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An Exploration of the Relationship Between School Dropout and the Academic, Emotional, and Social Experiences of Incarcerated Males

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL DROPOUT

AND THE ACADEMIC, EMOTIONAL, AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

OF INCARCERATED MALES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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Title: An Exploration of the Relationship Between School Dropout and the Academic, Emotional, and Social Experiences of Incarcerated Males

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the academic, emotional, and social experiences of males incarcerated within a rural Pennsylvania correctional facility prior to their dropping out of school. After evaluating the data, recommendations were made to all stakeholders responsible for the welfare of adolescents. The recommendations included methods to improve the experiences of future adolescents who are at-risk for dropping out of school based upon feedback received from twelve incarcerated men between the ages of 18 and 24. The recommendations identify ways to assist in the three domains, as well as shed light to the problems they faced with drug abuse. Through discussions regarding their achievements, barriers, and relationships in each domain, the participants identified the strains they faced and how social learning influenced the decisions they made. Their stories support the ideas proposed in the General Strain Theory and Revised Strain Theory of Robert Agnew and the Social Learning Theory of Ronald Akers. Should the stakeholders involved in the lives of adolescents discuss and implement feasible recommendations as proposed in this study, it is possible that school dropout rates will decline.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

States within the United States work tirelessly to find alternatives to incarceration in an effort to reduce prison populations. What remains evident is a consistent characteristic of those incarcerated: failure to complete a basic education. Although United States prison populations slowly declined, from over 2 million in 2003 to 1.5 million in 2012 (Carson & Golinelli, 2013), their reports of school dropout remain consistently high at 39%-67% (Goebel, 2005; Harlow, 2003; D. Lee, Giever, Tolbert, & Rasmussen, 2012). Why are inmates dropping out of school in the first place? Is there anything we can do to affect those rates? Research consistently demonstrates that a negative correlation exists between educational success and incarceration rates (Adams et al., 1994; Batiuk, Lahm, McKeever, Wilcox, & Wilcox, 2005; Burke & Vivian, 2001; Cecil, Drapkin, Mackenzie, & Hickman, 2000; Fabelo, 2002; Flynn, 2005; Gaes, 2008; Kelso Jr., 2000; Lahm, 2009; Robinson, 2000; Saylor & Gaes, 1996; Steurer, Smith, Tracy, & Correctional Education, 2001; Steurer, Smith, & Correctional Education, 2003; Vacca, 2004; Wilson, Gallagher, & Mackenzie, 2000; Winterfield et al., 2009). According to the U.S. Department of Education, states report that roughly 17% to 24% of students drop out between ninth and twelfth grade (N. C. f. E. Statistics, 2010). It is worth considering that a key factor in reducing prison rates may lie in increasing graduation rates, as those who are incarcerated continue to drop out of school at rates two to three times that of the general population.

Earning a high school diploma or General Education Development certificate (G.E.D.) may serve as a buffer against incarceration. Numerous research studies have

explored this phenomenon from the angle of instituting educational programming within prison walls and its success in preventing recidivism. What has gained little attention are the justifications inmates give for dropping out of school in the first place. In a time of best practices and science-based programming, legislators, researchers, and prison administrators are pressed to institute programs proven to address this issue with current inmates. Society expects responsible spending of tax dollars on what is proven to work. The answers to the root of the problem may lie in understanding the experiences of inmates through their social, emotional, and academic domains prior to dropping out.

In response to this need for discovering the key to educational success, this qualitative study explored the lived experiences of incarcerated males, ages 18 to 24, who dropped out of school. There are social, emotional, and economic benefits to society as a whole in decreasing school dropout rates. If society strives to increase high school graduation rates, crime rates will decrease, and society will benefit economically (Gaes, 2008), with return benefits identified as high as 14% to 26% (Lochner & Moretti, 2004). Fewer crimes will lead to fewer victims and a more stable society. This study aimed to identify the essence of academic, emotional, and social experiences of the participants, identifying common achievements, barriers, and relationships in all three domains prior to their dropping out of school. There exists a gap in research and in literature exploring inmate school experiences and, consequently, school dropout. Only one similar study was identified, a dissertation conducted in 2007 (LeFargue, 2007), that explored this social problem and no future research or social reactions appeared to have occurred as a result of the study. LeFargue interviewed twelve inmates, aged 18 to 30, who were incarcerated in Louisiana and had dropped out of school.

A review of the literature and analysis of previous research supports the concept that a student's social and academic experiences are strongly related to a student's decision to drop out of school (V. E. Lee & Burkam, 2003; Zablocki, 2009). It has also been uncovered that our highest risk category for drop out are students who have identified emotional disorders (M. Wagner, 2005). Helping students establish a positive relationship with peers or adults in school is vital to ensuring student success academically, socially, and emotionally during those school years (Martin & Dowson, 2009). This study focused on young inmates in one particular county prison who attended and dropped out of schools within that same county. The results of this study will allow stakeholders of the county in which the research was conducted to review, discuss, and potentially implement changes that could affect the overall graduation rates and incarceration rates of its' young people.

Statement of the Problem

A significantly high rate of inmates dropped out of high school. Inmates' dropout rates range between 39% and 67% (Goebel, 2005; Harlow, 2003; D. Lee et al., 2012). The rates vary depending on the level of incarceration (local, state, or federal) and the inconsistent manner with which prisons collect their data (D. Lee et al., 2012). These statistics are significant because research has consistently demonstrated that educational success and incarceration rates are negatively correlated. As the United States continues to incarcerate adults at a higher rate than any other industrialized nation (Vacca, 2004), little has been done in the way of discovering how to reverse this trend. The United States has approximately 2.2 million people incarcerated, which is more than twice the rate of the second highest nation, China, who has 1.6 million people incarcerated (Lewis

& Burd-Sharps, 2010; Walmsley, 2013). Additionally, the United States incarcerates approximately 725 people per 100,000, a stark contrast to the country with the second highest rate, China, who only incarcerates 121 people per 100,000 (Lumsden & Eric Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1999; Walmsley, 2013). Educational success is lacking among many inmates found within the prison population (Erisman & Contardo, 2005; D. Lee et al., 2012). Yet to be identified are the gaps in our educational system that, if addressed, may increase graduation rates and, ultimately, decrease incarceration rates.

This study incorporated the theories of Robert Agnew and Ronald Akers in approaching the problem of school dropout among incarcerated males. Both Agnew and Akers are known and respected experts in the fields of delinquency and criminology. Each has extensively researched the problems of delinquent and criminal behaviors and developed theories as to the causes behind those behaviors (Agnew, 1985; Agnew & Petersen, 1989; Agnew & White, 1992; Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Radosevich, 1979; Akers, Massey, Clarke, & Lauer, 1983). It is the position of both theorists that certain stressors or reinforcers precede criminal or delinquent behaviors. The stressors that press one to engage in criminal or delinquent behaviors may be related to the stressors that led the same individual to drop out of school.

The study focused on three areas: academic, emotional, and social experiences. The research questions, inquiring about the achievements, barriers, and relationships in the three domains, were developed after a review of the literature and identification of key terms and phrases in a word tree as produced by NVivo 10 software. Through this identification process, themes and strands were evident as they continuously appeared in

literature, research studies, and data. This study utilized the frameworks of both

transformative theory, with the expectation that new knowledge will be gained and can be

used to reframe societal approaches to the problem (Creswell, 2013), and critical theory,

whereas a reality of the inmates' experiences will be drawn according to the stresses and

struggles identified by each (Creswell, 2013). Assuming that described academic,

emotional and social experiences are the essence of each inmate's reality, an exploration

of these experiences may help to transform society in its approach to increasing

educational success.

Purpose of the Study

The educational level of inmates pales in comparison to that of the general

population. On the average, inmates function on a 7.93 grade reading level when

administered the Tests for Adult Basic Education (Flynn, 2005). In addition, many

inmates report or are identified with learning difficulties in areas of reading, writing,

attention, visual or motor disabilities, or auditory processing delays (Adams et al., 1994;

Garner, National Center for the Study of Adult, & Literacy, 2005; Sarra & Olcott, 2007;

Vacca, 2004). With such significant factors regarding an inmate's functioning

educational level, it was imperative to discuss these academic barriers and consider

whether they contributed to inmates' decisions to drop out of school in the first place.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the social, emotional, and

academic experiences of males prior to their dropping out of school, who were later

incarcerated within a rural Pennsylvania county prison. The study was designed to help

understand the antecedents taking place academically, emotionally, and socially during

school years prior to a decision to drop out. If the conditions that surround an inmate's

reasons for dropping out of school were identified, the educational system may have the ability to assess whether it could address those identified motivators. If identified motivators for school dropout are within an educational system's ability to affect and control, and are subsequently addressed, it may be possible that as graduation rates increase, incarceration rates will decrease.

This study possessed a narrow focus, in that it concentrated on the realities of educational experiences as described by Pennsylvania inmates who previously dropped out of the specified rural county school districts and are now incarcerated in the correctional facility of the same county. The purpose of the study was transformative in nature. The researcher sought to understand the nature of the experiences of students who dropped out of school and were later incarcerated with an intention to create a discussion with stakeholders at the educational, political, and criminal justice system levels within the same county. The results of the study may hold implications as to how the county's social service and education systems can change their approaches with young adults at risk for dropping out. The study was participatory, in that the inmates involved with the study will identified constraints that existed within the county systems, and emancipatory, in that those results revealed elements for discussing the institution of societal change (Creswell, 2013).

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, a dropout is a student who, for any reason other than death, leaves school before graduation without transferring to another school/institution (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2013). In 2011-2012, the county of study experienced a dropout rate that was 47.2% higher than the state average, in that 2.12% of students in grades seven through twelve dropped out

compared to 1.87% at the state level. One high school within the county reported a dropout rate of 5.82%. In gathering dropout data, Pennsylvania reports that 50.15% of students who dropped out in 2011-2012 identified "other" as a reason or dropping out (Education, 2012). County dropout rates and the unknown reasons behind identifying "other" for dropping out indicate a need for further research.

Rather than institute more educational programming in prisons and increase incarceration budgets, perhaps society should evaluate whether it would be economically wise to invest those dollars in basic K-12 education. If the conditions that surround an inmate's reasons for failing to acquire a high school diploma were identified, schools would have the ability to assess whether and how they could address those concerns. If those concerns are addressed, it is possible that incarceration rates will decrease over time. Specifically, the results of this study encompass information regarding dropout motivators among former students of schools from within the county of study who ultimately were incarcerated in the county's correctional facility. Once shared, that information may lead to a conversation on ways to reduce dropout rates within said county, which may in turn reduce county incarceration rates.

Research Questions

Because there exists a positive correlation between school dropout and incarceration, this qualitative study explored the essence of lived experiences by inmates academically, emotionally, and socially prior to dropping out of school.
The central question sought to be answered by this research is how do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their academic, emotional, and social experiences prior to dropping out of school. The answer to this overarching idea was

explored through the following research questions, exploring the three domains during educational years; the academic, emotional, and social domains.

Research Questions:

1. How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with academic achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

2. How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with emotional achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

3. How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with social achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

Theoretical Perspective

This study incorporated the theories of Robert Agnew and Ronald Akers in approaching the problem of school dropout among incarcerated males. Both Agnew and Akers are known and respected experts in the fields of delinquency and criminology. Each has extensively researched the problems of delinquent and criminal behaviors and developed theories as to the causes behind those behaviors (Agnew, 1985; Agnew & Petersen, 1989; Agnew & White, 1992; Akers et al., 1979; Akers et al., 1983). The positions of both theorists include that certain stressors or reinforcers precede criminal or delinquent behaviors. The stressors that press one to engage in criminal or delinquent behaviors may be related to the stressors that led the same individual to drop out of school.

Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) outlines the idea that three types of strain exist, and those strains in life create a condition where coping mechanisms may include actions out of anger and frustration (Agnew, 2012). GST identifies one strain as the gap that is created when one's actual goals and achieved goals are not the same. Secondly, GST identifies a loss of a positive stimuli as another cause of strain, which can then be replaced by the third strain, a negative stimuli (Agnew, 2012). Should these strains prevent students from achieving a desired goal and present the student with the perception that he has lost control over his educational success, he is more likely to drop out of school (Fall & Roberts, 2012). The strains that affect the student can be found in academic, emotional, or social domains, potentially leading a student to feel a sense of loss of control.

Additionally, Agnew developed the Revised Strain Theory of Delinquency. Essentially, the revised theory supports the idea that an aversive event that cannot be legally escaped can result in an illegal escape, such as an act of revenge out of anger. If the strain experienced is perceived to be unjust, severe, and persistent, and the ability to block the aversion is prevented, the victim may feel he is forced to respond with anger (Agnew, 1985, 2012). Agnew's examples of unjust aversion that a student may not be able to control are parental punishments, mean teachers, and lack of school satisfaction (Agnew, 1985). These three sources of strain could affect a student academically, emotionally, and socially. Personal relationships, whether positive or negative, with significant individuals in those three domains have been identified as essential in creating an environment where an adolescent will either thrive or fail (Martin & Dowson, 2009).

Ronald Akers outlined a social learning theory, a behavioral theory that views social behaviors as the result of negative and positive rewards and punishments. However, Akers posits himself as a "soft" behaviorist who views those social behaviors as results of modeled behaviors and cognitive decision-making, not merely behavioral training. Additionally, Akers' social learning theory sees chosen behaviors as those resulting from weighed existing rewards and punishments against the rewards and punishments of differential reinforcers (Akers, 1990; Akers et al., 1979). Essentially, Akers' social learning theory is a supporting theory to Agnew's GST and Revised Strain Theory, whereas a student may display behaviors that are modeled and/or reinforced or serve as an alternative to strains present in his life.

Methodology

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of incarcerated males who dropped out of school. The aim of the researcher was to uncover themes of subject experiences in academic, emotional, and social domains both through inductive reasoning discovered in the data and deductive reasoning as themes emerged as part of the data collection and literature review process. The study relied upon narrative data as evidence, provided by subjects through interviews, whereas realities of those experiences were shared through different perspectives (Creswell, 2013; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Mertler & Charles, 2011) . Utilizing both ontological and epistemological approaches in identifying themes of lived experiences (Creswell, 2013), the researcher looked to identify and understand the subjects' reasoning for dropping out of school.

Significance of the Study

There have been extensive quantitative research studies, as cited earlier, demonstrating a strong correlation between school dropout and incarceration and justifications for instituting educational programming in prisons. There also exists strong support for educational success, such as the attainment of a high school diploma, as a key factor in achieving a successful adult in life (Bloom, 2010; Crosnoe, Riegle-Crumb, & Muller, 2007; Levin, 2009; Lochner & Moretti, 2004). What has been lacking in the literature is research that uncovers the reasoning behind school dropout among inmates, with only one recent qualitative study located exploring this social problem (LeFargue, 2007).

The significance of this study is its aim to understand the experiences of incarcerated males who dropped out of school and identify themes that emerge. This study provides a springboard for stakeholders to discuss, identify, and implement ways to provide buffers that may increase graduation rates. If we know why individuals dropout of school, especially individuals who ultimately are incarcerated, we have valuable information for improving the quality of life for individuals (Bloom, 2010; Crosnoe et al., 2007; Levin, 2009), the schooling experiences of many, and improving the social lives of those who may no longer suffer as potential victims of crime. Addressing experiences of dropouts who are within societal control could potentially increase graduation rates, decrease tax burdening incarceration rates (Bloom, 2010; Gaes, 2008), increase the number of taxpaying contributing citizens, and affect society with a 14% to 26% economic return by investing in those changes (Lochner & Moretti, 2004).

Definitions

An *inmate* is a person committed to the custody of or confined by the Department of Corrections (Parole, 2012)

Dropout refers to a student who, for any reason other than death, leaves school before graduation without transferring to another school/institution (Education, 2012).

Incarcerated refers to inmates confined in a prison or jail (B. o. J. Statistics, 2014).

A *prison* is a longer term facility that holds persons a year or more (B. o. J. Statistics, 2014).

To be *sentenced* refers to inmates who are serving time on court-imposed sentences (Lategan, O'Neill, & Santore, 2011).

Delimitations

Several delimitations were placed on the study by the researcher. Most importantly, the study was limited to inmates in a specified rural county prison who dropped out of schools located within that same county. The intention of the researcher was to explore and identify experiences that preceded school dropout by those individuals who were ultimately incarcerated. In turn, the researcher will share these findings with stakeholders within the county at the court system, prison system, county commissioner, and school district levels in order to start a conversation as to how society could better address these problems. The findings of this study can be specifically applied and explored within the school districts and criminal justice systems directly involved.

Additionally, subjects were limited to inmates ages 18 to 24. Pennsylvania Department of Corrections and the Federal Bureau of Prisons both use this age bracket as a whole in gathering statistical data (Bureau of Planning, 2013; Harlow, 2003; Lategan et al., 2011; B. o. J. Statistics, 2014). For comparable demographic data to be applied, the researcher utilized this same age bracket. Furthermore, these subjects would all have attended schools within the county during the current educational trends and expectations of the No Child Left Behind legislation. Curricular and legislative trends tend to change in education, so working with a population that experienced the expectation of current trends lent the study to more relevant recommendations for future study and exploration.

The study site and corresponding school districts, as well as the subjects involved in the study, were chosen as a matter of researcher convenience. The researcher has worked within the criminal justice system, mental health system, and educational systems of the same county and had an established rapport with stakeholders needed to invest in such a study.

Finally, the researcher limited the study subjects to males only. The existing literature overwhelmingly provided relevant data and information on male inmates over female inmates. Additionally, the female prison population of the studied county is low and fluctuates. It alone may have created subject attrition problems that may have hampered the study. Males are also more likely to be incarcerated (Lategan et al., 2011), and therefore a more robust population is available from which to select a sample population. However, any male inmate who initially participated in the study that later became a behavioral or safety concern was removed at the request of the researcher, prison facility, or inmate.

Limitations

This study has limitations that may prevent it from being generalized to educational systems who serve inmates from other settings. The setting of the study is a rural Pennsylvania county prison and all subjects attended and dropped out of schools located within that same rural county. Educational systems that serve urban or suburban areas or states other than Pennsylvania may not be able to apply this study and its recommendations to their own systems. Reliability posed a difficulty, in that the researcher was subject to the prison's conditions, settings, and need for flexibility in conducting the study to ensure safety as the primary goal of all parties involved. Additionally, the researcher attempted to select a sample inmate population that would survive the duration of the study. Of the 15 inmates who volunteered for the study, 12 participated. Three of the inmates were unable to participate due to behavioral infractions committed prior to participant interviews. However, from the time of initial interviews through the process of member-checking there was not an issue with subject attrition. Finally, the validity of the data gathered from subjects can be questioned merely due to the source of information, prison inmates. However, through triangulation of the data collected in interviews, the information shared by participants can be deemed credible (Creswell, 2013; Mertler & Charles, 2011).

Summary

The significance of this study is its exploration of the academic, emotional, and social experiences that preceded students' decisions to drop out of school, students who ultimately became incarcerated. Volumes of research investigated the positive correlation between dropout and incarceration and the effectiveness of instituting

educational programming in prisons, as cited earlier. The literature lacks an understanding of those events that took place before the decision to drop out was made. An analysis of the inmates' experiences provides a springboard that can generate discussions about those motivators. The ability to address shortfalls in education connected to incarcerations start with exploring the academic, emotional, and social experiences of inmates at the time they were engaged in the school systems. Understanding the essence of an inmate's achievements, barriers, and relationships in those three domains is important in beginning to uncover the gaps that exist in the educational system for those deprived of a high school diploma.

An understanding of social reinforcers that exist within the county where dropout took place was discovered through interviews with male inmates, aged 18 to 24 (Akers, 1990), as well as the strains (Agnew, 1985, 2012), that may have contributed to their dropping out of school. The hope is that society will begin to critically analyze and understand the importance of the achievements, barriers, and relationships of students so to begin to transform the educational experience of all into a successful one. Open discussions with communities may lead to the discovery of ways to increase graduation rates, potentially decrease incarceration rates, and improve the overall life experience of society.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There is a clear link between those who are incarcerated in the United States and dropping out of school (Adams et al., 1994; Batiuk et al., 2005; Burke & Vivian, 2001; Cecil et al., 2000; Fabelo, 2002; Flynn, 2005; Gaes, 2008; Kelso Jr., 2000; Lahm, 2009; Robinson, 2000; Saylor & Gaes, 1996; Steurer et al., 2001; Steurer et al., 2003; Vacca, 2004; Wilson et al., 2000; Winterfield et al., 2009). What warrants investigating is the reasoning behind the dropout and asking what society can do to affect this trend. Robert Agnew developed the Revised Strain Theory and the General Strain Theory, both of which provide a springboard for considering strain-based factors that existed in the life of inmates while they were adolescents. Those strains, according to Agnew, may help to clarify society's understanding of the decision-making adolescents experience prior to dropping out of school. Similarly, Ronald Akers developed a social learning theory that attempts to understand the effects of positive and negative relationships in the life of an adolescent and their impact on the adolescent's decision-making. These three theories open the door to asking questions about inmate experiences as adolescents in the academic, emotional, and social domains. What must be explored are the achievements, barriers, and relationships inmates experienced as adolescents both inside and outside of the school environment, preceding withdrawal from school.

This chapter explores the literature that connects experiences in education, their role in a decision to dropout, and the relationship between dropout and incarceration. Statistically, the national rate of dropout is marked at 17% to 24% among various states (N. C. f. E. Statistics, 2010), whereas prison inmates are identified at dropping out at

rates between 40% to 48% (Harlow, 2003; D. Lee et al., 2012). Theories of relevance that might explain this phenomena are explored, as well as the three domains that greatly affect an adolescent's decision to dropout: academics, emotional experiences, and social factors (Martin & Dowson, 2009).

