipated circumstances under which the participant’s involvement in the study might be terminated by the investigator without regard to the participants assent. Please note that one of the parent’s (or legal guardian) consent forms must be completed before the beginning of the interview. Also, the interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes only.

I give permission for my interview to be audio-recorded ___Yes ___No

_________________________________
Name (print)

_________________________________  ___________________
Signature                      Date

Signature of interviewer

Investigator:

Miguel A. Saucedo (773) 704-2154
Estimado Estudiante:

Miguel A. Saucedo del Departamento de Política de Educación en la Universidad de Illinois en Urbana-Champaign está trabajando en un proyecto para aprender sobre la experiencias de estudiantes de descendencia Mexicana y quisiera entrevistarte. Quisiera investigar sobre los desafíos que enfrentan y las estrategias que utilizan los estudiantes del Sistema Escolar Público de Chicago (CPS). Esta carta es para informar a los estudiantes si quiere participar en el proyecto. Si quieres participar, necesita que recibes permiso de tu padre/madre, y tienes que ser estudiante de Farragut Career Academy. Los directores del proyecto es Dra. Yoon Pak y Miguel Saucedo, del Departamento de Política de Educación en la Universidad de Illinois en Urbana-Champaign.

Si está usted de acuerdo, con el permiso de tus padre(s), tu tomarás parte en una entrevista, que durara entre 1 y 2 horas, y se llevara a cabo en la Escuela Farragut o lugar que usted elija. Preferiblemente, será después de horario de clases para evitar interferir con las actividades escolares. La entrevista incluirá preguntas diferentes aspectos de su vida, cultura, educación, opiniones e las experiencias familiares.

Tu participación es completamente voluntaria y no podrá ser entrevistado sin el consentimiento de usted. Tú tienes el derecho de retirar tu consentimiento y parar de participar en cualquier momento sin ningún problema. Tu decisión de parar no afectara tus grados, la relación con la entrevistadora ni la escuela.

**Privacidad y Beneficios**

Toda la información colectada e identidades será totalmente confidencial. Se les asignara números y otros nombres para asegurar la privacidad de los participantes. Los resultados de este proyecto serán incluidos en un reporte que documentara las experiencias de los estudiantes de descendencia Mexicana en CPS. Sus sugestiones y opiniones también ayudarán a formular un reporte para mejorar los desafíos que enfrentan los estudiantes Mexicanos, sus familias, maestros que será disponible para administradores, padres, educadores, y estudiantes.

**Riesgos**

Para los participantes del proyecto no hay riesgos diferentes a los de la vida diaria. Si usted no quiere contestar algunas preguntas de la entrevista puedo pasarlas. También descontinuar la entrevista si no quiere participar más.

**Su Derecho de Hacer Preguntas**

Si usted tiene preguntas sobre el proyecto antes de participar, por favor llame a Miguel A. Saucedo al (773) 704-2154 o mandar un correo electrónico a saucedo2@illinois.edu. También puede preguntar a la directora de la investigación a Dra. Yoon Pak al (217) 300-2819 o por correo electrónico yoonpak@illinois.edu. Si usted tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como...
participante en este estudio, por favor contacte con la Universidad de Illinois (Comité de Ética) al (217) 333-2670 o por correo electrónico irb@illinois.edu.

Consentimiento

Por favor indique debajo si usted da permiso de participe en este proyecto y regrese la forma a la investigador. Al firmar usted acepta que entiende la información contenida en esta carta y que esta de acuerdo que participe. Por favor de mantener la otra copia de esta forma.

SI / NO (circular uno) voy a ___________________________ (nombre) participar en el proyecto.

Estoy de acuerdo en que graben (audio) la entrevista ___Si ___No

___________________________________________________________
Nombre (letra de molde)

___________________________________________________________  _______________________
Firma Fecha

________________________
Firma de la investigador

Investigador:
Miguel A. Saucedo (773) 704-2154
Dear Former Student,

Miguel A. Saucedo invites you to take part in a University of Illinois research project exploring the experiences of Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, and/or Mexicano students. We want to learn what kind of issues students in the Chicago Public School System (CPS) face and experience in their daily lives. This letter tells you what the project is about so you can decide whether or not you want to be involved. In order to participate, you must give consent to be interviewed and must be a former student of Farragut High School, and identify as being from Mexican descent. The project is directed by Dr. Yoon Pak and Mr. Miguel Saucedo from the Education Policy Studies Department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, contact information is below.