The Historical Relationship Between Dropout and Incarceration

Dropout and incarceration share a connection that negatively affects society. However, given this relationship, society has the ability to identify characteristics of those who are at-risk for dropping out. What is in need of a deeper exploration is which of those characteristics are shared by those who later became incarcerated. Most importantly, society needs to know what is causing those circumstances to arise and ask if there anything they can do to address problem areas before dropout takes place. Gaes (2008) explained the need for societal intervention when he wrote that the, "marginal costs of education pale in comparison to the marginal savings in criminal justice costs from reductions in arrests, convictions, or recommitments" (p. 11).

School Dropout

School dropout rates are difficult to decipher. The fluctuation in dropout rate reporting is due to an inconsistent method of data collection at the national level, resulting in misleading graduation rates. Some states report graduation rates from those students who successfully started and completed the twelfth grade, but do not include those who dropped out in prior years. According to Bloom (2010), the rate of school dropout is between 3.5 and 6 million young adults between the ages of sixteen and 24. According to Houck and Kurtz (2010), graduation rates tend to be significantly skewed, often through over-reporting, making them difficult to measure. The United States

Department of Education reports that state dropout at rates vary between 17% and 24%

between grades nine through twelve, depending on the state (N. C. f. E. Statistics, 2010).

In Pennsylvania, during the 2011-2012 school year, 16,999 students dropped out in

grades seven through twelve. However, of the reasons that are reportable categories for

dropout, 50% of the students reported the reason for dropout fell under the category of

"other" (Education, 2012). Society needs to take the time to uncover what the "other"

reasons are for dropping out.

In the meantime, society does know which behaviors are predictors for dropout.

The decision to dropout is a long process (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004) , whereas many

factors that cause strain or encourage dropout finally make the decision justifiable to the

student. For example, in the academic domain, academic difficulties, GPA, suspension,

and retention are all predictors of increased risk for school dropout (Bradley & Renzulli,

2011; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007;

Zablocki, 2009). Schools, as an environment, have demonstrated only a minor effect on

dropout. However, school policies and procedures, such as those dealing with behavioral

problems and retention, have been linked to 25% of the dropout rate (Rumberger &

Palardy, 2005). In regards to the emotional domain of an adolescent, behavioral

problems, lack of peer connections, disengagement, emotional disturbance, and dislike

for school or teachers are all predictors of dropout (Agnew, 1985; Christenson &

Thurlow, 2004; Fall & Roberts, 2012; Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012; Osher,

Morrison, & Bailey, 2003; Stearns et al., 2007; Zablocki, 2009). Finally, in the social

domain, parental reactions, economic hardship, lack of relationship with peers, family

transiency, and designation as a minority all provide additional barriers to academic

success and increase the likelihood that an adolescent will dropout (Agnew, 1985; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Gasper, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2012; Ku & Plotnick, 2003; Stearns et al., 2007).

Research has also outlined for society which buffers exist to reduce school dropout. Within the academic domain, an adolescent who experiences reading success, a valued GPA, and has set realistic academic goals are less likely to dropout (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Zablocki, 2009). Emotionally, support from both school and parents are vital, as well as a pool of supportive peers. Parents who are involved in a student's academic life decrease the chances that student will dropout. Similarly, a school that has policies and procedures that work toward academic success and takes the time to teach students why school is relevant will add additional buffers against dropout (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Reynolds, Ou, & Topitzes, 2004; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005; Stearns et al., 2007). Together with an awareness of the risks for dropout, building the strength of these buffers may help to reduce overall rates of students quitting school.

Education Levels of the Incarcerated

The United States has about 1.5 million people incarcerated in its prison systems (Carson & Golinelli, 2013). The common denominator of 40% to 48% of those inmates is a failure to graduate from high school or earn a G.E.D. (Harlow, 2003; D. Lee et al., 2012). Society needs to consider which factors could be altered with interventions. Identified through research is that, before incarceration, inmates typically have very limited life opportunities (Erisman & Contardo, 2005). Examples of limited opportunities include an inadequate or lack of education (D. Lee et al., 2012), failed academic pursuits that made crime a better option to meet economic needs (Whitaker,

2011), and an academic functioning ability that was years behind their age-level peers (Blomberg, Bales, Mann, Piquero, & Berk, 2011).

As long as inmates continue to hold a high rate of school dropout, regardless if the overall prison population decreases, then it is a societal responsibility to discover the reasons. The average reading level of an inmate is 7.93 (Flynn, 2005) and many inmates report having been diagnosed with learning disabilities or difficulties (Adams et al., 1994; Garner et al., 2005; Sarra & Olcott, 2007; Vacca, 2004). Until the preceding problem of lack of educational success is addressed, it is unlikely that the resulting problem, incarceration, will decrease. Education is a very significant factor in affecting the risk for incarceration (Pettit & Western, 2004). The impact of reducing incarceration not only affects the United States in the forms of less crime and less victimization; it affects its citizens economically. Each taxpaying citizen stands to save 14% to 26% if crime rates and incarceration rates were lowered as a result of increasing education levels (Lochner, 2004). The investigation needs to begin with young inmates. Inmates under the age of 25 not only have the most recent experiences with the education systems, but they also make up 52% of the prison dropout population (Coley & Barton, 2006)

Theories of Relevance

What circumstances exist in the life of an adolescent that would cause him to quit school? There must be a reason for dropping out. According to theories of Robert Agnew, a strain in the life of the adolescent may have made the decision to drop out less painful than remaining in school. Ronald Akers believed that relationships in the adolescent's life might have allowed the decision to drop out an acceptable or appealing

one. Therefore, it is worth asking how the Revised Strain Theory, General Strain Theory, or social learning theory may help society answer this question.

Agnew's Revised Strain Theory

An investigation into delinquency by Robert Agnew drew attention to the idea that an adolescent seeks autonomy. During Agnew's initial research into causes of delinquency, he identified a need for autonomy as having a positive effect on delinquency. This assumption was drawn following an analysis of a national longitudinal survey of over 1,800 boys. Significant positive correlations were identified between both frustration and autonomy and anger and autonomy. Attachments to parent, school attitudes, and dating were also significantly correlated with a need for autonomy. Agnew hypothesized that an adolescent's failure to achieve set goals, such as autonomy, through legitimate channels led to an adolescent's retaliation against the source blocking him from achieving that goal (Agnew, 1984). A need for autonomy could be an adolescent's reaction to a sense of aversion. This initial hypothesis led Agnew to develop his Revised Strain Theory of Delinquency. The Revised Strain Theory includes the idea that when one is experiencing pain or in an aversive situation, it is one's nature to block the pain or avoid the aversion. Adolescents, however, are unable to control certain domains of their lives, such as family or school environments that may be sources of strain or aversion. If an adolescent is blocked from being able to legally escape pain or aversion, the adolescent might resort to an illegal escape attempt (Agnew, 1985). Consider an adolescent who is experiencing a negative relationship with a teacher at school; there is little that an adolescent can do to avoid this aversion. Most adolescents may not be able to drop out of school without resorting to extreme measures, unlike an adult who can quit

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a job presenting the same level of aversion. Similarly, an adolescent who lives with an abusive parent cannot escape the relationship as easily as adults who are engaged in the same painful or aversive circumstance. Because the ability to escape the pain or aversion is blocked, adolescents may feel forced to respond to this frustration with anger (Agnew, 1984, 1985). Agnew identified several sources of frustration for adolescents that may cause an escape attempt from school, such as attachment to father, attachment to teacher, deviant beliefs, dating and grades. However, Agnew (1985) found an adolescent is most likely to respond with anger in an attempt to escape school if parental punitiveness, mean teachers or dissatisfaction with school is the causes of frustration. It is worth noting that Agnew (1985) also identified these three factors as the major sources of frustration that lead to anger based delinquency and aggression.

Adolescents who identified parental punitiveness as a source of aversion reported verbal, physical, and emotional punishments. These punishments include parental screaming, hitting, or ignoring the adolescent. Mean teachers who display outbursts of anger or speak negatively toward students were identified as a source of aversion. Dissatisfaction with school was also identified as a painful experience by an adolescent was identified as dissatisfaction with school. However, dissatisfaction with school was a passive source of aversion, described as school being boring or a waste of time (Agnew, 1985). These three painful or aversive circumstances are prime examples of situations adolescents are often blocked from avoiding and have little control to affect. These sources of strain may be the inspiration an adolescent seeks to justify needing autonomy. One such example of autonomy would be dropping out of school, where the adolescent could gain control over the aversion experienced from mean teachers and a sense of

dissatisfaction with school. Adolescents in Agnew's (1985) research identified

attempting to escape school by means of tardy or class cutting behaviors.

An adolescent can encounter strains at school through other avenues, academic

expectations and social experiences. One cause of strain for adolescents in school may

be a high level of expectations for achievement with a low probability of achieving that

goal. Over-inflated academic goals, such as the ability to successfully attend college, are

identified as being caused by self, parental, or peer pressures (Agnew & Jones, 1988)

that may not correlate with one's actual intellectual ability. School experiences that

cause strains do not just involve academics, they can also include social activities.

School experiences can also be affected negatively or positively by an adolescent's

participation in social activities. Those social activities negatively affect delinquency or

deviance are often organized, include passive entertainment or involvement in non-

competitive sports. Conversely, those activities that are positively correlated with

delinquent or deviant behaviors that include "hanging out" and unsupervised activities

(Agnew & Petersen, 1989). Adolescents of all economic and social class backgrounds

may face these strains.

Agnew's interest in determining why crimes peak during adolescence and why

delinquency during that time does not discriminate between lower and middle

socioeconomic classes led him to develop a General Strain Theory. It became evident

through research that adolescents in both lower and middle socioeconomic classes were

unable to block pain or aversion; therefore, similar responses were elicited from

adolescents regardless of class. Agnew concluded that strain and the coping mechanisms

utilized to deal with said strain may be responses that include anger, especially when the

sources of strain are seen as unfair or unjust by the adolescent (Agnew, 1985, 1992, 2012; Agnew & White, 1992). Agnew sought to discover the methods utilized by adolescents to decide how to react to the aversion or pain, why the middle class was included in this delinquent grouping, and how to explain the variances and characteristics of the strains experienced by the adolescents. An investigation of such strains led to Agnew's development of the General Strain Theory.

Agnew's General Strain Theory

In a longitudinal study of social control theory and its ability to explain delinquency, Agnew identified attachment to peers, parents, and school as significant factors in predicting delinquency. These attachments explain not only delinquency, but can be generalized as a way to understand adolescent responses to school. Specifically, he found a strong negative correlation between attachment to school and engagement in delinquent behaviors and a positive correlation between connections and associations with delinquent peers and delinquent behaviors (Agnew, 1991). Although attachment to parents had only a small positive effect (Agnew, 1991), it nonetheless demonstrated that positive relationships with school and parents can greatly impact an adolescent's success in school.

The results of this longitudinal study, in collaboration with the Revised Strain Theory developed earlier, led Agnew to formulate the General Strain Theory (GST). GST identified three causes of strain that lead to an adolescent's reactions that may or may not include delinquent behaviors. Strains experienced may also lead the adolescent toward deviant or socially unacceptable behaviors. Agnew (1992) defined strain as "negative or adverse relations with others" and believed that it was a determination of an

individual to decide which relationships qualified (p. 61). The first type of strain occurs when one's actual goals and their achieved goals do not meet. For example, a student may expect promotion to the next grade level, but fail to achieve the scores or credits necessary to reach this goal. A second type of strain involves the loss of positive stimuli. This loss, which can include the loss of peers, family or school relationships deemed positive by the adolescent, is a void that opens a door to a third source of strain, the introduction of negative stimuli (Agnew, 1992, 2012; Agnew & White, 1992). As an illustration, imagine that an adolescent is told that she will be moving to a new school district because her parents will be divorcing. If she is attached to her current school, losing her school relationships with peers and teachers, a familiar home, and the presence of a parent all represent losses of positive stimuli. Agnew theorized that the adolescent would try to prevent the loss of the positive stimuli, replace it, or seek revenge against those deemed responsible for its loss. A replacement stimulus might include the introduction of a new and negative stimuli as a coping mechanism utilized to fill these voids. Those negative stimuli might include illicit drug use. Often times the loss of the positive stimuli creates an environment whereas the individual perceives the replacement as negative, such as the new school, peers, or paramour of the parent. The adolescent may seek to avoid, stop, or escape the newly introduced negative stimuli by running away, avoiding the new relationships, or by committing acts of anger against those she sees as responsible for her new situation. Agnew theorized that these acts of revenge are often seen as justifiable by the adolescent (Agnew, 1992) because the perceived mistreatment is, in itself, unjust and aversive (Agnew, 2012).

Although Agnew's focus was to uncover the underlying journey leading to delinquency, the same paths can be considered in uncovering the experiences that lead to dropping out of school. Agnew considered methods utilized by adolescents to cope with strain, such as negative methods of lowering standards and seeing failed goals as deserved punishment, as well as the influence of positive relationships in handling adversity. Agnew recognized that adolescents are very limited in their own ability to control adverse situations. His theory focused on all types of negative relationships that might influence the behaviors of adolescents and serve as sources of strain (Agnew, 1992). Those negative relationships could include verbally and/or physically abusive parents, negative peer groups, or a perception of mean teachers. Negative environments that could cause strain might include families with not enough money to meet needs, a school that is deemed unengaging or living in an economically deprived neighborhood riddled with crime. The decisions an adolescent may be faced with to cope with such sources of strain weigh heavily on the adolescent's ability to cope with the adversity she faces.

Agnew recognized social learning theory, such as that developed by Ronald Akers, as focused on negative relationships that created an opportunity for the adolescent to learn and imitate negative behaviors. Conversely, Agnew contrasted his GST to social learning theory in that GST is focused on negative relationships in an adolescent's life that create strain, pressuring the individual into action in an effort to avoid said strain. However, Agnew recognized that both GST and social learning theory complement each other, in that they were built upon the same general principles, explaining how negative relationships can lead to delinquent behaviors (Agnew, 1992). This similarity creates a

bridge between theories of delinquent behaviors between Ronald Akers' social learning theory and Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (Agnew & White, 1992). It is because of this link that social learning theory is also considered as a theory to explain why adolescents may drop out of school.

Akers' Social Learning and Deviant Behavior

Social learning theory, as GST, considers an adolescent's relationships with others. Akers explored how those relationships might influence the adolescent to engage in deviant behaviors. These same influences in an adolescent's life can be generalized as influences that create circumstances under which an adolescent might decide or need to drop out of school.

In 1979, Ronald Akers, in collection with other researchers, investigated the relationship between deviant behaviors and social learning. The study included an evaluation of self-reported questionnaires administered to 3,065 students in grades seven through twelve. It is important to note that Akers, et al., three years later, tested the validity of adolescent self-reports and found that the results can be considered valid, in that adolescents, under the auspice of anonymity and low-stakes questioning, find no threat in participating in such as study (Akers et al., 1983). Akers was also part of a team of researchers that investigated and concluded that studies conducted in urban, suburban, or rural communities did not require different theories based on the size of the population to explain engagement in deviant behaviors (Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Akers, 1984).

Akers explained that social behavior was a learned behavior was acquired through conditioning, imitation, or modeling of those who are influential in the life of an adolescent. Those social behaviors, in turn, are either strengthened if rewarded or

weakened if punished (Akers et al., 1979). Akers believed that behaviors are defined

within the group the adolescent associates with, rather than by society as a whole. If

those influential relationships determine whether a behavior is good or justifiable, that

definition is embraced by the adolescent. Approval received by those relationships

influencing the adolescent affects the likelihood the adolescent will engage in the

behavior, regardless if they are positive or negative relationships. Akers et al. (1979)

identified peers and family as the most influential relationships in an adolescent's life, but

also recognized that schools, churches and other social groups with whom an adolescent

engaged are also powerful factors.

According to social learning theory, individuals often first practice behaviors as a

method of imitation. An adolescent mimics the behaviors to which he or she is exposed.

As the adolescent continues to associate with those influential relationships, those

persons who continue to engage in the behaviors continue to model the behavior for the

adolescent. If those behaviors, for example, include drinking or drug use by parents or

peers, those behaviors are seen as justifiable by the adolescent and increase the

adolescent's likelihood of practicing those social behaviors. Peers and parents are

identified as significant influences in the likelihood that a teen will engage in alcohol and

drug use. Akers et al. (1979) viewed social learning theory as not only a way to explain

deviant behaviors, such as engaging in drug and alcohol use, but also as a way to explain

other behaviors defined by society as deviant.

Looking further into deviant behaviors, Akers tested the social learning theory in

evaluating its ability to explain why adolescents continue with substance use. Akers

determined that likelihood of punishment and perception of the punishment as more or

less rewarding than not engaging in a specified behavior was the prime factor in deciding whether the behavior would continue. Weighing one behavior against another, such as social compliance versus engaging in deviance, was defined as the differential reinforcer that determined the likelihood as to whether or not a behavior would continue (Akers, 1990; Akers et al., 1979; Lanza-Kaduce, Akers, Krohn, & Radosevich, 1982).

In choosing behaviors, Akers believed that the adolescent must decide between two behaviors. The behaviors are weighed against one another, with consideration given to formal or informal rewards offered versus likely punishments, such as whether or not legal consequences might occur. He explained that the decisions might not always be rational (Akers, 1990). For example, an adolescent might engage in underage drinking if the reward of social peers outweighs the threat of punishment by parents.

Belief systems of adolescents are tightly linked to the social learning theory process. If an attitude or rationalization is encouraged by relationships important to the adolescent, modeled by others, and deemed justifiable, the adolescent is more likely to engage in the same behavior (Akers, 1990; Akers et al., 1979). Consider the scenario whereas an adolescent deems school authority to be harsh and the academic work involved to be unrewarding, despite the beliefs of society as a whole that an education is a worthwhile and necessary venture. Should the adolescent value relationships with peers who have dropped out of school and have parents who did not graduate from high school, or engage in relationships with those who agree that school authority is harsh, the belief systems of those important social relationships reinforce that dropping out of school is a justifiable behavior. The differential reinforcer irrationally negates economic and social class rewards of a high school diploma. The adolescent has the ability to avoid

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aversion present in the school environment without negative consequences from the valued relationships.

Domains of Influence Prior to Dropout

There are three domains that directly affect students' ability to be successful in school: academic, emotional, and social. Adolescents experience the achievements, barriers, and relationships in these three domains that help to shape their character, their choices, and their future path. Both experiences inside the school environment and those in society mold adolescents. Martin (2009) described adolescent relationships with the significant people in their lives as the, "cornerstone of young people's capacity to function effectively" within these three domains (p. 351).

Academic Domain

In considering the academic domain, it is essential to explore and understand the factors that help to shape an adolescent's success as a student. Experiences with achievement, emotions, and social situations all mitigate or aggravate the academic benchmark achieved at the end of the school experience. In a study of 4,147 incarcerated youth in 115 Florida institutions, Blomberg et al. (2011) believed that society should take the time to explore and understand these areas of the academic domain because students who exhibit delinquent or deviant behaviors are often students who are not experiencing academic success. Behaviors that are deemed socially deviant may lead to an adolescent being arrested. Adolescents who are first arrested early in high school are six to eight times more likely to dropout (Hirschfield, 2009).

Academic achievements. Academic achievements are the marks reached by an adolescent that can include multiple facets of education both inside and outside of school.

Internally, the adolescent faces grades, norms, and program options. Externally and internally, an adolescent tries to balance these experiences with pressures from peers.

Student academic success is connected to the student's perception that he or she has some ability to control that path. That sense of control appears to be linked to a higher level of willingness to engage in the beliefs and norms of the environment (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). In a 2012 study of 14,781 students in grades ten through twelve, it was identified that a sense of control can be exhibited by a student through hard work, completed homework, earning higher test scores, and engagement in class (Fall & Roberts, 2012). A higher grade point average early in high school can positively affect the student's likelihood of academic success throughout, according to a 2008 study of 846 young adults aged 16-20 who had participated in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (Plank, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2008). Achievement of GPA may be an outward sign to the adolescent of control over academic success.

Students also tend to be more successful in school when they are engaged both academically and behaviorally within the set of norms established by the environment (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Stearns et al., 2007). In fact, academic engagement and behavioral compliance serve as mediators and buffers against school dropout. Essential, however, to engaging in said compliance is the student's link to identifying with school (Fall & Roberts, 2012). For example, both internally and externally, social engagement, such as bonds with peers, has been found to motivate students to stay in school. This has been identified to hold true, even if academic achievement if low, in a study of responses provided by 90,118 surveyed youth (Langenkamp, 2010) who participated in the Adolescent Health and Academic Achievement survey and the National Longitudinal

Study of Adolescent Health. High school graduation, or lack thereof, is associated with a student's social and academic success while in school (V. E. Lee & Burkam, 2003). Therefore, it is worth exploring the level of social engagement in school of those who dropped out of school. However, it is not only social engagement in school that affects academic success. The academic success of Black males in special education is significantly correlated with social engagement outside of school through church attendance (Whitaker, 2011). In regards to White students, those who were promoted, rather than retained, were described as engaged in school, having positive bonds with teachers, more popular among peers, and having involved parents (Stearns et al., 2007).

Other markers of academic success were found to be correlated with engagement in vocational education and involvement with a pre-kindergarten program. Students who may not find the academic portion of school to be rewarding may find that a mix of academics and vocational technology education to be rewarding. The ability to participate and especially find success in vocational education created a sense of attachment to school and decreasing the likelihood a student would drop out (Plank et al., 2008). Similarly, in a 2004 study of 1,404 low-income children, it was found that students who engaged in preschool education enjoyed a significantly higher rate of educational success and lower levels of juvenile deviance, compared to those who did not attend a preschool program. The study results led to a conclusion that preschool participation allowed for students to develop bonds with school and were characterized by families who support education (Reynolds et al., 2004).

Academic barriers. Different strains may exist within a school sometimes those strains serve as barriers to success and sometimes those barriers force a student to be

"pushed out" of school (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). As with academic achievements, academic barriers for an adolescent exist both inside and outside the school environment. They include a sense of disengagement, learning disabilities, retention, transiency, academic failure, disciplinary issues, perceptions, and an adolescent's life outside of school. Barriers might hinder or prevent an adolescent from achieving a basic societal goal, graduating from high school.

Disengagement, even early within an academic career, is identified as a factor in predicting delinquency and dropout (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). School disengagement is difficult to measure, but it can be identified by its characteristics. Students who are identified as disengaged fail to have a connection with faculty and describe school as boring. Engagement can include one's ability or failure to follow the school rules and participate in class. Those two examples are significant influences on both academic success and delinquency (Whitaker, 2011). School disengagement is linked to behavioral problems in students throughout their adolescence and is also a factor in predicting the likelihood of dropout (Henry et al., 2012).

Disengagement may be more than just a lack of enthusiasm for school. It may also be linked to a student's inability to be successful with school work due to learning disabilities or other special education needs (Whitaker, 2011). According to a 2009 study of 5,018 youth and parents who participated in the National Longitudinal and Transitional Study 2, students identified with emotional disturbance, in combination with academic performance and lower socioeconomic background, are at a higher risk for dropping out (Zablocki, 2009). In fact, students identified as emotionally disturbed are the highest risk category for dropping out (Hirschfield, 2009; M. Wagner, 2005). Those

identified with emotional disturbance are characterized as failing to achieve academically in combination with displaying inadequate social or behavioral skills (Connor & Ferri, 2005). Additionally, students who have an inflated expectation as to their ability to achieve academic success soon stumble upon the barrier of being unable to meet those goals. This strain creates frustration (Agnew & Jones, 1988), which could lead to a deviant response or even a decision to drop out. Interestingly, students who engage in deviant behaviors are also often students with unidentified special education needs (Tulman & Weck, 2009). Learning disabilities play a large role in student achievement. In the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, parents reported that only 72% of students who had disabilities received a diploma or completed high school. Of the former students who participated in the survey, they identified a dislike for school as a common factor for failing to complete high school (Institute of Education Sciences, 2005).

Retention is an important consideration in understanding academic success. It has been found that 14% of white students who were retained prior to tenth grade dropout, compared to only 1% of those who were continuously promoted (Stearns et al., 2007). Stearns et al. (2007) states that this does not reveal the reasons why a student was retained, such as lack of academic progress or other social or emotional factors leading to retention. Those students who are retained are marked by lower academic achievement, behavioral problems, and an overall distaste for school. What can be said, however, is that retention is identified as a permanent factor in the likelihood that a student may drop out (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004; Reynolds et al., 2004). Regardless of race, educational, or socioeconomic background, retention is a consistent predictor of school

dropout. However, those who are retained increase the odds of dropping out when socioeconomic status, level of academic success, behaviors, goals, disengagement, and relationships with peers and teachers are taken into consideration (Stearns et al., 2007). Retention is controversial, and questions remain regarding the long-standing effects of retention on future academic achievement and life after high school (Warren & Saliba, 2012).

Perhaps somewhat overlooked is the effect of switching schools or even transiency. Students who move from one school to another often bring with them a history of behavior problems. In a 2012 study conducted by Gasper, DeLuca and Estacion, data gathered from 8,984 youth aged twelve to sixteen through the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth was evaluated to determine the effects of transiency. They found that students who are transient can be classified as displaying a lack academic success, issues with truancy, socioeconomic issues, and family instability (Gasper et al., 2012).

A student's perception that school is an aversive environment may alone serve as a significant barrier to academic success. According to Agnew's (1985) theories on strain, adolescents who experience aversive situations will seek opportunities to block that aversion. If blocking the aversion is not possible, the adolescent will then try to escape the aversion. A school environment that is experienced as an aversive situation, whether it is through negative relationships with peers, teachers, or both, might result in a student blocking the aversion through coping mechanisms, such as absenteeism or skipping class, to avoid the aversion. If the aversion cannot be avoided, the student might try to escape through causing suspension or expulsion or through dropping out.

A student's life outside of school can also play a significant role within school. Socioeconomics have been identified as a factor for inability to complete school among Black students. And, the higher the rate of poverty within a school, the less likely it is that the school can buffer students against the effects of SES on dropping out (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). Extreme poverty, resulting in homelessness, greatly affects the student's ability to attend school and achieve academically, yet alone graduate (Miller, 2011). Household economic needs are also a factor for consideration. Household economic needs can sometimes become the responsibility of the student. Students who need, or sometimes even choose, to work twenty or more hours per school week are more likely to dropout and are often characterized as failing to see value in academic grades (Zablocki, 2009). Even the community tax bracket and its devotion to educational resources can either help or hinder graduation rates for students (Houck & Kurtz, 2010). Economic factors translate into academic barriers when resources are not available for students. One example is the quality of teachers provided by the tax base. Teacher salaries are linked to attrition, graduation, and transfer rates (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Additionally, teacher-student ratios are correlated with the risk of incarceration as an adult (Arum & LaFree, 2008).

Schools should identify programs that would keep students at-risk for dropping out in school, and reconsider the use of disciplinary removal or grade retention. Retention, suspension, and expulsions are all identified as contributing factors to academic success and increased the likelihood of dropping out (Zablocki, 2009). In fact, school policies have been identified as the most influential factor in reasons for dropout,

as well as exist as the one factor that has the greatest ability to be controlled (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005).

Academic relationships. Students' relationships with significant others has been described as the most essential building block to ensuring academic success (Martin & Dowson, 2009). For example, an adolescent's relationships with teachers and peers inside of school and family and peers outside of school can have a significant impact on academic success. For example, engagement in these relationships can negatively affect student success. Agnew identified parental punishments, mean teachers and a general dissatisfaction as the three primary causes of anger related escapes from school, but also found lack of attachment to a father, lack of attachment to a teacher, acceptance of deviance beliefs, negative dating relationships and poor grades as factors in a student's decision to escape from the school environment (Agnew, 1985). A lack of positive relationships with adults at school is directly linked to a student's decision to dropout (Osher et al., 2003). Seventeen percent of students with disabilities who failed to complete high school identified that they had experienced poor relationships with peers and with teachers (Institute of Education Sciences, 2005).

The size of the school and its relationship to dropping out of school has been debatable. But, a smaller school in collaboration with smaller class sizes has been linked to student levels of trust and the quality of school-based relationships (V. E. Lee & Burkam, 2003).

Student bonds with teachers help prevent school dropout (V. E. Lee & Burkam, 2003; Stearns et al., 2007). Similarly, bonds with peers help students create bonds with school (Osher et al., 2003). This need for bonding is demonstrated by students with

disabilities who reported in the National Longitudinal Transition Survey - 2 that a lack of bonds with teachers and peers influenced their decisions to drop out. It is possible that a lack of bonds with teachers or peers reported by those same students is directly linked to their reporting a dislike for school (Institute of Education Sciences, 2005). It is also demonstrated in a study conducted by Fall (2012) where students identified teacher support and encouragement helped them develop a strong sense of self and increased their desire to be engaged in school.

Akers et al. (1979), in his social learning theory, identified peer relationships and family relationships as essential keys to understanding adolescent behavior. He also saw these two domains, as well as the school environment itself, as differential reinforcers that either encourage an adolescent to model and engage in like-behaviors, whether those be positive or negative.

On another end of the spectrum, strong levels of commitment and positive relationships with family who is in economic need can also serve as a negative factor in the academic domain. Meeting family needs could mean sacrificing an education. Should a student be able to influence a family's financial need, that student may determine the need as a more drawing differential reinforcer. The strain of low income on a family may push the student to dropout in order to contribute to the family's economic need (Burton, 2007; Entwisle et al., 2004). Students may take a job that interferes with their ability to attend or be successful in school. That job may be needed to provide for family needs, including if the student is a young parent themselves (Entwisle et al., 2004).

Family relationships can also negatively affect academic success if the student experiences multiple changes in the living environment. With each change of a living arrangement, a student's likelihood of dropping out increases by 15% (Crowder & Teachman, 2004). Examples of changes in environment that increase dropout were identified in a 2011 study, conducted by Cho, of 6008 adolescents in a major city in Illinois. Those adolescents found to be at risk for dropout are those whose mother was incarcerated and were removed from mother's care to the care of other family members (Cho, 2011).

Parental education is also a factor in student academic success (Crowder & Teachman, 2004). In fact, a parent's highest achieved level of education is one of the strongest predictors for determining the level of education a child will complete (Lewis & Burd-Sharps, 2010). The parent serves as a model of behavior and the value the parent places on education, whether it is personally or for their child, can weigh on a student's adaptation of commitment to school. The relationship between parent-to-child education follows what Akers et al. (1979) described in his social learning theory and the impact of relationships with others, as well as behaviors modeled, in the adoption of behaviors by adolescents. An adolescent's relationship with family is one of the most influential relationships in an adolescent's life. The presence of both parents, expectations for college, and structure within the family home are all factors that positively impact the student's academic achievement (Whitaker, 2011). Additionally, parents who take the time to talk with their children about school help the student to develop attachments to school, increase the likelihood the student will engage in school activities, and decrease the likelihood that the student will dropout (Fall & Roberts, 2012; Stearns et al., 2007).

Preventing school dropout is a social problem that can be solved by educators and families investing in a student's academic success and by serving as academic relationships students can count on. Taking a genuine interest in a student's academics, emotional well-being, and in helping the student see how school today directly relates to life later can make an impact in lowering the dropout rate (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Students are more motivated, engaged, and successful academically when they enjoy quality relationships with others (Martin & Dowson, 2009) and are marked by a higher level of self-esteem (Fall & Roberts, 2012).

Emotional Domain

The emotional well-being of students is crucial to their academic success. Over 2,500 young people 21-29 participated in a survey conducted by Collaborative Psychiatric Epidemiology. According to a resulting 2011 study, of those participants, 38% reported they had experienced a major childhood trauma before the age of sixteen, and nearly 20% of them subsequently dropped out of school (Porche, Fortuna, Lin, & Alegria, 2011). It has been demonstrated that adolescents do not have a mature brain capable of complete rational decision-making. Adolescents are known to make decisions irrationally when in the presence of peers, during heightened states of emotion, and impulsively. In addition to those emotional states, adolescents may seek out thrills, desire instant gratification, and suffer from mental health disorders, such as depression, that affect their ability to think and act with reason (Reyna & Farley, 2006).

Emotional achievements. Students need to feel connected to others, whether they be family members, significant adults, or peers. For example, a relationship with a teacher that a student perceives is positive is a significant buffer to assuring that student

will remain in school (V. E. Lee & Burkam, 2003). A lack of emotional attachment to school leads to academic disengagement. In a 2012 study conducted by Henry et al., survey data from 911 youth in grades eight and nine, who participated in the Rochester Youth Development Survey and later dropped out of school, were examined to determine the effectiveness of utilizing the school disengagement warning index to predict dropout. They found that not only does an investment in school engagement affect an adolescent's behaviors while in school, that sense of attachment or detachment carries into behaviors after one has left school (Henry et al., 2012). It is a sense of engagement that not only is linked to behaviors, but also to the adolescent's academic achievement. According to a 2011 study of 47 youth aged 14-19, behavioral engagement, such as following the rules in school, is the most prevalent engagement factor linked to both deviance and academic success (Whitaker, 2011).

Adolescents also need to own some control over their own academic success. That sense of ownership could be found in pride or shame over the academic achievements met in the classroom. Emotionally, a GPA, grades on exams, feedback on homework, and a desire to engage in the classroom help to build the emotional adolescent in the classroom (Fall & Roberts, 2012; Plank et al., 2008). Adolescents also tend to achieve higher academically if they feel a sense of emotional engagement with peers (Langenkamp, 2010).

Emotional barriers. Emotionally, adolescents may experience many barriers that interfere with their ability to succeed in school. Those barriers can include being the victim of trauma, witnessing violence or trauma, mental health concerns, learning disabilities, or issues with peers. These barriers, along with others, can steer an

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adolescent away from educational success and toward school dropout (Porche et al., 2011; M. Wagner, 2005).

Adolescents may be victims of trauma. That trauma may be a vital factor in understanding why an adolescent responds the way he or she does to situations related to school. Trauma and dropout rates are significantly linked together, as reported by respondents who were victims of "childhood physical abuse (31.13%), witnessed domestic violence (26.01%), experienced rape (25.34%), were beaten (24.82%), or experienced a natural disaster (22.43%)" (Porche, et al., 2011, p. 989). In addition, those diagnosed with or showing traits of conduct disorder or substance abuse dropped out 2.5 times the rate of those who did not (Porche et al., 2011).

Students who are classified as qualifying for special education services begin their academic journey at a disadvantage. However, as mentioned earlier, of all the special education disability categories, those designated as emotionally disturbed, drop out at the highest rate and complete high school at the lowest rate of any student disability categories (M. Wagner, 2005; Zablocki, 2009). Osher, et al. (2003) noted that 48% of emotionally disturbed students dropped out of high school, compared to 30% of other special education designees and 24% of non-disabled students.

Aversive environments trigger emotional responses from adolescents. In line Agnew's Revised Strain Theory, the concept that emotional strain, such as from peers, may cause an adolescent to strike out at those peers in anger in an effort to block a strain they may not be able to escape (Agnew, 1985). Students are found to struggle academically when they are emotionally affected by negative feedback, resulting in a belief that they lack the ability to be successful (Crosnoe et al., 2007).

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Emotional relationships. An emotional connection to others is essential for adolescents. It is those connections to others that help the adolescent feel motivated, want to engage, and ultimately foster a path to academic success (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Among students with identified learning disabilities who dropped out of school, 17% reported that they lacked positive bonds with both peers and teachers (Institute of Education Sciences, 2005). In general, the lack of bonds between students and their teachers is a factor that has been seen as a detriment to the academic progress of students. This need for a bond is demonstrated when students describe perceiving teachers or administrators as mistreating them in some fashion, resulting in a lack of trust with adults at school. This lack of trust and perception of being targeted by faculty results in emotional disengagement from school and a correlation with a tendency to ignore the rules and norms of the environment (Whitaker, 2011). Demonstrated through the school disengagement index is a lack of regards for norms, which identifies students who dropped out as more likely to report involvement with substance abuse and engagement in delinquent behaviors (Henry et al., 2012).

Emotional ties to negative people, such as a peer or family member outside of school, result in an increased likelihood that an adolescent may exhibit a lower level of social control (Agnew, 1985). If an adolescent is surrounded by others who do not embrace social norms, the adolescent may adopt those same belief systems. Consistent family relationships are important to the emotional well-being of an adolescent. Because of this, family relationships can be the buffer that encourages the adolescent to succeed or the irritant that causes strain on the adolescent. For example, if a family becomes disjointed and the adolescent is moved from one school to another, behavior problems

may arise. Such behavioral problems are exhibited in transient or inconsistent families through lower test scores, truancy, or history of substance abuse (Gasper et al., 2012). Another example is the dramatic increase in school dropout when an adolescent is exposed to childhood physical abuse or witnesses domestic violence, with rates ranging from 26% to 31% (Porche et al., 2011).

Social Domain

The social domain affects education and, similarly, the reverse is true. Levin (2009) clearly describes this importance of this relationship when he stated that, "educational equity is a moral imperative for a society in which education is a crucial determinant of life chances" (p. 5). Despite the overwhelming evidence as to the social consequences of failing to complete an education (V. E. Lee & Burkam, 2003), adolescents continue to drop out. Considering this consequence, it has been found that the social economic burdens that accompany school dropout far outweigh the financial costs of society investing in education and educational interventions (Levin, 2009).

Social achievements. The ability to achieve socially is heavily dependent upon completion of high school. Successful completion of high school is found to affect many areas of life for an individual, including life earnings, health, ability to care for self financially, and the likelihood of complying with the law (Henry et al., 2012). Graduating from high school and having achieved that level of academic success, yet alone further years of education, are outward social markers that lend a sense of reassurance to society. Success in school is found in both gauged social success and economic success, regardless of how proficient the adolescent was during the educational process (Houck & Kurtz, 2010). Helping adolescents understand their abilities and plan

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for a realistic future will increase their ability to achieve socially in the future (Whitaker, 2011).

As society within the United States continues to advance with educational opportunities, it has become vital, more than ever, to reach the benchmark of a high school diploma. Successfully completing high school alone no longer carries the value it had in the past. These statements are supported by research conducted by Bloom (2010) and Crosnoe et al. (2007). Individuals who earn a General Equivalency Diploma earn significantly less than those who earn a traditional high school diploma (Bloom, 2010). Consequently, the gap that exists between those who have achieved academic success in high school by earning a diploma and those who have not translates into significant social and economic consequences (Crosnoe et al., 2007).

Social barriers. When academic pursuits are accompanied by inflated sense of accomplishments, such as an overinflated sense of academic ability, this carries over as a barrier to social success. If a student expects that he or she will be able to successfully perform at the collegiate level and cannot, the time to prepare for more realistic career opportunities that can impact adulthood and social success have been lost (Agnew & Jones, 1988). For example, those engaged in a special education program may develop a false sense of what they can realistically achieve following high school. In turn, 40% of those identified as special education eligible in school live with their parents after high school and fail to participate in society as adults, lacking either educational or occupational pursuits (Wells, Sandefur, & Hogan, 2003).

Social responsibilities to family members and others may trump the adolescent's desire or ability to complete a high school education. The adolescent may be

experiencing a "pull" factor that forces their hand to leave school (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). Any life circumstance that an adolescent views as more important than his own education would be an example of a pull factor. For example, teen parents are five times more likely to drop out of school than to graduate (Institute of Education Sciences, 2005). Taking care of a baby becomes more important to the adolescent than remaining in school.

In understanding social barriers, it is imperative to consider the social circumstances both inside and outside of school that affect the adolescent. Inside of school, an over-inflated understanding of ability or a learning disability designation may hinder progress. Similarly, commitments to family members, especially financially, might also prevent the adolescent from achieving set academic goals.

Social relationships. Social relationships are important in the formation of an adolescent striving to become an adult. In understanding the role of social relationships and their power to encourage academic success, one should evaluate the role of peers, family members, schools, and parental reactions to social deviance.

The social relationships outside of the school environment greatly influence an adolescent's perception of his or her education. For example, according to Akers' Social Learning Theory, peers and family members become the model of behavior and the thread of belief systems for adolescents. The behaviors of those valued family and peer relationships are first mimicked, then they are internalized by the adolescent (Akers et al., 1979). If the family and peers see little to no value in conforming with the norms or expectations of school and graduating, this differential reinforcer may be strong enough of an alternative to the adolescent that the adolescent chooses to mirror those beliefs.

Conversely, if family and peers highly value an education, despite the reservations of the adolescent, this behavior too may become the adopted belief system of the adolescent. The behavior is learned socially, followed by a personal internalization of the belief system.

A study conducted by Rumberger and Parlady in 2005 found that schools, as an environment, have very little ability to affect the dropout rate. Even if overall achievement of the student body is higher, there does not appear to be a buffer to prevent school dropout. It is the adolescent's background, such as social influences, that has the greatest impact on the likelihood of dropout. In fact, more than half of the students who drop out share a similar social background (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). This statistic only emphasizes the importance of relationships, whether in school or outside of school, in creating buffers against dropout. That background, however, may not be based upon tangible factors, such as socioeconomics. Agnew (1985), in his Revised Strain Theory, was able to demonstrate that middle class youth engage in delinquency behaviors because of a presence of aversive strains in life. Presence of aversive strain from which an adolescent attempts to escape by quitting school could be a factor found in the common background of dropouts. Quitting school becomes the only way the adolescent believes he can escape the strain experienced in the school environment. Dropping out of school can also be a sign that differential reinforcers are present. Those differential reinforcers become the justification an adolescent needs for dropping out of school.

Akers elaborated on differential reinforcers and their ability to mitigate an adolescent's decision to engage in social deviance, such as dropping out of school. According to a study by Akers (1979), adolescents may choose to engage in deviant

behaviors based upon the reactions of his or her parents. If the parental reaction is perceived as too harsh or too lenient to deviant acts, such as engaging in illicit substances, the adolescent is likely to increase frequency of the behaviors. On the other hand, if the parental response is seen as a centered and fair response to the deviant behavior, the adolescent is likely to decrease the frequency with which he or she would engage in the behaviors. A lack of parental response or negative consequences result in a false sense of being untouchable, justifying engaging in risky behaviors (Reyna & Farley, 2006).

Whether it is the school environment, relationships within school, or peers or family outside of school, there will always be social barriers that can prevent an adolescent from reaching academic goals. These barriers are just one more set of examples in understanding the strains adolescents undergo or the differential reinforcers they face.

Summary of Related Literature

In understanding school dropout, it is essential to understand the environment in which the adolescent exists. Through achievements, barriers, and relationships, the adolescent develops a sense of self in his academic, emotional, and social domains. These domains exist both inside and outside of the school environment, but yield equal power to affect academic success. According to Robert Agnew's Revised Strain Theory and General Strain Theory, society must consider what is causing strain in the adolescent's life that might force him to escape school through dropout (Agnew, 1985; Agnew & White, 1992). Worth equal consideration is the social learning theory of Ronald Akers. According to Akers et al. (1979), society should be exploring the essence

of the relationships surrounding the adolescent that make him believe it is acceptable to dropout.

A barrier for society itself is found in the economic costs to taxpayers when an adolescent fails to graduate from high school. Should society look to save tax dollars and invest wisely in individuals, then society should evaluate the costs of investing in education versus the criminal justice system, where many individuals who lack a diploma are arrested, convicted, and imprisoned (Gaes, 2008). Earning a high school diploma has been strongly linked to less violent and drug-related crimes. In turn, the incarceration rates lower and the costs invested by society in the criminal justice system decrease as well (Levin, 2009; Lochner, 2004).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the purpose for conducting a qualitative study with prison

inmates who dropped out of schools located within the same county in which they were

incarcerated. The qualitative approach, including data collection through the correctional

facility database and semi-structured interviews, is explained thoroughly. The process

for inviting and choosing participants, the setting of the study within the correctional

facility, and the method for analyzing the data collected are outlined throughout the

chapter. All participants were protected at every stage of the process, from an initial

process approved by the Institutional Review Board at Indiana University of

Pennsylvania through the final meeting during the member-checking process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the social, emotional, and

academic experiences of males incarcerated within a rural Pennsylvania county prison

prior to their dropping out of school. The study was designed to help understand the

antecedents taking place academically, emotionally, and socially during school years

prior to a decision to drop out. Should stakeholders within the education system have an

ability to control or affect any of the identified conditions, it may be within their power to

decrease the dropout rate. Consequently, an increase in graduation rates may lead to a

decrease in incarceration rates.