If you want to participate, you will take part in a one-on-one interview at the location of your choice, at a time that does not interfere with school or work activities. The interview will include questions about different parts of your life, including experiences, culture, school, family, and everyday challenges. The interview will last from one-to-two hours and will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes.

**Risks and Benefits**

There are no risks beyond those of everyday life to the participants in this project. If you do not want to answer any of the questions in the interview, you may skip them. You can even withdraw from the project if you decide you no longer want to participate.

The results of this project will be used to document the experiences of Mexican students in the CPS system. In addition, suggestions and results will help researchers compile a report that can help identify and improve issues affecting Mexican students, families, and teachers which can then be made available for educators, administrators, parents, and students.

**Privacy**

Your privacy is very important to us, and we will take steps to protect the information you share. You will be assigned a secret ID number that will be used to keep track of your answers without your using your name or any information that might identify you. Only researchers will have access to a list linking your name and ID number. This list will be destroyed after the project is over. All answers and information will be kept in a secure place that is accessible only to researchers.
Your right to ask questions

If you would like to ask questions about the project before agreeing to participate, call Miguel A. Saucedo at (773) 704-2154 or saucedo2@illinois.edu. You can also contact Mr. Saucedo’s advisor, Dr. Yoon Pak at (217) 300-2819 or via email at yoonpak@illinois.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at (217) 333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

Freedom to stop

Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect.

Consent

Your signature shows that you understand the information in this letter and want to be part of this research project. You will be given a copy of this letter. Anticipated circumstances under which the participant’s involvement in the study might be terminated by the investigator without regard to the participant’s consent. Please note that forms must be completed before the beginning of the interview. Also, the interview will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes only.

I give permission for my interview to be audio-recorded ___Yes ___No

_________________________________
Name (print)

_________________________________________  ________________
Signature                                Date

___________________________________
Signature of interviewer

Investigator:

Miguel A. Saucedo (773) 704-2154
Estimado Estudiante:

Miguel A. Saucedo del Departamento de Política de Educación en la Universidad de Illinois en Urbana-Champaign está trabajando en un proyecto para aprender sobre la experiencia de estudiantes de descendencia Mexicana y quisiera entrevistarte. Quisiera investigar sobre los desafíos que enfrentan y las estrategias que utilizan los estudiantes del Sistema Escolar Público de Chicago (CPS). Esta carta es para informar a los estudiantes si quiere participar en el proyecto. Si quieres participar, necesitas que recibas permiso de tu padre/madre, y tienes que ser estudiante de Farragut Career Academy. Los directores del proyecto es Dra. Yoon Pak y Miguel Saucedo, del Departamento de Política de Educación en la Universidad de Illinois en Urbana-Champaign.

Si estás de acuerdo, con el permiso de tus padre(s), tu tomarás parte en una entrevista, que durará entre 1 y 2 horas, y se llevará a cabo en un lugar que elijas. Preferiblemente, será después de horario de clases para evitar interferir con las actividades escolares. La entrevista incluirá preguntas diferentes aspectos de tu vida, cultura, educación, opiniones e las experiencias familiares.

Tu participación es completamente voluntaria y no podrá ser entrevistado sin el consentimiento de usted. Tú tienes el derecho de retirar tu consentimiento y parar de participar en cualquier momento sin ningún problema. Tu decisión de parar no afectará tus grados, la relación con la entrevistadora ni la escuela.

**Privacidad y Beneficios**

Toda la información colectada e identidades será totalmente confidencial. Se les asignara números y otros nombres para asegurar la privacidad de los participantes. Los resultados de este proyecto serán incluidos en un reporte que documentara las experiencias de los estudiantes de descendencia Mexicana en CPS. Sus sugerencias y opiniones también ayudaran a formular un reporte para mejorar los desafíos que enfrentan los estudiantes Mexicanos, sus familias, maestros que será disponible para administradores, padres, educadores, y estudiantes.