An investment in K-12 education to address identified dropout factors affected by

the educational system would be a less expensive venture than incarceration. For every

year a student is kept within the Pennsylvania school system, the average cost per pupil in

2012-2013 was $15,341 ("School spending," 2013). However, according to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the average cost per inmate in 2009 was $32,059 (J. Wagner, 2011). Additionally, Pennsylvania has the fastest growing inmate population rate in the country, experiencing a 40% rise between 2000 and 2010 (Wager, 2011). The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania needs to consider whether they should continue to institute more educational programming in prisons and increase incarceration budgets or whether it would be economically wise to invest those dollars in basic K-12 education. If the conditions that surround an inmate's reasons for failing to acquire a high school diploma were identified, schools would have the ability to assess whether and how they could address those concerns. If those concerns are addressed, it is possible that incarceration rates will decrease over time.

Qualitative Research Approach

This qualitative study was designed with an ontological philosophy, in that each participant's individual academic experience provided the researcher with a whole perspective of the realities of school dropout based on the participants' view (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, the research was epistemological in nature, in that each inmate's response provided subjective evidence (Creswell, 2013). The subjective evidence was gathered through a series of open-ended questions during individual conversational interviews which are ideal for gathering qualitative data (Mertler & Charles, 2011). Through document analysis and theme identification following the interviews, this qualitative research study helped provide clarity in understanding the essence of the inmate experience (Creswell, 2013) in choosing to drop out of school.

Research Questions

Because there exists a positive correlation between school dropout and incarceration (Adams et al., 1994; Batiuk et al., 2005; Burke & Vivian, 2001; Cecil et al., 2000; Fabelo, 2002; Flynn, 2005; Gaes, 2008; Kelso Jr., 2000; Lahm, 2009; Robinson, 2000; Saylor & Gaes, 1996; Steurer et al., 2001; Steurer et al., 2003; Vacca, 2004; Wilson et al., 2000; Winterfield et al., 2009) this qualitative study explored the phenomena experienced by inmates academically, emotionally, and socially prior to dropping out of school. The central question sought to be answered by this research is how do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their academic, emotional, and social experiences prior to dropping out of school. The answer to this overarching idea was explored through the following research questions, exploring the three domains during educational years; the academic, emotional, and social domains. Research Questions:

1. How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with academic achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

2. How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with emotional achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

3. How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with social achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

Research Design

The researcher began the study by receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board of Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Next, the research met with the county administrators, the county sheriff and warden, who oversee the prison to explain the purpose of the study. Next, potential participants were introduced to the study in a one-to-one meeting with the warden. The warden then chose to make all initial contacts with inmates who qualified for the study. The warden, who has a reputation as having a positive rapport with inmates at the prison, wanted to be the first to explain the study to the inmates and review all essential paperwork with them. This decision was agreed upon between the researcher and the warden, after the researcher shared that a few of the eligible inmates were known the researcher. The researcher believed that some inmates might not wish to participate once the researcher's identity was revealed. The warden presenting information to the inmates demonstrated that he supported the study and may have alleviated concerns inmates may have had about openly sharing information with an outside individual. In fact, several of the participants shared that the warden was enthusiastic in his presentation of the study to them. Several also shared that they appreciated having the two-week window between initially learning of the study and meeting with the researcher, as it provided time to truly reflect on the interview questions and ponder what information they thought was important to share. Both the warden and the researcher read, reviewed, and offered personal copies of the Interview Guide (Appendix A) and the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) to the participants. Additionally, each person explained to the inmates that no benefit existed if they participated in the study, however any information shared could benefit students who

might be experiencing the same struggles. This concept inspired several of the

participants to be open and honest as they shared that they hoped teens, parents, or

schools could benefit from information being shared. The information was read to

inmates in order to alleviate literacy barriers that might exist. The letter and verbal

presentation contained information regarding the purpose of the study, the right to

withdraw from the study, clarified that no benefits or rewards existed for participants, and

assured inmates that their confidentiality would be protected.

Process for Analyzing the Data

The data gathered for the purpose of this study were collected by means of

database searches and one-to-one interviews. Existing documents and records were

evaluated (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Mertler & Charles, 2011) to identify

participants' age, highest level of education, schools attended, and length of sentence to

prison. The correctional facility featured in this study incorporated the Global Tel*Link

Digital Solutions Offender Management System (Tel*Link, 2014) for gathering

demographic information for each inmate, as well as a storage system for all pertinent

information about the inmate during incarceration. This database software program was

accessed by the researcher in order to identify general demographic information about all

inmates at the correctional facility, including name, age, gender, race, educational

attainment (including last school attended), length of sentence, and sentence status. From

this generated list, twenty-one inmates who fit the study profile were identified and were

consequently were invited to participate in the study. Figure 1 provides a visual

representation of the general male population housed at the correctional facility at the

time of initial data collection. This process allowed the researcher the ability to evaluate

each participant's independent experience (Creswell, 2013; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) as well as a level of safety in gathering data. The interviews were collected using a digital recording device and later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Additionally, recording the interview allowed the researcher to maintain eye contact, display interest in responses, and build a rapport of trust with participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

Male Population by Age
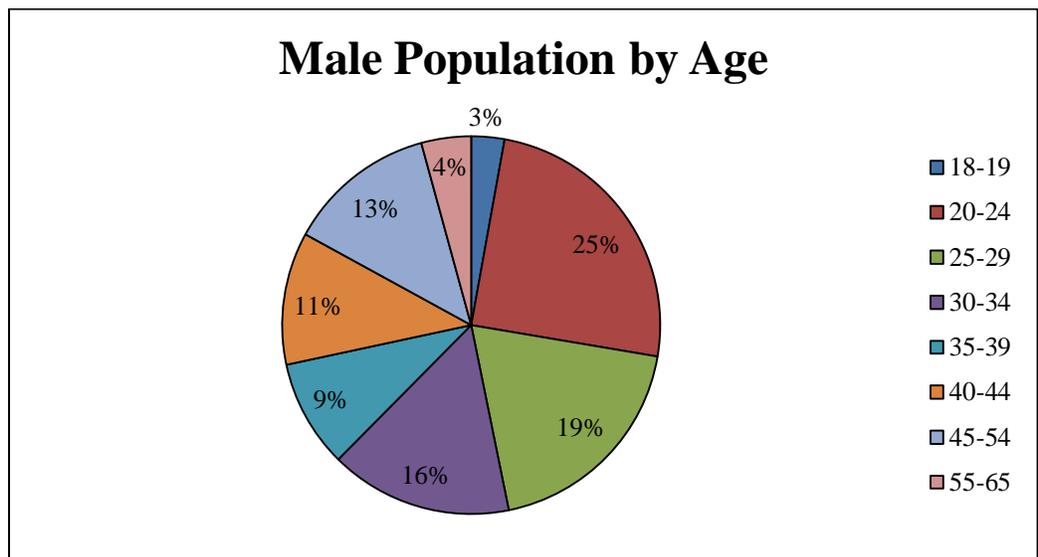
Figure 1. Demographic data: Male population by age.

Initial data collection revealed that only 41% of the inmates held a high school diploma or higher. Of the 59% who failed to graduate, only 26% went on to successfully obtain a G.E.D. The dropout rates of inmates at the study site correlate with the average dropout ranges reported earlier, between 39% and 67% (Goebel, 2005; Harlow, 2003; D. Lee et al., 2012). Figure 2 displays an overall picture of the educational success of inmates at the correctional facility. Note that during the study the researcher discovered a discrepancy in the correctional facility's data collection system. For some inmates, the highest attended grade level was recorded, whereas others were entered with the highest

completed grade level. The data represented in figure 2 reflect the data gathered from the institution's database. This inconsistency with data collection is not uncommon (D. Lee et al., 2012) as discussed earlier. However, this discovery was shared with the correctional facility's warden.

Once a pool of participants was selected, those participants met with the researcher in a one-to-one interview. During the personal meeting questions on a

Highest Reported Level of Education

Legend:
- Unknown
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- Graduated HS
- Some College
- A.A./A.S.

Percentages shown: 3%, 1%, 1%, 3%, 1%, 5%, 5%, 10%, 32%, 13%, 23%, 3%, 3%
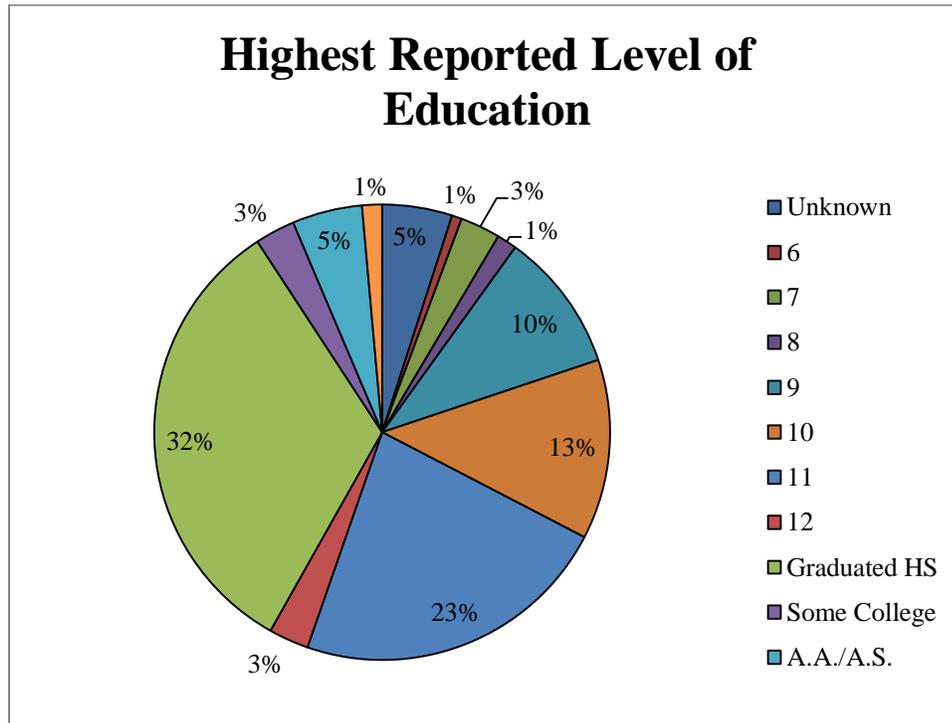
Figure 2. Highest reported level of education by inmates.

researcher designed interview tool was used to guide the interview. The questions on the tool were developed following a thorough literature review that involved identifying patterns of relevant data into nodes using NVivo 10 software. The interview questions followed the same patterns established in the literature review which provided prefigured categories (Crabtree & Miller, 1992) for data analysis. However, the researcher also

included new categories as they emerged through information presented by the participants (Creswell, 2013).

The interview guide (Appendix A) was used as a guide for discussion with all participants. The researcher allowed the participants to speak freely and include any information they believed was relevant, regardless if it was not included in the interview guide. Questions included the themes of academic domain, emotional domain, and social domain with categories that included details about achievements, barriers, and relationships. Participants were given an opportunity to reflect on whether any type of intervention may have changed the outcome of their decision to drop out. The answers to these questions and discussions were then categorized according to the nodes and themes identified earlier through a literature review. A word tree identified by NVivo10 software provided the nodes the researcher used in question development.

One-to-one interviews were conducted in an interview room within the correctional facility. Participants were informed that an audio recording device would be utilized to ensure accuracy of responses provided. The audio recordings were then transcribed allowing for analysis among the prefigured categories. Additionally, verbatim answers of participants were then ensured for accuracy and inclusion in the study. Identifying patterns of responses through a coding system provided trustworthiness of the data, an opportunity to identify discrepancies in participant responses, and a visual representation of the information collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

Participants and Setting

The twelve participants of this study were all inmates in the same correctional institution and between the ages of 18 to under 25. Participants within this age range match Department of Corrections' data collection categories within Pennsylvania institutions. The Department of Corrections categorizes inmates by age that include an "18 to under 25", providing valuable comparative demographic data useful within this study. The setting included a Pennsylvania rural county correctional facility. The participants were all Caucasians. Ninety-four percent of the male population at the correctional facility was Caucasian and 100% of inmates who met the study requirements were Caucasian. All participants dropped out of schools located within the same county in which they were incarcerated.

Participants

This study included interviewing male inmates under the age of 25 who dropped out of school. Specifically, the study sought to analyze the reasons given for school dropout among young incarcerated men who all attended schools within the same rural county in which they were incarcerated. The researcher aimed to provide a springboard for discussion within the same rural county regarding the problem of school dropout and its role as a contributing factor to later incarceration. For those reasons, the pool of potential participants for the study was very narrow and specific. All participants were part of a non-random convenience sample in that all eligible inmates who were deemed appropriate, agreed to participate, and fit the sample qualifications were included in the study.

Sex

The participants of this study were all male. The purpose of an all-male study was due to a low female inmate population within the study site as well as the convenience of an abundance of qualifying male inmates for achieving the study's purpose.

Number

The researcher accessed the on-site software database that stores demographic data for the correctional facility. That database allowed the researcher to identify twenty-one potential participants, of those, fifteen agreed to take part in the study. Of the fifteen eligible inmates who signed the informed consent to participate (Appendix B), twelve were available during the dates of the interview process. Three of the consenting inmates had been placed in lock-down isolation and were therefore deemed inappropriate by the correctional facility to participate on said days. According to Creswell (2013), the ideal number of participants in a qualitative study is between five and 25. Of those participants, all twelve failed to graduate with a high school diploma and dropped out of schools within the same rural county in which they were incarcerated. Since dropping out of school, five obtained a G.E.D. and four more are in the process of attending classes. Participants reported dropping out of school between the ages of fourteen and nineteen and between the grades of seven and eleven. Ages of inmates at the commencement of the study included participants who were nineteen (2), twenty (2), twenty-one (5), twenty-two (1), and twenty-three (2).

Table 1

Participants and Their Reported Educational History

	Age	Highest Completed Grade Level	G.E.D. Status	Repeated Grade Levels	Age at Time of Dropout	Diagnosed Type Learning Disability
Andrew	23	8	N	none	14	Learning Support (all core classes)
Brandon	19	10	IN PROGRESS	K	17	Emotional Support
Christopher	21	8	Y	5th	15, 16, 17	none
David	23	9	N	3rd, 9th	16, 19	I.E.P. - unsure of category
James	19	9	N	9th	17	none
Kyle	20	7	Y	6th, 8th	15	none
Michael	22	11	IN PROGRESS	1st, 8th	19	Learning Support (math, reading)
Nicholas	21	7	IN PROGRESS	7th - (3x)	17	Learning Support
Robert	20	11	Y	2nd	17	Learning Support
Thomas	21	7	Y	7th - (2x)	16	none
William	21	11	Y	2nd (unsure)	17	none
Zachary	21	11	IN PROGRESS	none	18	Learning Support (reading, writing, math)

Additionally, ten of the participants repeated at least one grade level and seven participants reported having at least one known diagnosed learning disability, receiving formal services while a student. All of the above demographic data was gathered as part of the interview process to help understand the educational backgrounds and experiences of each participant. A snapshot of participant educational history is found in Table 1.

Inclusion Criteria

The participants included in the study had to meet the qualifications set by the researcher. The requirements included that each participant had to be male, aged 18 to under 25, incarcerated within the same correctional facility, and dropped out of schools within the county of incarceration. All participants provided written consent to take part in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

During the initial phase of study, data was collected from correctional facility records and staff to identify inmates who were male, aged 18 to under twenty five, and dropped out of school prior to graduation. Once this data had been collected, also during the initial phase of the study, inmates identified via records and staff as potential subjects were be excluded for the following reasons:

- Subject identified that he was not a student in the county of study at the time of school dropout and, therefore, responses may not be applicable to recommendations or future study regarding addressing the cause of dropout in county schools.

- Subject stated that he did not wish to consent to participate in the study.

- Subject was deemed inappropriate for participation due to behavioral, mental health, or safety concerns by the correctional facility staff or the researcher.

- Subject was identified as likely to be released within the first 30 days from the commencement of the study and therefore may have contributed to subject attrition rates.

During the second phase of data collection, which included participation in interviews, subjects may have been excluded for the following reasons:

- Subject stated that he did not wish to consent to participate or continue to participate in the study.

- Subject was deemed inappropriate for participation due to behavioral, mental health, or safety concerns by the correctional facility staff or the researcher.

- Subject was unexpectedly released from the prison.

Vulnerability of Participants

Although all participants in this study were inmates within a correctional facility and could be viewed as vulnerable, the primary investigator ensured that all information gathered for the purpose of the study was protected, confidential, and could in no way affect the subject's status within the correctional facility. All demographic information gathered was coded and pseudonyms were utilized to protect inmate identity. Additionally, no information was solicited, gathered, or documented regarding inmate experiences within the corrections system. All information gathered was directly relevant to the study, it included information only about demographics and educational experiences prior to school dropout.

Participants in the study were assigned a coded pseudonym that protected the subject from any ties to information gathered throughout the study and/or interview process. There will be no way for the primary investigator, correctional facility staff or administration, or future consumers of the study's outcomes to identify any of the participants in the study. All data will be destroyed after three years, in compliance with federal regulations.

Subjects in the study were educationally disadvantaged, in that they all have dropped out of school. They may also be economically disadvantaged, in that subjects were all unemployed or underemployed as inmates within a correctional facility and may come from economically disadvantaged circumstances. All subjects were incarcerated, in that the essence of the study focuses on those who dropped out of school prior to incarceration. Finally, subjects may have qualified as mentally disabled. Some subjects revealed that they were deemed learning disabled and/or qualified for special education services while in school.

The researcher's status as vulnerable may also be questioned. The researcher interviewed inmates one-on-one within an interview room located in the correctional facility. However, the researcher was in a room that was highly visible to correctional facility staff as one wall was made of glass and faced the main hallway. The room was unlocked and was equipped with a camera monitored by central command in case of an emergency. Should the researcher have become uncomfortable with an inmate during any phase of the interviewing process, the researcher was able to request immediate removal of the inmate.

Protection Against Risks

The methods and procedures utilized in this study followed the ethical concerns and recommendations as outlined by Creswell (2013). Prior to the study, the researcher sought approval of the rural correctional institution's warden and the county sheriff overseeing the institution. The county stakeholders were provided all necessary and requested documentation prior to the study, as well as a final copy of the research upon completion. Additionally, research results were shared within the school districts of the studied county who might also benefit from the acquired information and analysis.

The study was conducted with consideration to the sensitive population from which the participant sample was drawn: young, incarcerated males. The researcher utilized great caution in regards to the balance of power that exists between the inmate, researcher, and the prison staff ensuring that inmate privacy and confidentiality was protected at all times. No information gathered was deemed harmful to the inmate in any way. All of the above steps were formed based upon steps to ethical considerations outlined by Creswell (2013). Additionally, the researcher kept a record of any ethical dilemmas encountered, the people involved or affected by the situation, ultimate decisions made by the researcher, and the impact those dilemmas may have had on the study based upon guidance written by McMillan and Schumacher (2001).

In the initial phase of the study, potential participants had a copy of the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) read aloud, explaining the purpose of the study and the role of participants. Additionally, copies of the Interview Guide (Appendix A) were made available for any inmate who wished to read them as part of his consideration to participate in the study. In the second phase of the study, subjects interested in

participating in the study had both the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) and the Voluntary Consent Form (Appendix C) read aloud, as well as provided physical copies of each, in a one-to-one meeting with the researcher.

The ethical focus of the study was guided by research conducted by Mertler and Charles (2011), whereas the researcher looked to identify the essence of lived experiences of the participants with the intent of gaining useful knowledge about the motivators behind school dropout. Both positive and negative honest feedback were reported in the results, regardless if they coincided with the intended mission of the study. Finally, participants who provided consent to take part in the study were reminded that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and the purpose of the study was carefully outlined for all those who agree.

The questions asked during the interview are outlined in the Interview Guide found in Appendix A. The questions are open-ended and provide participants an opportunity to elaborate on experiences regarding his academic, emotional, and social experiences as a student prior to the decision to drop out of school. The questions inquired about the inmate's achievements, barriers, and relationships while he was still a student. Any participant selected for the member-checking process provided the researcher with approximately another hour of time in order to validate the researcher's interpretation of the data. There were no identified risks to the subjects or to the facility participating in this study,

Protections against risks were accounted for through strict adherence to the county correctional facility administration and staff procedures and expectations. These policies were followed to ensure the safety and security of all subjects, other inmates,

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facility staff, and the primary investigator. Additionally, all information gathered for the purpose of this study was coded for confidentiality purposes and for the protection of subject privacy. Finally, participants reserved the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Sampling Procedure

The participants who participate in this study were selected from a non-random convenience sample. A non-probability sampling was most appropriate because one could not predetermine individuals who would be incarcerated and that would be eligible to participate in the study (Mertler & Charles, 2011). This study was non-experimental in that the prison population tends to fluctuate around 160 inmates per day (Corrections, 2012) and was conducted for informational purposes only. Because the inmate population was relatively small to begin with and could be unpredictable, the sample population selected had to meet the requirements set by the researcher. Inmates included in the sample had to consent to participate in the study, receive approval from prison administration, and meet a minimum expected incarceration term of 30 days from the commencement of the study. The 30-day benchmark was set by the researcher to ensure that participants would survive the life of the study and member-checking process.

In the initial phase of the study, inmates who were potential subjects in the study were identified through examination of the institution's records of demographic data with the assistance of the institutional staff. The records were examined to identify potential subjects by gender, age, and educational background. The researcher and warden then approached potential subjects in individual meetings who were identified through demographic data sources and explained the purpose of the study and opportunity to

participate. At this stage, the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) was read to potential participants and copies of the Interview Guide (Appendix A) were made available for inmate review. The initial phase included all inmates who desired to participate in the study and met the above requirements in order to provide an ethical basis for the study.

From the initial phase pool of participants, individuals were selected for the second phase of the study whereas interviews were conducted to provide depth of understanding regarding dropout and incarceration. Those participants were selected in accordance with the Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria outlined in this proposal. To begin the second phase, the researcher, one-on-one, read and physically presented the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) and Voluntary Consent Form (Appendix C) to the inmate and provided the inmate with copies.

Study Site

The study site, a rural county prison, was recruited by the researcher through scheduling an in-person meeting with the County Sheriff, the primary administrator of the facility. At this meeting, the researcher presented the letter of study intention (Appendix D) and a copy of the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institution Review Board protocol as well as explained the intentions of the study. The sheriff approved the study and a second meeting was scheduled to explain the intentions of the study to both the sheriff and the county correctional facility's warden.

The setting of this study was a rural Pennsylvania county prison. According to data collected by the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, the prison population averaged 189 inmates per day in 2013 and has a fluctuation rate of approximately 1300 inmates incarcerated and released per year. Of those inmates, 150 were male and 94%

reported their race as White. Additionally, 29.3% of the male inmates are between the ages of 18 to under 25. The facility can house 151 inmates in cells and has expanded with another 56 beds in a dayroom/dorm room setting because of a rise in population over the past few years. The county correctional facility offers drug and alcohol counseling, education, social services, mental health counseling, and an offender re-entry program.

The interviews were conducted over a series of two days. They were conducted in an interview room in the main hallway of the correctional facility. One wall of the interview room was glass and the door was unlocked from the inside at all times. The room also contains a camera that was monitored by central command. Additionally, correctional facility staff often walked by the interview room or stopped in between interviews to ensure all was well. At no time did the researcher feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

<p style="text-align:center">Data Collection</p>

The data collection involved three phases. The study began with conducting a pilot study, where the Interview Guide questions were evaluated for clarity and comprehension by professional educators. Next, databases at the correctional facility were utilized to determine which inmates might serve as potential participants in the study. Finally, inmates who agreed to participate in the study took part in semi-structured conversational interviews with the researcher. This entire process is explained in detail below.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted for the purpose of establishing clarity, comprehension, and reading level appropriateness of the interview protocol. Middle school English and Special Education teachers evaluated the interview questions. Since it has been shown that inmates average a 7.93 grade reading level (Flynn, 2005), educators at this level were appropriate for the pilot study. According to Creswell (2013), pilot testing assists the researcher in refining research questions and identifying degrees of researcher bias that may be present in the instruments utilized.

The pilot study was launched after approval was received from the Institutional Review Board. The study involved eight middle school English and Special Education educators reviewing the Interview Guide (Appendix A) and providing the researcher with feedback regarding the quality of comprehension and clarity of the questions. The pilot study was conducted utilizing Qualtrics software, an online survey package that allows the researcher to create and conduct studies via Internet. A copy of the Pilot Study can be found in Appendix G. Of the eight participating educators, four were Pennsylvania certified in special education and four were certified in English. Additionally, all educators who participated in the evaluation of the interview guide all had more than ten years' experience in education, as demonstrated in Table 2.

The prevailing comments from educators included questions as to how the researcher would gather detailed responses from participants. Throughout the survey, regardless of the question being addressed by the educator, the overall feedback centered around the interest in gathering details from inmates. Recommendations for eliciting more detailed responses included comments such as those found in Table 3.

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Table 2

Education of Participants in Pilot Study

How long have you been teaching?				
#	Answer		Response	%
1	0-5 years		0	0%
2	6-10 years		0	0%
3	11-15 years		2	25%
4	16-20 years		2	25%
5	21+ years		4	50%
	Total		8	100%

Table 3

Pilot Study Participants' Recommendations

Would it be more beneficial to not form a "can you" question but do you say please describe?
Did you feel that school was important? Why did you feel that way?
Again I would just caution the can you at the beginning of questions you don't want them to say yes or no you want them to elicit more information
They look good so far...I think that I would be interested in a question singling out any effects on education caused by family dynamics alone.
maybe even how did you feel about dropping out of school???
Can you describe your relationship........ Explain
"Please describe", "Please provide examples of..."
Instead of can you maybe use how would you
Do you want them to explain why it was or was not important?
I understand why some students feel like failures and drop out of school when education mainly focuses on book knowledge. All students have gifts, but not all are in academics.
good question - although they may not have had achievements in those areas, but were involved with them. It depends on whether you want to know WHAT their interests were or how well they did in those areas.

The researcher kept these suggestions in mind during the interview process.

Although the interviews were semi-structured in nature and allowed for elaborative

responses, the researcher was aware that the questions alone may need more prompting

following the feedback of the educational professionals. However, the overall feedback

of the participating teachers was positive regarding the Interview Guide, as demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4

Pilot Study Participant Feedback on Survey Tool

Pilot Study Participant Feedback on Survey Tool
Text Response
Excellent
Good
Great questions!
good ones!

Databases

Multiple databases were utilized to gather relevant and comparative demographic data for the study. The Pennsylvania Department of Education databases on dropout rates, age levels, highest level of education attained, and budgetary expenses were used. Similarly, inmate education levels, ages of inmates, populations, and budgetary expenses were gathered from Pennsylvania Department of Corrections databases. Finally, databases within the rural county prison study site were also accessed to provide comparative demographic data and identify potential participants for the study.

Semi-Structured Conversational Interviews

Data from inmates for the purpose of qualitative analysis were gathered utilizing semi-structured conversational interviews. Those interviews were conducted after an interview protocol was designed to guide the questioning process. Questions were open-ended in nature to allow participants to answer the questions in a manner that aligned with their personal interpretations (Mertler & Charles, 2011). Additionally, the semi-structured conversational interviews were held within the prison interview room, which

provided the participant a sense of security and, according to Creswell, a needed

distraction-free environment (2013).

All interviews with inmates took place in the same rural Pennsylvania county

prison. Prior to meeting with inmates, the researcher presented copies of the Interview

Guide (Appendix A), Informed Consent Form (Appendix B), and the Voluntary Consent

Form (Appendix C) to the prison warden. The warden then chose to make all initial

contacts with inmates who qualified for the study. The warden has a reputation for

positive rapport with inmates at the prison. He asked to be the first person to explain the

study to the inmates and review all essential paperwork with them. This decision was

agreed upon between the researcher and the warden, after the researcher shared that a few

of the eligible inmates were known the researcher. The researcher believed that some

inmates might not wish to participate once the researcher's identity was revealed.

Allowing the warden to be the first person to present the study to potential participants

served as a demonstration of his support for the study. It may also have alleviated inmate

concerns regarding their participation. In fact, several of the participants shared that the

warden was enthusiastic in his presentation of the study to them. Several also shared that

they appreciated having the two-week window between initially learning of the study and

meeting with the researcher as it provided them ample time to reflect on the interview

questions and ponder what information they thought was important to share. Both the

warden and the researcher read, reviewed, and offered personal copies of the Interview

Guide (Appendix A) and the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) to the participants.

Additionally, each explained to the inmates that there was no benefit to participating in

the study. However, it was relayed that any information shared could benefit students

who might be experiencing the similar struggles. This concept inspired several of the participants to be candid during the interview.

Interview Questions

The interview questions utilized for this study explored the experiences of inmates prior to their dropping out of school in their academic, emotional, and social domains. The interview guide of questions can be found in Appendix A. Samples of questions in the interview guide include:

1. Can you describe any achievements you had in school, such as with academics, grades, clubs, sports, or activities?

2. Can you describe any barriers or problems you had in school, such as with academics, grades, learning disabilities, repeating a grade, or with switching schools?

3. Did you feel that school was important?

4. How did you feel about your relationships with your peers, teachers, administrators or family members while in school?

5. How did your family or friends feel about your dropping out of school?

6. Did your relationships outside of school make a difference in your decision to drop out?

The formal interview began with the researcher introducing herself, reminding the inmate what the general purpose of the study was, and providing each participant with a copy of forms as they were read. Each participant was reminded that his participation was voluntary and that he could choose at any time to end the interview or rescind his information for inclusion in the study. Each participant was notified that the researcher

would make minimal notes, as to give him the researcher's maximum attention, and that the interview would be audio recorded to ensure accuracy. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed at least twice for accuracy. The interviews included explaining the three domains that the interview questions sought to explore. However, the researcher informed the inmates that the interview guide was only a guide and encouraged the inmates to share any information that he thought would be important or relevant to include in the interview. Because the interviews were semi-structured and participants were allowed to freely elaborate on interview questions or other relevant information they wished to include, the interviews lasted between 17 and 101 minutes. Two of the inmates were direct in answering questions whereas other inmates elaborated on their answers, had additional important information to share, or tended to repeat the same stories multiple times throughout an interview. The researcher made an effort to explain to each participant that his story was important. Sharing his story could help to create conversations or opportunities to help young teens in similar situations. It is worth noting that all participants volunteered to meet a second time for the member checking process should they be asked. All questions on the interview guide were derived from the themes and nodes identified during the literature review process, as demonstrated in a word tree graphic organizer identified through NVivo 10.

Each participant was informed that his participation did not affect his incarceration. The researcher explained that the interviews were only to include information about the participant's life while he was still a student prior to dropping out of school. All twelve participants were able to remain focused on this objective. Additionally, the researcher assured the participants that his identity would remain

completely anonymous, that neither the correctional facility nor his home school district would be able to identify him from the information. All inmates were assigned a pseudonym number during initial data collection. The numbers were used during the interviews. Following the interviews, each participant number was then reassigned with a pseudonym name. The names were selected by researching the most popular boys' names during the year 1990, the year that all twelve participants were born shortly after. Each pseudonym was selected to ensure a different initial letter was assigned, therefore all names selected are found somewhere within the top 25 names of that birth year.

<div align="center">**Method of Data Analysis**</div>

There were multiple steps incorporated in analyzing the data gathered as part of this study. The following sections outline how the data was organized and coded while taking into consideration the ethical, reliability, validity, and research bias concerns.

Organization

Data collected through recorded interviews, hand-written researcher notes, literature, and databases were organized through multiple methods. Recorded data and literature were entered into NVivo software whereas the software program identified nodes worth evaluating as possible themes. Nodes were identified through graphic representations of words in word trees. The researcher also organized hand-written notes and database information into charts. The tables, charts and graphic software output were used to visually represent the data (Creswell, 2013), the researcher then was able to identify repeating themes of participant experiences.

Coding

Information gathered through interviews, literature, and databases were coded in order to identify themes of participant experiences. Themes could not be identified until after all information was gathered, as McMillian and Schumacher identified that, "the final set of categories is not totally predetermined but is carved out of the data according to category meanings" (2001, p. 468).

This qualitative study incorporated of subject interviews and analyzed them via NVivo software. The software is based upon the principle of in vivo coding, whereas exact words utilized by participants of the research are drawn out and identified (Creswell, 2013). The data were then analyzed to identify the essence of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013) as they related to the relationship that may exist between the educational experiences and school dropout of incarcerated males.

Ethical Considerations

The methods and procedures utilized in this study followed the ethical concerns and recommendations as outlined by Creswell (2013). Prior to the study, the researcher sought approval of the rural correctional institution's warden and the county sheriff overseeing the institution. The county stakeholders were provided all necessary and requested documentation prior to the study as well as a final copy of the research upon completion. Additionally, research results were shared within the school districts of the studied county, who might also benefit from the acquired information and analysis.

The study was conducted with consideration to the sensitive population from which the participant sample was drawn: young, incarcerated males. The researcher took great caution in regards to the balance of power that existed between the inmate,

researcher, and the prison staff, ensuring that inmate privacy and confidentiality was protected at all times. No information gathered could be deemed harmful to the inmate in any way. All of the above steps were formed based upon steps to ethical considerations outlined by Creswell (2013). Additionally, the researcher kept a record of any ethical dilemmas that were encountered, the people involved or affected the situation, ultimate decisions made by the researcher, and the impact those dilemmas may have had on the study based upon guidance written by McMillan and Schumacher (2001).

The ethical focus of the study was also guided by research conducted by Mertler and Charles (2011), whereas the researcher looked to identify the essence of lived experiences of the participants with the intent of gaining useful knowledge about the motivators behind school dropout. Both positive and negative honest feedback was reported in the results, regardless if they coincided with the intended mission of the study. Finally, participants who provided consent to take part in the study were reminded that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and the purpose of the study was carefully outlined for all those who agreed.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity were both established in this study by implementation of a variety of methods. One method instituted to ensure accuracy of the results was triangulation of the data. Triangulation was established through member checking, whereas a sample of participants were given the opportunity to review the results and validate the conclusions drawn by the researcher (Creswell, 2013; Mertler & Charles, 2011). Member checking was completed with six of the twelve participants utilizing the form found in Appendix E. The form and the individual meeting provided the

participants with an opportunity to ensure that their voices were heard in the study, that they were accurately quoted or summarized, and allowed a final opportunity for input. Additionally, an independent party conducted an external audit. The auditor had not stake in the study. The auditor reviewed the researcher's process to evaluate accuracy of the information, identify any areas that indicated researcher bias, as well question any areas in need of clarification. The auditor reviewed all documents related to the study and was provided an opportunity to ask questions of the researcher. The form developed for the purpose of the audit is found in Appendix F. A third method of triangulation was employed as peer review was utilized throughout the study. Education, mental health, and legal professionals read through sections of the study in order to provide feedback regarding clarity and comprehension while questioning methods and researcher interpretations (Creswell, 2013). Finally, the researcher gathered information for the study through multiple sources such as interviews, literature, previous studies, and databases to aid in establishing credibility of the study's results (Creswell, 2013; Mertler & Charles, 2011). The study's reliability was enhanced through verbatim transcription of interviews (Creswell, 2013). The information gathered from the participants was deemed credible and dependable (Mertler & Charles, 2011) based upon the implementation of the multiple methods of triangulation. Despite the participants being known prison inmates, evidence was gathered in a separate space within the prison in individual interviews. Therefore, any identified themes can be considered credible, as no opportunities for corroboration between participants existed.

Potential Research Bias

The study's purpose, to identify the essence of the educational experiences of inmates prior to dropping out of school, holds an interest to the researcher that may be considered biased. The researcher worked within the criminal justice system as a probation/parole officer and currently works within the educational system as a secondary education teacher. The researcher also worked as an adolescent therapist. All three of these professional positions were held within the county of study. However, this multi-role background allowed the researcher a better understanding of the potential areas of need and questions to be asked in the interview or researched through the literature. Potential researcher bias in the study was minimized through implementation of triangulation of the data (Mertler & Charles, 2011).

Another bias consideration was the relationship developed between the researcher and participants. Prior to the researcher meeting with any inmates, the warden approached all potential participants. At this time, the warden revealed the identity of the researcher. The warden was notified that some inmates were known to the researcher prior to their incarceration. This allowed any inmates to refuse participation in the study, should the identity of the researcher make him uncomfortable. All potential participants were also informed that they reserved the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In the final pool of participants, two inmates were previously known to the researcher. The researcher reminded both participants that there was a prior relationship and asked if either wished to withdraw due to that relationship. Both inmates requested to remain as participants in the study.

The researcher also made an effort to establish a rapport with all participants in order to gain their trust and foster honesty in the interview while taking steps to avoid sympathizing with the side of the participants (Creswell, 2013). The benefit of choosing this particular county for the study was the preexisting rapport and relationships the researcher had with the educational and criminal justice community, leading to open doors for conducting the study. A history of trust among community stakeholders allowed the study's purpose, to understand the experiences of school dropouts, to provide a future springboard for conversations.

Summary

The outcomes of the qualitative study provided insight regarding the academic, emotional, and social experiences inmates had prior to a decision to drop out of school. In the process of gathering the information for the study, each participant was protected as a vulnerable subject and voluntarily participated in each phase of the study. All questions on the Interview Guide were piloted with professional educators to ensure clarity and comprehension among inmates with a limited education . The Institutional Review Board provided approval for all steps in the research process, as did the warden and sheriff of the participating correctional institution.

Using the guidelines outlined above, including processes such as auditing and triangulation of the data, the results were deemed reliable and valid. In the end, the results should be considered a springboard for discussions on ways to address the issue of school dropout.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA AND ANALYSIS

This qualitative study included a review of the literature to assist in identifying prevailing themes among incarcerated adults who dropped out of school. The researcher, using the correctional facility's demographic data system, selected male inmates under the age of 25 to invite to participate in the study. All inmates selected dropped out of schools located within the same rural county in which they were incarcerated. The identified themes from the literature guided the development of the interview guide utilized with the inmates. The survey was conducted one-to-one by the researcher in an interview room at the correctional facility. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy. Any identifying information for participants was redacted and pseudonyms were applied.

This chapter discusses the experiences of twelve young men who dropped out of school and who were later incarcerated. It addresses three themes: the three domains, drug use, and drop out. All three themes support the theories posed in chapter two. Agnew's Revised Strain Theory proposed that adolescents experiencing strain cope by blocking or avoiding the source of aversion (Agnew, 1985). This theory is confirmed by the participants' discussions regarding reasons to drop out of school or resort to drug use. Agnew's General Strain Theory included considering three sources of strain as underlying causes of delinquency: inability to meet expected goals, a loss of positive stimuli, and the introduction of negative stimuli (Agnew, 1992, 2012; Agnew & White, 1992). Again, participants share instances in their lives where they were blocked from achieving goals, lost people who positively influenced them, and found replacement

influences who negatively affected their lives. Finally, the themes discovered within the data support Ronald Akers' Social Learning Theory. Akers et al. (1979) purported that behavior is acquired through conditioning, imitation, or modeling by those who are influential in the life of an adolescent. This theory is supported by the participants' explanations as to why they chose to engage with individuals and in behaviors that were destructive. In all, the themes discovered in the data support the theories that explain delinquency. In return, those theories clearly applied to explaining the sources of strain and behavior that lead to school dropout.

Research Questions

Because there exists a positive correlation between school dropout and incarceration, this qualitative study explored the phenomena experienced by inmates academically, emotionally, and socially prior to dropping out of school. The central question sought to be answered by this research is how do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their academic, emotional, and social experiences prior to dropping out of school. The answer to this overarching idea was explored through the following research questions, exploring the three domains during educational years; the academic, emotional, and social domains.

Research Questions:

1. How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with academic achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

2. How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with emotional achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

3. How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with social achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

The Three Domains

Each interview was semi-structured to allow each participant to share his experiences in the academic, emotional, and social domain freely, with the assistance of a guided discussion. Within each domain, the questions also sought to explore the achievements attained, barriers faced, and relationships within that domain. Each section also included a reflection question that allowed the participant the opportunity to ponder experiences described in that section and whether they contributed to the decision to drop out. The final question in each section was designed to allow the participant to evaluate whether, if any of the above circumstances were altered, they could have changed the outcome and encouraged the participant to remain in school. It is essential to understand the participants' information written is as it was described and felt by each individual. The version of events may not necessarily reflect the whole picture or views of others. The goal of the study was to understand the experiences of the student who dropped out. In turn, society can better understand the viewpoint of the student in making such a decision. If society better understands the decision-making process and the circumstances that surround it, especially within the county in which the study took

place, it is possible that stakeholders can reevaluate how the dropout problem is addressed.

Academic Domain

The portion of the interview guide that sought to explore participant experiences academically prior to dropping out of school included six questions. The questions centered around the achievements, barriers, and relationships as explained by the participant. The answers assist in understanding how frustrations experienced by the participants overwhelmingly outweighed the successes prior to a decision to drop out. The questions included in the academic domain of the interview guide can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

Interview Guide: Academic Domain Questions

1.	*Achievement Question*	**Can you describe any achievements you had in school, such as with academics, grades, clubs, sports, or activities?**
2.	*Barrier Question*	Can you describe any barriers or problems you had in school, such as with academics, grades, learning disabilities, repeating a grade, or with switching schools?
3.	*Barrier Question*	Can you describe any barriers or problems you had with behaviors or discipline while still in school?
4.	*Relationship Question*	Can you describe your relationships while in school with your peers, teachers or administrators?
5.	*Relationship Question*	Can you describe ways your parents or guardians were involved with your schooling?
6.	*Reflective Question*	Can you explain if any of these issues with school made a difference in your deciding to drop out of school?

Academic achievements. When asked about achievements, ten of twelve participants described positive experiences while a student in school. The reports varied, including subjects that were enjoyed, involvement in elective programs, and engagement

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in team sports. James, who loved music class, described why he felt he fit in there, "I was actually kinda happy in that class because it let me express myself." Kyle shared his enjoyment of Math and Science, Nicholas loved History, and David talked about being successful in Reading and English. Kyle, David, and Robert also shared that they earned good grades. Christopher talked of struggles with sitting still in class while a fourth grade student, but that his teacher would motivate him with the reward of helping younger students in the kindergarten or first grade classes. He spoke about how powerful rewards were and how those rewards helped motivate Christopher to do well in school,

> I went down there and I loved it. I absolutely loved it. It made my whole day. I remember going home and being so ecstatic talking to my mom. It was still love. It was that attention that I loved.

Sports seemed to hold a prevailing theme among many of the participants. William, Brandon, and Michael played two sports each for their schools. Michael lettered in both track and football twice, and that in, "2010, when I was in school, I went professional in mountain boarding. That same year, I almost went to states in track. That was positive!" Zachary played football and Robert was a wrestler. However, dropping out of school for many of these young men meant having to walk away from one of the few positive activities in their lives. Christopher shared how the end of his high school career meant the end of his dream, "Soccer was a big part of my life. It was, like, my foundation. I wanted to go to college for it. My little kid dream was to be a professional soccer player."

In the interviews, the academic achievements section had the least amount of information shared. Most of the participants tied their achievements to downfalls that

ended their successes. It is worth noting that although students experience successes at points throughout their academic careers, these participants struggled to identify them. In comparison to barriers and issues with relationships in school, achievement stories were hard to recall. Two of the participants reported that they believed they had no success in school.