**Riesgos**

Para los participantes del proyecto no hay riesgos diferentes a los de la vida diaria. Si usted no quiere contestar algunas preguntas de la entrevista puedo pasarlas. También descontinuar la entrevista si no quiere participar más.

**Su Derecho de Hacer Preguntas**

Si usted tiene preguntas sobre el proyecto antes de participar, por favor llame a Miguel A. Saucedo al (773) 704-2154 o mandar un correo electrónico a saucedo2@illinois.edu. También puede preguntar a la directora de la investigación a Dra. Yoon Pak al (217) 300-2819 o por correo electrónico yoonpak@illinois.edu. Si usted tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como
participante en este estudio, por favor contacte con la Universidad de Illinois (Comité de Ética) al (217) 333-2670 o por correo electrónico irb@illinois.edu.

Consentimiento

Por favor indique debajo si usted da permiso de participe en este proyecto y regrese la forma al investigador. Al firmar usted acepta que entiende la información contenida en esta carta y que esta de acuerdo que participe. Por favor de mantener la otra copia de esta forma.

**SI / NO** (circular uno) voy a __________________________ (nombre) participar en el proyecto.

Estoy de acuerdo en que graben (audio) la entrevista ___Si ___No

________________________________
Nombre (letra de molde)

________________________________
Firma                      Fecha

________________________________
Firma de la investigador

**Investigador:**
Miguel A. Saucedo (773) 704-2154
Dear Parent/Guardian:

Miguel A. Saucedo, from the Educational Policy Studies Department at the University of Illinois, is working on a research project exploring the experiences of Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, and/or Mexicano students and would like to interview your child. We want to learn what kind of issues students in the Chicago Public School System (CPS) face in their daily lives and what strategies they take on to negotiate these experiences. If you agree to have your child participate, your child will take part in a one-on-one interview at the Little Village Community Church or the location of their choice, preferably after school hours to avoid interfering with classroom activities. The interview will be audio recorded and will take from 1 to 2 hours. Questions will include topics about different parts of their life, including experiences, culture, academics, family and your opinions, challenges and strategies.

The participation of your child is voluntary and cannot be interviewed without your permission and if he agrees to participate in the project. You, as well as your child, are free to withdraw your permission and can stop participating at any time without penalty. The decision to discontinue will not affect the status of your child, your relationship with the researcher, with the school, or your child’s grades.

Privacy & Benefits
All the information collected and identities will be kept strictly confidential. Participant names will not be used and instead a pseudonym along with an interview number will be assigned to ensure privacy. The results of this project will be used to document the experiences of Mexican students in the CPS system. In addition, suggestions and results will help researchers compile a report that can help identify and improve issues affecting Mexican students, families, and teachers which can then be made available for educators, administrators, parents and students.

Risks
There are no risks beyond those of everyday life to the participants in this project. If they do not want to answer any of the questions in the interview, they may skip them. Participants can withdraw from the project if they decide to no longer participate. The University of Illinois does not provide compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in a research study, except as required by law.

Your right to ask questions
If you would like to ask questions about the project before agreeing to allow your son to participate, call Miguel A. Saucedo at (773) 704-2154 or saucedo2@illinois.edu. You can also contact Mr. Saucedo’s advisor, Dr. Yoon Pak at (217) 300-2819 or via email at yoonpak@illinois.edu. If you have any questions about your son’s rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional...
Review Board at (217) 333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu

Consent
In the space at the bottom of this letter, please indicate whether you do or do not want your child to participate in this project and return this note to the researcher. Your signature shows that you understand the information in this letter and agree to have your child participate. Consent indicates that your child will be given a copy of the consent documents or invites them to print one, if appropriate. Please keep the second copy of this form for your records. Anticipated circumstances under which the participant’s involvement in the study might be terminated by the investigator without regard to the participants assent.

If you have any questions about your son's rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu

I do/do not (circle one) give permission for my child ____________________________ (name of child) to participate in the research project described above.