Academic barriers.   The participants all had experiences with academic barriers; barriers that they believed stood between them and academic success. The barriers included issues with academic struggles, learning disabilities, grade retention, transiency, behavioral problems, and disciplinary encounters.

One barrier to academic success that was not included in the question set and repeatedly was identified by these young men was drug addiction. Prevailing concerns included problems with concentration, lack of attendance, and outside lives interfering in school. The barriers identified obviously made school a difficult hurdle to conquer for these men as young teens.

Academic difficulties.   Christopher, David, and Thomas all spoke about struggles with concentration in school. The inability to concentrate made it difficult to complete tasks as simple as listening to what was being taught by the teacher. Thomas shared, "I'd be in the classroom, but I'd be outside the classroom," noting that his mind was often other places. Christopher believed he suffered from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). He shared how he was allowed to help tutor younger students if he could sit still and face the board without disruption. As for David, his biggest barrier was,

Concentration, in general. Sitting and listening, and then all of a sudden, I'm still looking at the teacher and listening, I might even be writing notes, but in my head I'm somewhere else. I could read well, but my concentration is always somewhere else. Always thinking of something else in my head.

Zachary, James, and Andrew identified drug problems as their biggest barrier to academic success. In fact, all participants but one spoke of issues with illicit drug use sometime during the interview. However, these three young men saw drug use as their primary obstacle. Andrew believed he had nothing positive to report about school, that he "sold a lotta drugs", and that this was his sole purpose for attending school. James said, "After I started doing drugs in the seventh grade, I was barely passing the seventh and eighth grade." James dropped out in ninth grade. Zachary said he slept often at school because he was either high or coming off a high from drug use.

Another identified obstacle to success was transiency. This movement from one school to the next may have been due to family moves, family problems, or because of involvement in the juvenile court system. Michael and Christopher changed schools because their families relocated. Michael's family moved from the mid-west and Christopher's family relocated from the south. Some participants, like Kyle, only switched from one local district to another. Nicholas's story was different. His family was uprooted when he was ten, as his father tried to protect him and his brothers from a drug-addicted mother in trouble. Sometimes transiency for the participants was due to the juvenile court system removing these boys from their family homes. Soon after moving to Pennsylvania from the south, Christopher said he was placed by the court. Christopher said he knew his placements would never be long term, so he did not care to

invest in school. He is one of six participants removed from their family homes and placed into either a foster care setting or a facility for juvenile delinquents. Thomas believed his constant change of schools through the juvenile court system led to constant academic struggles. He said that these placements led him to change schools three times each school year.

Another academic barrier discussed was grade retention. Of the participants, ten (83%) repeated at least one grade level and five of those (42%) repeated two or more. Retention as a barrier is evident in the data, whereas ten participants (83%) dropped out of school for the final time between the ages of 17-19, and despite their advanced ages, seven (58%) of the participants never surpassed ninth grade.

Learning disabilities. Of the twelve participants, seven of them (58%) reported having diagnosed learning disabilities. Six spoke about their disabilities as barriers to academic success. Brandon, for example, received Emotional Support services for both ADHD and anger-based issues. Zachary reported that he received Learning Support services his entire academic life. David complimented the services he received through the Resource Room. It offered him great support while in school, especially with Math. Andrew, however, felt differently about his participation in Learning Support services. He said he received academic services since the second grade for dyslexia, but that "they never really taught me that much--had to teach myself how to read and stuff when I went to jail." Michael shared Andrew's frustrations, stating he was informed his senior year that his learning support credits from freshman year would not count toward graduation, "So, I signed myself out of school. Moved back, signed myself back into school, because I wanted to graduate. Who goes this many years and leaves school?" According to

Michael, he had to take an extra credit in all four of his cores in order to graduate. Michael felt like he had been pushed through as a student in Learning Support. Michael described what he said would transpire in a class between he and his Math teacher, "If they really wanted to catch me up, they would have sat me down, taught me it. I remember going to Math classes and, 'just sit right here and don't interrupt the class and it'd be okay'."

David's encounters with Learning Support, however, demonstrated his feelings of not receiving help,

> I just feel like--I just couldn't get it for some reason. I just felt like maybe there was something wrong with me, because everyone else around me was getting it and I just couldn't do it. I would listen, I would pay attention, and I try as hard as I could. And, I thought I was doing good and I would go and take a test and I'd fail the test. And, that would just piss me off. And, so then I would be really upset and I'd be like, 'I don't even care anymore. I'll go to sleep.'
>
> Even in my [learning support] classes, I feel like they really didn't do anything for me. To me, my classes were always like an extra study hall. I'd go there and the teacher'd say, 'If you need help, come up here.' I mean, I'd go up there and get some help and that was fine. And, so, I did a good job on that worksheet-- because she helped me. But, then, when it comes time to take the test--I still don't know the answers on the test.

Behavioral problems. Behavioral problems and encounters with discipline in school were a significant barrier identified by this study. One-hundred percent of the participants reported problems with behaviors or discipline while a student. Seven of the

participants reported having issues with anger or violent acting out in school, whereas five of the participants found themselves in trouble for other types of infractions. In addition, several of the participants noted that they intentionally would get into trouble in school to either earn a "break" in the in-school suspension room or to be sent home for the remainder of the day. Sometimes behaviors were intentional methods of manipulating the school system.

Brandon talked about his issues with getting into fights, throwing papers at the teacher, or giving authority a hard time on purpose. "I would leave school, in the middle of a class, with friends--and then go get high and then come back." Brandon said he would come back to school so he could spend the rest of the day in the ISS room. Kyle described similar behaviors. "I learned pretty fast that if I get into trouble, I don't have to go to school." He elaborated on ways he plotted with friends to commit offenses that would get them kicked out of school. Christopher said he would get in trouble because, "I craved the attention." However, Christopher would comply with in-school suspension rules after becoming bored in order to return to the regular classroom environment.

When it came to fighting and acts of violence, several participants shared their motivators and experiences. Zachary said he was expelled from school for "sending the principal to the hospital." James was often in trouble. "Like every time something was bothering me, I would say, like, 'f-you' to the teacher. You know, flip desks." Nicholas shared that his violent actions included "racking up medical bills. I was hurting kids pretty bad in school." Robert, though, fought at school for a different reason. Robert believed his fights were provoked by "people bullying me, or bullying other people and I

didn't like it, so--on top of my anger problems and the anger medication I was on, so--I would quit takin' it and I would just snap."

Michael's discipline problem varied from all other participants. He claimed he had only one major disciplinary infraction, but this behavioral choice is what led him to drop out of school. Michael was searched at school and was subsequently charged with possession of a buck knife and cannabis pipe at school. Before this incident, Michael said he had only been in trouble for profanity. Michael said he openly admitted to his mistake, even after trying to cover it up. "Did I try to get rid of it? Yeah, threw it behind a bookshelf because my life was on the line."

Academic relationships. The academic relationships portion of the interview sought to explore how participants viewed relationships with peers, teachers, administrators, and parents or guardians while a student. The focus was on how those relationships affected the participant's school experience specifically while in school.

The participants' answers varied, including relationships with friends, positive and negative relationships with adults, and the level of involvement of parents. Some participants saw themselves as popular, whereas others questioned whether they were bullies. Regardless, almost all participants had vivid accounts of what life was like for them in school. In the academic domain portion of the interview, participants spoke at length about relationships with teachers and administrators. Whether positive or negative, the impact of those relationships was evident in their stories.

Peer relationships. In talking with the participants, eleven of them commented on their relationships with peers. It is significant to note that all eleven had very little to

say about their peers at school. There was an overwhelming lack of attachment to peers, evident by the comments or lack thereof regarding those relationships.

Brandon, Christopher, Michael, and Kyle reported they had positive relationships with their peers. However, their comments were short and lacked detail. Brandon's assessment of positive relationships was equated with peers providing him with answers to homework or tests, so that he could compete in school sports. Christopher said being popular was very important to him. To earn a popular status, Christopher said he would pick on some kids to impress others. Michael, like Christopher, believed he got along with everyone. Clique barriers were not an issue for him and "bullying wasn't happening in our school. Or, if it did, we never knew about it--me and my buddies." Kyle spoke earlier about plotting with friends to earn suspensions from school. He believed he was popular, but acknowledged that this popularity may have been because he acted out.

Seven participants reported negative or neutral relationships with peers in school. Thomas said he was "good with other kids", claiming that he had an "alright" relationship with others. However, he elaborated with stories of feeling isolated in school, "A lot of kids didn't talk to me. I was kind of a loner type. But, the people I did talk to I got along with good." He went on to share how he had friends in his home school district, but that changed once he was involved in the juvenile court system, "Then, once I started getting placed, I stopped-growing close to people because I was just going to leave anyway." Robert, like Thomas, admitted to isolating himself. When asked about his peers, Robert commented that, "some of them were alright. A lot of times I just kept to myself. Was quiet."

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James blamed his lack of positive peer interactions on bullying that took place in his school. He spoke about the economic disparity among students and how this tended to cause divides, in his mind, between students. James said he did not get along with most students because, "they would usually brag because they made more [money] than my family." Nicholas, however, believed his negative relationships were due to his drug and alcohol addiction. He said he would isolate himself and push peers away who did not want to be like him. Nicholas noted, "even dating was difficult. I would have girlfriends who dumped me because of my addiction problems."

Teacher relationships. When it came to relationships with teachers, participants had multiple stories to share. The impact of one teacher, either through positive or negative interactions, was evident. For most participants, these interactions occurred five or more years ago. However, the emotional impact of those interactions was as if it were yesterday.

Zachary struggled to bond with all of his teachers. He was a learning support student who said he started using drugs at the age of fifteen. He reported using cocaine, methamphetamines, bath salts, heroin, crank, marijuana, and alcohol. Zachary said he would "just sit there and disrupt the class. Or, I'd go to the bathroom, get stoned, and come back out." All behaviors were efforts to earn a suspension out of school. Zachary claimed he told a teacher to "go screw himself," then flipped desks onto another teacher. Zachary bragged about being violent at school. The only teacher he said he got along with was one his father bullied when he was in school, alluding that the teacher showed him respect because of it.

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Nicholas was failing Math class with a grade of 69%. It was the third time he was failing the course. That one percent was the difference between having the credits to be promoted to the next grade or retained. Nicholas shared how his relationship with his Math teacher, and that one percent, continued to haunt him. He believed the Math teacher refused to give him a chance at extra credit because the teacher hated him. He believed the teacher would call him out and embarrass him on purpose. Nicholas described swearing at the teacher and throwing a desk at him out of mounting frustration. The researcher asked Nicholas why he thought the teacher hated him, Nicolas responded:

> Because I wasn't--I wasn't on the level of the other students. I was always asking questions, multiple times, about one problem, one thing. I was like, 'How do you do this?' He'd explain it. I'd be like, 'Can you explain it to me again?' So, he was always picking me out. He said something smart one day--and it broke me.

Nicholas believed the teacher responded to him in a way that was intentionally sarcastic and meant to embarrass him. Christopher had an experience similar to Nicholas's with teacher tone. Christopher also described himself as a student who asked many questions.

> I'm one of those who need positive reinforcement....If a teacher turns around and is, like, '[Christopher], why can't you pay attention?' or 'Are you listening?' I can feel your sarcasticness. It's almost like a downer to me. I just won't do my homework. I know, when I was younger, that was my way of getting back to the teachers.

Brandon, who also had learning support services, shared the belief that teachers just did not like him. In fact, a need for acceptance by teachers was shared among many

participants. Brandon said he did not care about most teachers, especially regular education teachers, and he believed they did not care about him. According to Brandon,

I didn't feel like they really helped me at all. Anytime I asked for help, they're not really helping me, so they might as well get away from me. You're not going to do your job, apparently. I would act like I was doing my work, just because I knew they weren't going to help me. So, I'd just act like I did my own work and then I would just put stupid answers at the end and I would just hand it in.

Some of the same participants who had negative experiences with teachers also had tales of positive experiences. Ironically, Nicholas, who had such vivid tales of his conflicts with his Math teacher, believed this same teacher was the one who could have helped him with his addiction. He needed his Math teacher to reach him. Brandon said his emotional support teacher and the teacher's aide, "were always there to help me." Christopher spoke fondly of his kindergarten, fifth, and high school teachers as making a huge impact on him. When he spoke of his fifth grade teacher after being retained, Christopher said,

I loved her to death. She was one of the best teachers I ever had because she kinda knew my situation. She would work with me. She'd be like, 'I know you're struggling'--and I gave her so much hell. I don't know how she didn't just choke me (he laughs). I put her through so much stuff. I was with her consistently and she still dealt with me. That's the year I got held back and she asked my parents to take me back. I'm like, 'You really want to take me back?' I'm like, 'What kind of teacher are you? You're like a superhero!'

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Kyle spoke highly of his peers and his teachers. He admitted acting like a "punk" toward some of the teachers, but that "I never really wanted to disrespect anybody. That wasn't my intention at all when I would get in trouble." Similarly, Michael spoke positively of several of his teachers. As he would describe some teachers as "good teachers, the researcher asked for clarification of a good teacher. Michael said teachers he thought were good teachers for him those would invest time in him and get to know him. Michael said he would

> Get passes to certain teachers classes and we just talked. They talked to me, ya know, so I talked to them like a regular friend. They actually got to know me, ya know? They knew how to handle it, handle me, I guess.

Teachers Michael had problems with freshmen and sophomore years evolved into better relationships. According to Michael, they "put the bad times behind us."

Thomas mirrored what Michael believed, that teachers who take the time to get to know their students made a difference in his life. Thomas spoke about his home economics teacher,

> She was real close to me 'cause she knew my whole family. She would try to calm me down and encourage me to stay out of trouble. I tried to listen to her. I was dealing with drugs and everything. It was hard for me.

There was a clear theme regarding the importance of relationships in interviews with participants. A great deal of time was spent elaborating on relationships, whether perceived as positive or negative, with adults in school. The importance of creating relationships was not the case in describing relationships with peers. They were marked with short, pointed answers and lacked details. Christopher summarized what several

participants believed about teachers. "You can tell. Students can definitely tell who the teachers are that really care. If you're really there to help me, I'll know. And, I'll show you effort that I'm going to work."

Administration relationships. Participants articulated that teachers either hindered or helped them while they were students. This impression is mirrored in participant stories of their relationships with administrators. The participants spoke about their interactions with principals, guidance counselors, special education coordinators, and superintendents and how they affected their school experiences. Similar to teacher relationships, the description of events reflected an internalization of the events as perceived by the participant. Many participants described administrators as only talking with them when they caused trouble. The participants had difficulty recalling whether principals interacted with them outside of disciplinary meetings. Only one participant spoke of a vice-principal who would say hello to him in the hallway for no reason, other than to be polite.

Four participants spoke of incidents where they believed administrators intentionally insulted them. Brandon was a student who received Emotional Support services. He said, "I've been called retarded at times." Zachary was expelled for "sending the principal to the hospital." When asked why, Zachary responded, "He said something that–upset me. He called me 'retard'." Zachary received Learning Support services. Thomas also described an incident where he was expelled after a confrontation with a principal,

> I got expelled from one school for slapping the principal. We were alright before
>
> that. It's just that, he tried--he was spitting in my face when he was yelling at me

and I thought it was disrespectful. So, I took it to the next level and got in

trouble.

Thomas struggled significantly in school. He did not receive any Special Education

services, but he was certain he had some sort of learning difficulty. Thomas appealed to

school for help, even reaching out to the guidance counselor,

I'm not the smartest guy--I had problems learnin'. They didn't believe me, that I

had problems learnin'. I went and talked to counselors about it and everything.

I'm not stupid, it's just that I had trouble learnin' what they were trying to tell

me...I was told, 'You don't need that much help. Just try harder.' I was trying as

hard as I could. I passed sixth grade with all F's. I don't know how I did it.

Kyle's experience, however, was different. He admitted he had never had a good

relationship with the principal and guidance counselor, as he spoke of his intentional

acting out, hoping to be suspended. However, Kyle described the principal and guidance

counselor as asking Kyle's father to withdraw him from school. Kyle believes the

principal and guidance counselor wanted him to quit school, even though he was only

fifteen years old. Kyle's father was facing truancy fines for Kyle's constant absences.

When it came time for me to drop out, my father had asked how old I had to be

and the principal jumped up, just like that (shows quick movement with hands),

'Well I'm going to go see right now!, I'm going to go figure out how old he has to

be and we'll see if we can take care of this today.'

Kyle believed the principal and guidance counselor marked him as a "home school"

student until he turned sixteen. Kyle was known to this researcher before the study took

place for acting out, not working in class, and sleeping often in school. Kyle was not a

student known for violence, theft, or confrontations with teachers. He said he slept in school because he used marijuana all weekend long and would be coming down from a drug induced high while in school. Kyle said that he did not use in school. Kyle shared that he suffered from depression and sought the help of the guidance counselor in the past. However, his relationship with the guidance counselor was not one where he felt respected. "I specifically remember, the day I was going to drop out. My dad got mad, actually, because the counselor said, 'He's a bad egg and that's just what we're dealing with.' Those were the exact terms." Kyle said he was shocked the guidance counselor said that to his father.

Michael, who spoke of school, peers, and teachers positively, described himself as someone who did not get in trouble often. If he did, Michael said it was for minor infractions, such as swearing in school. However, the day he took a buck knife and marijuana pipe to school changed his education forever. Michael, who was a senior, was sent to complete his education at an alternative education school as a consequence. When asked about his relationship with the principal, he responded, "Oh, it was horrible!" He spoke about how his poor decision, coupled with his principal's decision, changed his life,

> I'm about to graduate in six months. I asked them just look the other way because they just should have looked the other way, do the right thing, and that was NOT the right thing (speaking of being expelled). Look what happened, I almost went to prison for it. I had a buck knife.

Michael spoke about how living in a rural hunting county meant many people regularly carried pocket knives and hunting knives. Despite choosing to be honest with his

principal about what had occurred, the principal decided to pursue criminal charges and an expulsion against Michael. According to Michael, when the principal wrote up her statement, "She wrote, like, four pages on me, why she wanted me to get punished with the utmost--made an example of. She ruined me. It ruined me."

Brandon, however, attempted to return to school after a juvenile court placement. He had a Special Education designation and was in residential placement for a few years. Brandon was excited to return home to his family and to his school. However, he felt rejected by the Special Education director upon his return to his home school. Instead of allowing him to return to school, the Special Education director sent him to a partial-hospitalization day school over twenty miles away. He shared his frustration with the decision to send him away to school,

> I had a chance to go back to [school name]. I mean, they could have, (special education director) could have been more--she shouldn't have been, like, just sat there and pushed me away saying, 'No. You're going to partial. You're not going to come to our school.'

Brandon felt as though his homecoming should have been an opportunity to try to get his life in order with his family, with his friends, and with his education. However, this chance to try to return to a normal life was impeded by administration. Brandon believed that some students were given a chance to prove they could do it, while others were not. I feel like, if you mess up in school, they give you an opportunity to go back--but they don't. They're just like, 'We don't want to deal with his behavior issues. We're just going to push him away. So, we're just going to push him on to the next person. Push this problem on to somebody else to deal with--not us. We don't have time for this.'

Well, if you don't have time for us--I understand that you got, like, a thousand kids--but, how many of them really have behavioral issues? A lot, right? You push me out, but you keep these ones in.

The only participant who spoke of having a positive relationship with an administrator was James. James reported that he suffered from a significant drug addiction while in school and was on juvenile probation. He said that his vice-principal would check in on him regularly. However, James claimed and found it admirable that his vice-principal would look the other way when James was using heroin. James said his vice-principal would make "deals" with him to keep him in school and be cooperative.

> I just felt like he was a cool dude and actually that he really did care. Even when I wasn't getting in trouble, he would always sit down and ask me what was going on at home. He would notice if I had what they call track marks (from shooting heroin). Yeah, he would notice and when I was on probation, he would threaten me saying, 'Ya know, I could call your P.O. (probation officer).'

James spoke of this relationship as his only positive relationship in school. James said he was glad the vice-principal took time for him. James claimed juvenile probation was not made aware of his heroin use by the vice-principal.

Family relationships. Participants had an opportunity to elaborate on family relationships during the social domain section of the interview. However, they were asked to share in the academic domain how involved their families were in their schooling. Their stories varied; some young men spoke about how their parents or

guardians kept up on school-based issues, whereas others talked about lack of parent or guardian involvement.

Robert, James, and Andrew simply stated that their parents were not involved in their schooling. Thomas, who spoke of struggling significantly with school, said he lived with his father. However, Thomas would not ask him for help.

He'd help me, if I needed help or if I'd ask him. But I was too proud to ask. The way I grew up is that you don't need to ask nobody for nothing. If you can't do it by yourself, then you shouldn't be doing it.

Thomas was taken from his home and placed through the juvenile court system. He said once he was placed, he sought and received help with school. Christopher shared that he also struggled with pride when it came to school. He described how he left his mother out of his schooling. "I closed her out of everything. I didn't want her to know because then she would be disappointed in me." When asked why he was so concerned with disappointing his mother, Christopher spoke of great respect he has for his mother. "If I disappointed her? It was worse than disappointing myself."

Both David and Michael had mixed feelings about their parents' involvement in their school lives. David believed his mother would attend parent-teacher conferences, "But as far as homework I needed help with, I don't think she was no smarter than I was." David was later placed with college educated foster parents, bragging that one had even been named valedictorian. However, his foster parents talked him into dropping out of school and said they would help him either home school or earn his G.E.D. He had not accomplished either. Michael, on the other hand, had a mother who worked out of town all week long. He remained home with his stepfather who raised him and was the

only real father Michael ever knew. Michael said he would honestly share with his parents how he was doing in school, but they remained uninvolved. His stepfather was dying of hepatitis and cirrhosis and Michael spent the week caring for him while his mother was gone. Michael described how he and his stepfather would "bond" over History, their favorite subject,

It's not a drug. I hate when people call cannabis a drug. We'd smoke a little pot together. I'd come back and do some homework and I'd ask him some questions because we were both history buffs, ya know.

William, Zachary, Kyle, and Brandon had families involved in their education. Kyle's father owned multiple businesses, but he would go to school meetings and tried to help him out. According to Kyle, "He did his part, I'll say that. But my dad is also a very busy person." William's mother tried to be involved, noting, "Yeah, she would get on me, like all the time about getting my homework done." Brandon's father, however, was involved in his schooling for a different reason. Brandon was an athlete. Brandon says his father would scream at him and that school was only a means to be an athlete. "I was supposed to be good in sports. If I wasn't in sports then he didn't want nothing to do with me." Brandon lived with both of his parents, but as for his mother, she "didn't really care at all. She was a–crack head. She was big into drugs."

Summary of academic domain. There were many facets to consider in trying to understand the academic domain. When it came to discussing achievements, participants mostly identified successes with sports participation. Although some participants discussed certain classes or activities they felt successful participating in, overwhelmingly, successes were gauged according to the accolades earned as part of an

athletic endeavor. Regarding barriers to the academic domain, participants shared frustrations experienced with learning disabilities, grade retention, and failing classes. As for discipline and behaviors, it was revealed that infractions were often intentional methods to be removed from the educational setting. Participants also spoke of drug problems that interfered with academic success. However, participants overwhelmingly spoke about the role relationships played in the academic domain. Whether it was a parent, teacher, or administrator, several participants had detailed accounts as to how those relationships affected the school experience.

Emotional Domain

The emotional domain portion of the semi-structured interviews was explored through a series of five questions. These questions were designed to allow the participants an opportunity to reflect on emotional events that occurred prior to dropping out of school. It is worth noting that some participants identified events as emotional in nature that were identified by others as academic in nature. However, for the sake of integrity, the researcher included information identified by participants in the domain in which they chose to share those events. Therefore, some information may overlap with information previously presented in the study.

As with the academic domain, participants were asked about their achievements, barriers, and relationships in the emotional domain. In addition, they were given an opportunity to evaluate school importance and reflect on emotional events that affected their decisions to drop out. Questions in the emotional domain of the Interview Guide included the following:

Table 6

Interview Guide: Emotional Domain Questions

1.	*Achievement Question*	**Can you describe any achievements you had while you were still a student that made you feel good about yourself?**
2.	*Barrier Question*	Can you describe any barriers or negative experiences in your life while you were in school that made you feel bad about yourself?
3.	*Barrier Question*	Did you feel that school was important?
4.	*Relationship Question*	How did you feel about your relationships with your peers, teachers, administrators or family members while in school?
5.	*Reflective Question*	Did any emotional issues you had while in school make a difference in your decision to drop out of school?

As for achievements, several participants elaborated on how they felt a sense of success in sports or at a job. Barriers included obstacles such as homelessness, drug abuse, and mental health problems. Six participants spoke about specific mental health diagnoses that affected how well they performed in school. Additionally, six of the young men also spoke about how drug abuse or addiction changed the course of their education. As for relationships, the participants spoke about differing levels of family support. For example, three of the participants were teen fathers and subsequently made decisions based upon those newly assumed responsibilities.

Emotional achievements. When asked about achievements, participants were asked to share what they were good at that made them feel good about themselves. Five of the participants believed their accomplishments in sports made them feel proud. Robert commented that he "always did sports, always was active. When it came to that, it was something I loved doing." Both Michael and Thomas competed in sports outside of school. Michael was a professional mountain boarder and Thomas raced BMX bikes. For Thomas, engaging in BMX bike racing helped him form a bond with his uncle who

owned a bicycle-racing track. William loved sports and looked forward to playing football his senior year in high school. However, William shared that the juvenile probation department encouraged him to drop out of school. Once he dropped out and earned his G.E.D., his probation supervision terminated and he returned home to his family. He was a teenage father and he believed this was the best option. However, when he did play sports, William said,

> I don't know. It felt good to go out there and play sports and stuff. My ma would bring my son to the games. Ya know, even though he was young, it still felt good, like, being out there and--school, everything felt good.

William's oldest child was two years old when he dropped out of school and his girlfriend was pregnant with their second child.

James and Andrew both identified classroom subjects they were successful in that made them feel proud. For Andrew, Math class was his only identified emotional achievement. James, however, spoke about how his love of music and writing lyrics were closely tied to what he learned in the English classroom. James said he felt good when he was "working on lyrics. I've always been a good writer." Kyle, like James, found an emotional haven in Music at school. Kyle said that he "enjoyed the Music program and school and learning about Music History." However, Kyle also identified his peer relationships and his passion for working on cars in his father's garage as additional emotional highs in life. According to Kyle,

> I tell anybody, if they want to know anything about cars or guitars, they can talk to me. And, by the time I was fourteen, I was painting cars in the paint booth at my dad's and doing motor swap. So really, anything mechanical at that time was

a big thing for me. That's where I lived. I lived around mechanics. So, I mean, that was--that definitely was nice.

Zachary, like Kyle, grew up in his family garage. Zachary spoke about how he had "been in a garage since I've been able to crawl." When asked what he did to help his father in the garage, Zachary shared that "my dad does body work, I twist wrenches." David worked on his foster family's sheep farm. According to David, it was a multi-million dollar factory farm. David spoke about how learning this new trade changed his life.

> I loved it. Before that, I always thought I was a little thug. I was just a badass, smoking weed and stuff. Then, I started farming and I loved it. That is what I wanted to do. It just made me feel good. That was my persona. I'm a--I'm a worker. I'm fifteen years old, I go to school, I go home, I work all day. I was big and I liked it. It always made me feel pretty good.

As much as sports seemed to be a prevailing mark of achievement in the academic domain, it shared the spotlight with family businesses in the emotional domain. Learning a trade, working hands on, and having responsibility created a sense of pride for some of the participants. Later on, participants spoke about how their families became victims of their drug addictions. Kyle, Zachary, and David all got into trouble with drugs and theft that led to destruction of family relationships and at a cost to the family businesses. These emotional barriers took a toll on their family relationships.

Emotional barriers. When the discussion of emotional barriers took place, the participants were asked to describe barriers or negative experiences that occurred while they were still attending school. Specifically, participants were asked about emotional

barriers that made them feel badly about themselves. Ten of the twelve participants

spoke about combinations of family, mental health, and drug problems and how those

interfered with their emotional stability as a student. Emotional barriers experienced by

the participants typically centered on their lives outside of school.

   Mental health barriers. Six of the participants spoke about the connection

between mental health concerns and some other problem as an emotional barrier.

Nicholas, who reported diagnoses of ADHD and bi-polar depression, spoke about how

depression and anger affected him. Nicholas's father moved all of his children in an

attempt to start over, after fighting drug addiction and leaving a drug addicted spouse.

Nicholas said his family struggled with poverty after his father left his mother. Nicholas

also struggled with drug abuse, naming alcohol as his drug of choice. He said that he was

very depressed, and so his father sought help for him, taking him to counseling and to his

primary care provider. Nicholas was prescribed medication for depression while trying

to hide his struggles with addiction,

> And, what did I do? I abused them. She (medical provider) prescribed me
>
> Klonopins. I took twenty in one day. I ate them like candy. You can't do that.
>
> But she, (medical provider), didn't know that. She didn't know I was like that; I
>
> never told her. It was my secret.

Robert also struggled with depression. He verbalized that he also received counseling

and medication. Robert's depression was complicated by a lack of supportive

relationships. His biological parents choose not to be involved in his life and his peers

shut him out. He was a student in Learning Support and he believed other students would

not accept him because he was not as smart as they were. Robert seemed embarrassed as he shared,

> I was always quiet, always to myself. Hard to make friends, that made me feel negative about myself. Like I was no good, or somethin' to them. That they were always better or somethin'…I never really had anyone who wanted to talk to me or anything.

Christopher's depression was reportedly tied to his juvenile charges. He voiced how he became depressed when he realized how a juvenile record would affect his future,

> There comes the depression. I can't do anything. Every job that comes into my mind, I can't do. Because of charges--it's really hard to get a confidence boost when, everywhere you go, every new dream that you end up having, gets shut down because of the charges you get when you're fourteen.

> The reports of mental health struggles and significant family discord were repeated in stories shared by Kyle, James, David, Thomas, and Zachary. Kyle articulated how doctors at a psychiatric hospital were unsuccessful in trying to help him, as his drug use and mental health needs collided.

> I was emotionally--I don't know, not depleted, but basically I had no emotion. Or my emotions were very extreme, I'll say. It's either there were none or they were all of them at once. I wouldn't go to school 'cause I'm upset. Or, I'd get kicked out because I had—sometimes, I'd have a fit because I'm angry. So, sometimes they'd send me to [psychiatric hospital] or whatever. But most of that was home issues really. Nothing really in school bothered me in that way.

They did try to medicate me a lot. And I wouldn't, I wouldn't do it. I knew. I

can't smoke pot and take a whole bunch of Prozac and expect the Prozac to work

the way it's supposed to. It's just chemically imbalanced.

Rejection barriers. James and David spoke mostly of family discord. James

lived with his mother and a half-brother. He also spoke of family and brothers who he

would run into while out in the community, but they "wouldn't acknowledge me as their

brother." James battled with feelings of rejection from his family. David lived with his

mother before being placed into foster care. He said, "I didn't really have nothing. I

mean, my mom was always a drug addict, so I kinda just did whatever I wanted. I never

had no rules." After leaving foster care, David tried to return home to his mother, but she

had moved on. He was homeless and still in high school.

Zachary and Thomas, however, shared their emotional barriers in detail, as they

spoke about significant events with family members that changed their lives. Zachary

said he first struggled with depression when his grandmother died. Shortly thereafter, he

lost two more grandparents and a close friend. Zachary said he was with his friend and,

"It was all a little too much for me." Zachary was with his friend when he committed

suicide. He said he was overwhelmed as he watched his friend, "blow his brains out in

the back of his car." Thomas's emotional struggles came at the hands of his older

brothers. Thomas said he began using drugs when he was six years old, as his older

brothers would smoke marijuana, and "they figured it'd be funny" if they got Thomas

high with them. Thomas said it just ballooned from there. "Marijuana at six, and then at

eight I started using methamphetamines. My drug addiction keeps going up right until I

came here (correctional facility)." Thomas was very frustrated when he spoke about his

brothers, who taught him to use at such a young age, because "They're all clean now. They're all clean. They got good jobs, good houses, good wives, and I'm here. They don't even talk to me no more." None of his family members reportedly struggled with addiction, like Thomas, and none of them include Thomas in their lives today.

Brandon's and William's stories described a different perspective on barriers. They both shared feelings of rejection. Brandon, who had returned from a juvenile residential facility, continued to recount how he felt rejected by his home school upon return. He believed that his school did not want him return, stating, "They tried to push me out." Brandon believed he was targeted by his administration and "felt like they were all against me." William felt rejected by his school and by his community police. William said he had been labeled a "pot head" and a troublemaker because of his family name. He was proud of who he was, despite coming from a family well known for run-ins with the law. William described how he felt like a target because of his name.

> Yeah, I feel like I was growing up, like I mean, I always thought I was a natural little [last name]. Ya know what I mean? I always thought, I ain't sure, I'm good person, I gotta go to school. Got in a couple fights, ya know. So what, who doesn't? Like, that's the way I looked at it, everything. Now that I am gettin' older, I'm starting to look back on it, and I'm like, yeah, they really look back on-
> -my uncles, my dad, and everybody…

School importance. Despite this feeling of being targeted, William believed that school was important. The belief of school as important was shared by Robert, Nicholas, and Michael. Nicholas elaborated, stating that "school was very important," but that it stopped being important to him "when I started using drugs. Drugs is a big part of

throwing it away. With drugs, you lose sight of what's important." Michael also described school as being "very important." As for seven other participants, they believed school was important either later in life or only as a social opportunity. Brandon viewed education as necessary to get a job. David recognized school as important after the first time he dropped out. As for Thomas, he only thought of school as a way to connect with his friends, "what little ones I had." When it came to explaining school importance and how that perspective tended to change later in life, Kyle conveyed,

I don't think I had a mature enough state of mind to feel that school was important. At the time I dropped out, I was only fifteen years old. I was still just a little, little kid, for the most part.

Many participants spoke about their families and school-based relationships as barriers both academically and emotionally earlier in the interviews. However, reflections on those relationships were revisited as questions about the effects of emotional relationships were asked of each young man.

Emotional relationships. Each of the twelve participants were asked to reflect specifically on the emotional effects of relationships they had with others while they were still attending school. Participants identified family and school relationships as significant during that time. Family relationships, however, hosted different outcomes for different participants. For some, teen parenting was a priority. For others, their family relationships were identified either as significantly positive or negative.

Teen Parenthood. Nicholas, William, and Robert were all teen parents. When it came to emotions regarding family relationships, these three young men had family concerns not experienced by the other participants. Nicholas was sixteen when he had

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his first child; his girlfriend was fourteen at the time. He was twenty-one at the time of the interview and they were expecting their third child. According to Nicholas, who struggled with addiction, his girlfriend's father was not happy with their relationship. He allegedly tried to shoot Nicholas with a gun. William also had his first child at the age of sixteen. He spoke earlier about how much he enjoyed having his son come to watch him play football for his school. Robert was only fourteen when he had first child. His girlfriend was pregnant with their second when he was fifteen, the year he dropped out of school for the first time. Robert suffered from depression and said that his relationship with his girlfriend continued to go "downhill." He was receiving counseling and medication, but decided neither one was helping him.

Positive family relationships. Christopher and Zachary were the only two participants who described family relationships as having a positive emotional effect on them. Christopher spoke of his admiration for his mother, whereas Zachary spoke of his father. Christopher "just wanted everyone to love me" when it came to his life as a student. His mother, a nurse, encouraged him to do well and to chase his dreams. According to Christopher, "She definitely brings out the better in me. She makes me realize 'you can do this'." As for Zachary, his father was a military veteran who served all around the world. Zachary listed all of the places his father had been stationed, bragging about what his father has accomplished in life. Both saw their parents as inspirations in their lives.

Negative family relationships. When it came time to discuss relationships, several of the participants tied family relationships to their reasons for dropping out of school. Kyle viewed his relationship with his stepmother as emotionally draining. He

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spoke about how he believed she wanted him to fail. For Kyle, dropping out of school meant he would no longer have to live under his stepmother's roof. David's relationship conversation centered on his mother. David was taken from her and placed into the custody of the court system, where he was sent to live with foster parents. David described his mother's drug problem as the cause of a chaotic life. "We moved around a lot, whatever it was, maybe she couldn't pay rent or something. We just kinda had to get up and boot scoot quick." Once David was placed into foster care, he believed his mother would never pull herself together enough to regain custody. With his encouragement to "just move on," his mother surrendered her parental rights. "She kinda just felt like she didn't have to take care of me no more. She kinda went wild." Once he was released from foster care, David tried to return home to her and re-enroll in school. However, she had no interest or ability to care for him. David lived with friends and on the street,

> I'm 17 years old, and my mom is living in [town] and doing drugs. And I was
> just roaming around. I was homeless for a long time. Just roaming couch to
> couch. And then, now I'm like, 'I have no idea what I'm gonna do.' I can't even
> get a job 'cause I don't have any experience, I'm 17 and I've only worked on this
> family farm for the last five years. All I can do is really is get a farm job down
> the street.

James also had to contend with his mother's drug addiction while he battled his own. James's relationship with his mother was "not really good at all because she was trying to stop me from doing drugs, but yet she was doing drugs." James said his mother

was "smoking weed. But she was an extreme pill popper." She was absent at times, as she was admitted multiple times to a psychiatric hospital.

These same scenarios were repeated in Thomas's accounts of his childhood. Thomas lived with his father, a drug addict, and his four siblings. Thomas's older siblings introduced Thomas to drug use at the age of six,

> I thought it brought us closer together, at the time. I only realize now that it was pushing us apart because they weren't--addicts. And, I am. They could just put it down whenever. I couldn't do it. At twelve years old I started shooting up, I started going off the deep end then. They were like 'whoa' and tried to stop me.

Thomas was asked to clarify if "shooting up" meant he was using heroin, "Heroin, meth--it's a pretty rough life. I don't understand it, nobody in my whole family shot up, just me." Thomas's four siblings left the house and went to live with their mother. Thomas went to a residential juvenile placement. When asked why he also did not go to live with his mother, Thomas replied, "Because, when I was six years old, she told me I was a mistake."

School relationships. Nicholas had a father who loved his boys enough to walk away from drugs and leave his wife, their mother. However, Nicholas struggled with addiction like both of his parents. As much as his father tried to help him, Nicholas felt as though he did not have an adult in his life that fulfilled the role of the positive influence he needed. Nicholas admitted that he was often high on drugs in school. He described being suspended from school and sent to the community boot camp program for his actions. He was asked if teachers could have somehow helped him, could they have talked him into going to drug rehabilitation. Nicholas replied, "I would have gone.

I would have gone--at that point. I knew all along my life was going down the drain. When I was under the influence, I just didn't care." When asked to elaborate how a teacher could have talked him into going to rehabilitation, he surprisingly talked about his Math teacher. His Math teacher was the one Nicholas blamed earlier in the interview for failing him with a 69% and for causing him the most emotional stress in school. However, his next statement left a different impression as to how Nicholas felt about this teacher,

> Teachers need to learn how to handle a situation. You don't have to have a lot of experience. But you can't leave kids in the dust. You can hold somebody to their actions, but I wouldn't say that you can judge. I think it was more he was judging the way I lived my life. From his perspective, from what he'd seen from me. But, he never got a chance to know what I was going through, why I was like that, if I needed help, if I was on drugs. He didn't give me an opportunity. If he would have opened an opportunity, I would have given him one right back.

Nicholas believed that his Math teacher was the one who could have reached him while he was struggling with his addictions as a student. The one teacher he admitted to giving the most grief was the one teacher he wished reached out to him.

Brandon was the young man who felt rejected by his home school. He believed that his teachers "really didn't like me. I know that they didn't like me because you could tell. Their body language, you could see it in their expressions. When they talked to me their whole demeanor changed." Brandon articulated an example situation of his experience. He said teachers might be talking and laughing with other students, and then walked over to Brandon to ask him if he needed help. "The way they come up to you and

ask you if you need help, being all cocky--disrespectful about it, like you're retarded or something." Brandon believed this was an intentional action to embarrass him in front of other students. As for his relationship with his peers, Brandon described himself as a bully toward peers who had a higher economic status. According to Brandon, these wealthier peers would make a point of targeting Brandon for having less.

Despite positive relationships, neither Zachary nor Christopher believed their parents could have done anything different to support them and encourage them to remain in school. Brandon viewed school as an overall negative experience. He believed he would just be "thrown out anyway," and so he chose not to bother investing himself in relationships at school. A few of the young men, like Nicholas, Thomas, and James, believed that the school could have intervened in their drug use on some level and that this intervention might have made a difference.

Summary of emotional domain. Emotionally, all twelve of the participants faced many obstacles during their years as a student. Their achievements included competitive sports, such as mountain boarding and BMX bicycle racing, as well as learning a trade in the family garage. As for others, being a teen father came with both senses of achievement and a set of barriers to completing high school. However, family relationships coupled with drug use dominated their stories. Their lives as students were riddled with tales of parent histories of drug abuse, participant drug abuse, and a need for strong adults in their lives. Some of the participants even discussed how someone stepping in might have made a difference. Whether biological or situational, many of the participants talked about adding a struggle with mental health problems to complicate what was already a complicated childhood.

Social Domain

Social questions in the interview explored what was occurring in the participants'
lives outside of school prior to dropout. Participants shared details of their achievements,
barriers, and relationships experienced within their social domains. These events
included interactions with jobs, relationships with drug-using peers, engagement with
adults who cared, and overall reactions by loved ones when the participants dropped out.

Six questions on the Interview Guide laid the foundation for understanding the
social domain of the participants. The final question provided the participants an
opportunity to reflect on whether people within their social realm affected their decision
to drop out of school. Those questions are found in Table 7.

Social achievements. The achievement questions during the interview allowed
participants to evaluate social, economic, or other successes while they were still in
school. Although some of the participants spent a great deal of their childhood in and out
of court-ordered juvenile placements, eleven participants shared achievement stories. Of
the three domains discussed, participants shared the most information regarding
achievements in the social domain. This domain was where the young men believed they
had experienced the most success.

Most of the young men listed several accomplishments. The accomplishments
typically fell into one of three main groups: group achievements, family achievements,
and job-related achievements. All three of these areas of achievement were coupled with
a sense of belonging to a group.

Table 7

Interview Guide: Social Domain Questions

1.	*Achievement Question*	**Can you describe any achievements or successes you had outside of school, such as with non-school clubs, sports, jobs, or activities, while you were still a student?**
2.	*Barrier Question*	Can you describe any barriers or problems you had in your life outside of school, such as within your neighborhood or with the legal system, while you were still a student?
3.	*Relationship Question*	Can you describe your relationships, such as with family, friends, other important adults, or neighbors, outside of school while you were still a student?
4.	*Relationship Question*	Did your parents or guardians graduate from high school?
5.	*Relationship Question*	How did your family or friends feel about your dropping out of school?
6.	*Reflective Question*	Did your relationships outside of school make a difference in your decision to drop out?

Group achievements. Belonging to a group became a dominant theme among the participants. The groups they described did not necessarily afford explicit markers of great achievement, such as awards, competitions, and the like. For example, James, who struggled significantly at home and at school, spoke with great pride about his church youth group. He talked about how he really felt as though he belonged with his church peers. James talked about his youth group members as "good people" and said that he made a point of spending a great deal of time with them—at least when "I wasn't hanging out with what they'd call 'bad influences'." James wanted it to be clear that his church-youth-group friends were not the same friends with whom he used drugs. In fact, James described himself as feeling like a hypocrite, "I'd go from church to a drug house."