I give permission for my son’s interview to be audio-recorded ___Yes ___No

_________________________________  __________________     
Name (print)                                                                                     Date

_________________________________  __________________
Signature                                                                       Signature of interviewer

Investigator:
Miguel A. Saucedo (773) 704-2154
Estimado Padre/Guardián:

Miguel A. Saucedo del Departamento de Política de Educación en la Universidad de Illinois en Urbana-Champaign está trabajando en un proyecto para aprender sobre la experiencias de estudiantes de descendencia Mexicana y quisiera entrevistar a tu hijo. Quisié inhalgar sobre los desafíos que enfrentan y las estrategias que utilizan los estudiantes del Sistema Escolar Público de Chicago (CPS).

Si está usted de acuerdo con que su hijo participe, su hijo tomará parte en una entrevista, que durara entre 1 y 2 horas, y se llevara a cabo en la La iglesia de La Villita o el lugar que usted elija. La entrevista será registrado por audio. Preferiblemente, será después de horario de clases para evitar interferir con las actividades escolares. La entrevista incluirá preguntas diferentes aspectos de su vida, cultura, educación, opiniones y las experiencias familiares.

La participación de su hijo es completamente voluntaria y no podrá ser entrevistado sin el consentimiento de usted y si él no accepta participar. Su hijo tiene el derecho de retirar su consentimiento y parar de participar en cualquier momento sin ningún problema. Su decisión de parar no afectara el status de su hijo, los grados de su hijo, la relación con la entrevistadora ni la escuela.

**Privacidad y Beneficios**
Toda la información colectada e identidades será totalmente confidencial. Se les asignara números y otros nombres para asegurar la privacidad de los participantes. Los resultados de este proyecto serán incluidos en un reporte que documentara las experiencias de los estudiantes de descendencia Mexicana en CPS. Sus sugestiones y opiniones también ayudaran a formular un reporte para mejorar los desafíos que enfrentan los estudiantes Mexicanos, sus familias, maestros que será disponible para administradores, padres, educadores, y estudiantes.

**Riesgos**
Para los participantes del proyecto no hay riesgos diferentes a los de la vida diaria. Si usted no quiere contestar algunas preguntas de la entrevista puedo pasarlas. También descontinuar la entrevista si no quiere participar más.

**Su Derecho de Hacer Preguntas**
Si usted tiene preguntas sobre el proyecto antes de participar, por favor llame a Miguel A. Saucedo al (773) 704-2154 o mandar un correo electrónico a saucedo2@illinois.edu. También puede preguntar a la directora de la investigación a Dra. Yoon Pak al (217) 300-2819 o por correo electrónico yoonpak@illinois.edu. Si usted tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante
en este estudio, por favor contacte con la Universidad de Illinois (Comité de Ética) al (217) 333-2670 o por correo electrónico irb@illinois.edu.

Consentimiento

Por favor indique debajo si usted da permiso que su hijo participe en este proyecto y regrese la forma a el investigador. Al firmar usted acepta que entiende la información contenida en esta carta y que esta de acuerdo que participe su hijo. Por favor de mantener la otra copia de esta forma.

Si tiene cualquier pregunta sobre los derechos de su hijo por favor contacte con la Universidad de Illinois (Comité de Ética) al (217) 333-2670 o por correo electrónico irb@illinois.edu.

SI doy/ NO doy (circular uno) permiso que mi hijo ____________________________
(nombre) participe en el proyecto.

Estoy de acuerdo en que graben (audio) la entrevista ___Si ___No

_________________________________
Nombre (letra de molde)

_________________________________
Firma y Fecha

Firma de la investigador

Investigador:
Miguel A. Saucedo (773) 704-2154
APPENDIX D
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT
INTERVIEWER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

This agreement serves to document that I, Miguel A. Saucedo, an interviewer for the “Endangered Species: The Hope for Chicanos in La Villita” project:

- Am familiar with the goals of this project and have participated in the required ethical and data collection training;

- Recognize I am acting as a representative of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign when I am conducting an interview;

- Agree to conduct myself in a respectful and professional manner when interacting with project participants and other staff members;

- Am aware that the results of interviews will form the basis for important decisions (including program development and policy recommendations) and pledge to ensure that the interviews I conduct yield valid information;

- Agree to treat all information obtained during the course of the study as **confidential** and to respect each participants’ privacy at all times;

- Understand that any breach of confidentiality or unprofessional behavior on my part will result in disciplinary action and/or termination.

_________________________________________   _______
Interviewer Signature                      Date