Similarly, David, who never really believed he fit in while in school, did not play organized sports. David did, however, make friendships when he engaged in weight lifting with some of his peers after school. Christopher bragged about how successful he

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was in the community boot camp program. Even though his participation in boot camp was court-ordered, Christopher was proud of his success in the program. He said he would act as if he were a junior instructor. Because Christopher knew all of the routines, he would be asked to demonstrate for other juveniles. Christopher hoped to enter the military and saw this program as a way to practice for such an endeavor.

Some participants highlighted group activities with more traditional status markers. Michael, who used to live in a more urban area, talked about how he belonged to the Boys and Girls Club and Boy Scouts of America. Michael was successful in Scouting. He was "on [his] way to being an Eagle Scout" and working on his project when he quit scouting. Michael said that he "got into my teenage years. Girls, parties, and other people's thoughts affected it." Michael though Scouting was "fun and awesome" but quit in high school when he felt pressured by others into believing it was "not cool" anymore. Michael, William, and Thomas also spoke about their love of competitive sports.

Family achievements. A sense of family was important to the participants. The most significant variable, however, was the definition of family. The sense of family experienced by the participants may have included biological relatives, organizations somewhat responsible for these young men, or other adults who shared responsibility for caring for them.

William's sense of achievement and family was different from the other participants. William was a teen father, who described a strong bond with both his mother and his girlfriend. When it came to his family, William noted, "Actually, if I didn't have that, sometimes—I don't know—and my family, my kids, really made me

happy, always wanted to stay out of trouble." William wanted to do well and wanted to be there for his family. William said that he was able to do well at times because of his juvenile probation officer. He spoke about her throughout the interview. His probation officer guided him in decision-making with the intent of reuniting him with his family. He believed that being under the supervision of the juvenile probation department was often, "keepin' me in line."

Thomas and Nicholas also associated their families with a sense of accomplishment. Thomas was a BMX bicycle racer who raced at his uncle's track. Both his uncle and his cousins embraced Thomas as part of their inner circle. Thomas talked about how strong his relationship was with them until he began using drugs. Thomas admitted that his cousins tried to intervene in his drug use; however, "They started using too." Thomas was later court-ordered to live in a group home owned and operated by a local family. Thomas spoke with great admiration about his relationships with the family who ran the group home, all of whom took time for him while he lived there for an extended period. When asked if he still has a relationship with his group-home family, Thomas replied, "You can't really talk to people who are positive in your life when you're doing a bunch of negative stuff." Thomas was embarrassed about being sentenced to the correctional facility and did not believe people who had been positive influences in his life would want to engage with him while he was serving time.

Nicholas, like Thomas, acknowledged he had family who cared for him. He revisited his family history, re-explaining that his father moved to the area with three of his five children to escape a rough life in Philadelphia. Nicholas was the oldest of the

three boys. They lived in poverty. In order to meet the needs of his sons, Nicholas's

father had a job that often left Nicholas in charge of the boys.

> My brothers, my brothers were a very big part of my life. Even under the
>
> influence, I took care of them. I didn't yell at them. I tried to teach them the right
>
> way from the best of my understanding.

Nicholas, who struggled with addiction, tried to encourage his brothers not to follow his

example. He believed that they listened to him and that, overall, he did a great job

helping his father raise them.

Zachary expressed that two family groups existed in his life while growing up.

Zachary performed outside chores for his neighbors. When Zachary got into some

trouble, his neighbors were the ones who called the police. Zachary was speeding on a

dirt bike at three o'clock in the morning, while under the influence of drugs, and the state

police followed him home. There his neighbor stood in the driveway, waiting to confront

him. Zachary did not see this as betrayal; he saw this as a sign of caring. Additionally,

Zachary worked at a local greenhouse. The owner and the owner's son taught Zachary

the trade of greenhouse work and treated Zachary as if he were their own kin.

Job related achievements. The skills Zachary learned and the responsibilities that

he undertook while working for his neighbors and at the greenhouse were symbols of

family. They were also a way to gain valuable job skills, in addition to the skills he

learned under his father's direction in the family garage. Five other individuals spoke of

skills they learned at jobs they held after school. Kyle's family, like Zachary's, owned a

garage. Kyle was proud of the many skills he learned there. He saw his mechanical

skills as a reliable backup plan for his future. Robert worked after school shoveling snow

in the winter and landscaping during other seasons. Hard labor was a theme these participants shared: David and Andrew worked on a farm, Thomas and Andrew stacked stone, and Michael was learning the trade of welder's helper. Despite obstacles with drugs, family problems, or lack of success in school, these young men managed to hold difficult jobs.

Social barriers. When barriers were discussed, the participants spoke of obstacles in life that interfered with their ability to be successful in the social domain. Most of the participants had a sense of social responsibilities, such as the meaningful achievements mentioned earlier. However, ten of the twelve participants articulated that personal drug abuse or addiction was an insurmountable barrier. In addition, six of the participants were removed from their family homes. They were placed in facilities or homes through the juvenile court system. For several participants, this experience repeated on several occasions. Andrew ran away from home at the age of fourteen to avoid being placed, and he remained a runaway for the next ten years. Participants' history in placement is summarized in Table 8, which explains the type and number of placements, reasons for placement, and the age at which participants were removed from their family homes.

While some participants were removed from their homes for engaging in acts of juvenile delinquency, others were allowed to remain in their homes after committing acts that required the involvement of law enforcement. James committed acts of graffiti, vandalism, and curfew violations, often bringing him to the attention of local police and his juvenile probation officer. Robert got into trouble with some peers and was charged with truancy. According to Robert, he was placed for six months for "not going to

school. And, I had bad grades at the time. Around the wrong group of people and got

into trouble." David echoed Robert's story in that David was never in trouble for

significant delinquent acts. He said he "got in trouble a lot" when he was younger for

acts of mischief. David said, "My ma would whip my ass. But she never really cared,

she would just be like, 'why did you do that?'" David said his mother would ground him,

but she never followed through with consequences. Christopher began his placements at

the age of twelve through child general protective services. However, he did not specify

what caused his court-ordered placements to occur. He did note, however, that he was

placed on juvenile probation by the age of fifteen for acts involving assault.

Table 8

Participant History of Court-Ordered Placement

	Facility Information	**Reason for Placement**	**Age**
Andrew	**Ran away to avoid placement	Juvenile delinquency	Runaway at age 14
Brandon	Multiple placements in foster care, residential, mental health facilities	Juvenile delinquency and dependency	Beginning at age 5
Christopher	12 placements in juvenile detention Multiple other placements	Juvenile delinquency and dependency	Beginning at age 12
David	1 placement in foster care Subsequently adopted	Juvenile dependency	Beginning at age 13
Robert	1 placement in a group home for 6 months	Juvenile delinquency and dependency	Age 14
Thomas	Multiple placements in group homes and secure facilities	Juvenile delinquency	Beginning at age 11
William	4-5 placements	Juvenile delinquency	unreported
Note: a *dependent child* is a child without proper parental care or control, subsistence, education as required by law, or other care or control necessary for his physical, mental, or emotional health, or morals. 42 Pa.C.S. § 6302.			

Thomas became involved with the juvenile court system after he was charged with a drug-related offense. Thomas was a student in an alternative education school when he was found to be in possession of Klonopin, a prescription benzodiazepine frequently abused by recreational users. Thomas said that the Klonopin pills were for "personal use" and that he would take "four or five at a time, trying to get through my day." Thomas has been a patient in several drug rehabilitations, but he believed his placement in a family-run group home was the most beneficial to him.

Andrew faced serious charges through the juvenile court system. Andrew began dealing drugs at a young age and he said this illegal activity made him a considerable amount of money. Andrew said he sold "mostly weed. A little bit of meth, though. Depended on the age groups, they all changed. Younger kids usually just smoke weed. The older they get, they get into different drugs." Andrew was caught with $40,000 he stole from his drug supplier. Because of this theft, the court ordered Andrew to be placed in a juvenile residential facility. Because the county Andrew lived in charged families the entire cost of a juvenile placement, Andrew ran away:

> Uh, I did it for that way they wouldn't have to pay that much money because they were going to send me away, to a reform school or whatever. [His parents] were pretty upset about it. They said I just shoulda went.

Brandon had been in and out of placements consistently since the age of five. He was about to be adopted by his foster family when his biological father, who was incarcerated, contested termination of his parental rights. Brandon said his parents reunited to regain custody of both his sister and him. Thereafter, Brandon was in and out of mental health facilities, group homes, residential facilities, and boot camps. Unlike the

majority of the participants, Brandon accepted no personal responsibility for any of his actions. Brandon believed that what happened in his life as a juvenile was due to the actions or lack of actions of others.

Although the circumstances that surrounded drug use varied for the participants, several identified it as a barrier. James spoke about how his life as a teen centered on his drug use. "Most of the time I was high or on my way to get high." Robert's mother was not taking care of him, so he used in marijuana and opiates. He said that he "didn't have any parents really, just did what I wanted." For Kyle, his one brush with the law as a juvenile was a result of his using. Although he did not share the details of what had occurred, he did state, "It was pretty serious. I was definitely smoking pot at the time."

Brandon struggled with ongoing placements and parental incarceration. He started using drugs at the age of fifteen. He explained that marijuana helped him "calm and focus," as he only inconsistently took his prescribed ADHD medications. Brandon believed marijuana was "more effective" in treating his symptoms. From there, he began stealing his mother's Percocet for personal use and for profit.

Nicholas began using cigarettes, followed by alcohol, marijuana, and then hard drugs. For Nicholas, his need to use was what caused him to commit acts of juvenile delinquency. Nicholas committed a robbery, repeatedly stole, and assaulted others while under the influence or in an attempt to gain more drugs. He said that using helped him feel as though he fit in with others as well as feel better about himself.

Kids, teenagers, want an instant reward. When you're going for something

positive, you've got to work for it. You just don't want to do that, you just don't

feel like doing that. For me, it was like 'bam!' I'd get high, I'm laughing, I'm

with all these people--but in reality, where am I going in life?

Social relationships. The social domain included relationships that participants

identified as important which were part of their lives outside of school. Participants

talked about influences in their lives, parent educational history, and families' reactions

to dropping out. It was considered by some participants whether someone in the social

realm could have changed their minds and convinced them not to drop out.

Positive relationships. Of the twelve participants, nine believed their

relationships with family members were overall positive. Families helped to care for

them, provided role models, or tried to guide participants in the right direction. James

and Zachary shared stories of siblings who made a difference. For James, his older

brother was only a year or two older, but he often took care of James when their mother

was unable to do so because of her drug addiction and mental health problems. James

said his brother, "never really messed around with the drugs." James said that his brother

did use marijuana but believed this paled in comparison to the hard drugs James and his

mother used. For Zachary, his close relationship with his sister was strained during his

drug use. However, Zachary said she "never turned her back on me" and offered to "be

there for me." His sister cared enough to confront him about his behaviors and drug use.

Zachary described his parents as being just as dedicated as his sister was when it came to

trying to help him,

> My parents, I never seen it before. But I'm starting to realize my parents are
>
> actually trying to help me and shit. It's just that I wouldn't accept it in the past.

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If it weren't for my mom and dad, I probably would've been in here (incarcerated) a long time ago. They saved my ass I don't know how many times.

Michael described his mother as a role model. He bragged about his mother—a career professional—describing how she dressed in business suits. "I love her to death" was how Michael described their relationship. He continued to say, "I'm proud of her. She's a business lady, like you see on TV." For Michael, continuously getting into trouble and disappointing his mother was his biggest regret. Michael's admiration for his mother rivaled descriptions Christopher shared earlier, as he described his mother's professional successes and how she cheered him on educationally.

Nicholas talked about his father who struggled to get clean and make a better life for his sons. Nicholas was one of five children. Three of them were able to leave with his father. He spoke of what his father did for them.

> When I was growing up, my father was a heroin addict. I didn't grow up here, I moved here because--my mother, my father, were addicts. My mother was a crack addict, heroin addict, an alcoholic. And, uh, my father finally got clean. He was a two-year heroin addict, we're talking shooting 10 bags a day. So, he finally got clean. He brought me and my two other brothers up here. He got a little house, got a little job. I mean, we weren't living luxurious. I mean, we were on the borderline of being poor. But, we had a roof, we had food, we had warmth, we had clothes, not the best clothes, but we didn't care. We were happy.

At first, Nicholas's father lived in a hotel. The boys stayed with their paternal grandparents nearby. For Nicholas, going from living in Philadelphia to living on a farm came with both a sense of love and belonging, as well as some surprises. "I remember I

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was ten years old. My grandparents pulled into the driveway and I was like, 'You got me a tree house!' and they started laughing." Nicholas was excited for his tree house, until he was told that the big yellow plastic container they brought home was a new septic tank. He laughed when he told this story. It continues to be a favorite family tale.

As with Nicholas, Robert's grandparents played an instrumental role in his life. His grandfather watched over him and was his closest ally. They raised Robert once his mother no longer fulfilled that role.

Despite coming from divorced parents, Kyle spoke highly of the support both his parents gave him. Kyle noted, however, that his mother could sometimes be a harsh disciplinarian: "My mom was strict, I'll say. She had a funny way of punishing me. Instead of, like, 'you're grounded for two weeks', she'd be like, 'Your birthday is taken away. You don't get a freakin' birthday this year'." Kyle went on to say his mom "never did me wrong." Kyle said the punishment was never an attempt to conceal financial problems. His mother would give him gifts, but take away "the part that you could never relive," the birthday party.

David's biological family offered him no support. His adoptive family, however, were college educated and had a successful farming business. They were his biggest supporters. They encouraged David to learn the family business, with the intention of his assuming control of it in the future. In addition, because David struggled in school, his adoptive family agreed to help him earn his G.E.D. David left their home, however, and unsuccessfully attempted to reunite with his biological mother. After struggling with homelessness, David returned to his adoptive family who took him in. His adoptive family supported David until they began arguing over money. He needed money for

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drugs. This fight ended their support. "They kicked me out," said David of their last encounter.

 Negative relationships. When discussing negative relationships that existed in their social circles, many of the participants spoke about the role of drugs in those relationships. James, Robert, and William all relayed that their negative relationships included older friends with whom they used drugs. James had three sets of friends; his church-youth-group friends, his marijuana-using friends who "were looking down on me, 'cause even though they were smokin' weed, they weren't getting into the other stuff," and his friends with whom he used hard drugs. The last group of friends "were like a couple of years older" than James. He shared that the "funny thing is, half of them are on my block," meaning they are in his cellblock within the correctional facility. Robert also talked about his drug use and how it was connected to his friends. They were "all older than me. Like four or five years. And, I always hung out with them because I thought I fit in with them. But really, I didn't. And, it's where it got me, I guess."

 William had friends with whom he used outside of school. William only used marijuana. William related that his friendships were very important to him and that he maintains several of those friendships today. However, those relationships consumed his after-school time.

  So, when they came over, we'd usually smoke pot or uh do some-un', I wasn't betterin' myself. But, say, once you got out of school--school's over, like, nobody, some people go like to a friend's house like, you know study and stuff like that, and help each other. But mine's usually the opposite. Like, come over

and smoke pot, and not talk anything about school-talk about a female at school or somethin', ya know-nothin' positive.

Five of the twelve participants specifically discussed how family members negatively influenced their lives during this portion of the interview. David talked about how his mother tried to hide her drug use from him. He recalled what bonding with his mother was like: "I remember when she started letting me smoke cigarettes. That was like when I was twelve or thirteen. I thought that was pretty cool." Although she let him smoke cigarettes with her, he noted that, "I never tried smokin' weed with her or nothin'." Nicholas also spoke about his mother's drug use and how her addiction affected his childhood.

> My, my mother was a user. She was a pothead, drunk. My mother was an alcoholic. I have three brothers, and I was the oldest. My sister moved away; she got her own life. She moved away and I was stuck taking care of my brothers, you know, because my mom's always drunk. I had to get them up for school, 'cause my mom couldn't do it. She was passed out, didn't want to do it. So that was a big burden on me.

Kyle and Christopher shared that their poor relationships were with stepparents. Kyle and his stepmother were in constant conflict. For Christopher, his stepfather was the disciplinarian who was left to address issues Christopher's mother avoided. "The only time I interacted with him was for punishment," Christopher said. If his mother found unfinished homework, she would leave it for his stepfather. After returning from his second-shift job, Christopher's stepfather would then wake Christopher at midnight to do his homework.

Brandon and Thomas continued to hold resentment toward those who affected them negatively. Brandon resented both of his parents. Brandon's father fought to keep custody of him while his father was in prison. However, Brandon believed his father saw him as a disappointment, "I was supposed to be good in sports. If I wasn't in sports, then he didn't want nothing to do with me." Brandon failed a drug test and could no longer play on the team. However, Brandon said that his father was "big into drugs," and that his mother "didn't really care at all. She was a crackhead. She was big into drugs." After Brandon was caught with marijuana and failed a random urine screen, he said his father became disappointed in him. Brandon said his father was still speaking to him at the time of the interview. Brandon believed that his father moved to a southern state "just to get away from me." Thomas's girlfriend was the one who caused him a great deal of stress. She lied to him about being pregnant and he worried about being able to provide for her. Thomas decided to commit a robbery to support them. His girlfriend reported him to the police and then told him she lied about the pregnancy. Thomas was sentenced to a maximum-security juvenile facility for ten months.

Family education. As participants talked about the influences of family members, questions were posed regarding family values of education. Participants were asked if their own parents or guardians graduated from high school. Ten of the participants offered to share that information of which seven had at least one parent who did not graduate high school. In Pennsylvania, as of 2008, at least 85.5% of adults possessed a high school diploma (Lewis & Burd-Sharps, 2010). Only three of the participants came from households where parents or guardians, who were also primary

custodians, all graduated from high school. The educational data of participants' family

members is shared in Table 9.

Table 9

Family Education Data

	Mother	**Father**	**Other Guardian**
Andrew	no	*yes	*step-mom - yes
David	*yes		*Adoptive Parents – college
James	*no		
Kyle	yes - college	*no	
Michael	*yes		*step-father - no
Nicholas	*yes	*yes	
Robert	*no	no	*Grandparents - yes
Thomas	*yes	*yes	
William	*no	no	
Zachary	*no	*no	

primary custodial parent at some point in the participant's childhood

> ***Family reactions.*** Family reactions to the participants dropping out varied
>
> because the circumstances surrounding dropout varied. For William and David,
>
> dropping out of school was a plan developed by adults in their lives. William was
>
> in placement, encouraged to dropout, and earned his G.E.D. in order to return
>
> home to his family. His mother was glad to see him home and out from under the
>
> control of the juvenile probation department. David did not like school and
>
> struggled significantly with academics. His adoptive family, who were college
>
> educated, planned to help him earn his G.E.D. and allow him to eventually take
>
> over the family business. For David, this plan did not materialize after he left
>
> school.

Like William, Christopher and Michael were not given the option to remain in

school. Christopher and Michael were both removed from school for acts that involved

juvenile and criminal charges. Although Michael could have finished his year in an

alternative education setting, he and his mother deemed the environment hostile. Dropping out of school appeared to be Michael's best option. Christopher went from school to jail. He had no choice.

Robert, Thomas, and Kyle all dropped out with the support of parents and guardians. Robert had missed so many days of school that his grandparents were fined for truancy. If they did not agree to sign him out, it would have caused a financial and legal burden for them. Thomas was constantly engaging in fights in school. His father signed him out, much to his mother's dismay, to avoid any further assault charges. Kyle was pushed out by his school at age fifteen. However, his father saw dropping out as a way to terminate ongoing conflicts with the school and allow Kyle to work for him full time.

The remainder of the participants experienced unhappy reactions from family members when they decided to drop out. James's mother saw him as bright and did not want him to give up his future. Both of Nicholas's parents graduated from high school. When he dedicated himself to school, "I had 85 to 90's." Nicholas's father tried to keep him in school, noting that:

> He didn't like it. He knew I could do it—he knew I could do it. He knew why I
> wasn't at my potential, because of drugs. He even tried—he showed up at the
> people's house I was doing drugs at and threatened them. Tell them to stay away.

Nicholas's addiction, however, won over his ability to earn a high school diploma.

Family relationships, at any level, influenced each of the participants. Regardless whether a father was a role model or a mother was a drug addict, each significant adult who had a role of responsibility for these young men influenced their reactions and

decision-making. Additionally, friends who supported drug-using habits also helped to reinforce the decisions facing the participants as juveniles.

Summary of social domain. In the social domain, participants shared experiences with achievements, barriers, and relationships that were significant to them outside of school. Although participants had support—in the form of clubs and organizations, loving family members, and jobs that were noteworthy—problems with drugs and removal from their family homes seemed to destroy those buffers. Once the participants engaged in behaviors that brought them to the attention of law enforcement, it seemed as though drug-using friends and other negative role models dominated their lives. In the end, decisions that preceded dropping out led to many significant consequences for all of the participants.

Drug Use and the Three Domains

While conducting the interviews with the participants, data were revealed in conversation that do not neatly correspond within only one domain. Drug use was addressed by participants across all three domains: academic, emotional, and social. The events that occurred within these domains were both contributors to and affected by drugs. This information had been discussed throughout the chapter. However, because drug use was a significant factor across the three domains, it became imperative to evaluate this issue as a stand-alone theme.

The participants discussed both personal drug use and family history of drug use across all three domains. In the academic domain, it was shared how drug use kept participants from attending or functioning in school. In the emotional domain, participants revealed histories of mental health concerns that were often self-treated using

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Table 10

With Whom Participants Reported Used Drugs

Participant	With Whom he used	Age at Drug Use Onset	Drugs Used
Andrew	*	10 years old	*admitted to non-specified use and to selling marijuana & methamphetamines
Brandon	Friends	15 years old	marijuana & Percocet
Christopher	*	*	* did not discuss any drug use
David	*	*	* admitted to use, did not specify
James	Older friends	7th grade	heroin
Kyle	Friends	12 years old	marijuana
Michael	Stepdad	*	cocaine, crack, bath salts, & marijuana
Nicholas	Alone & older friends	13 years old	marijuana, alcohol, Klonopin, cocaine, methamphetamines, & bath salts
Robert	Friends	*	marijuana & opiates
Thomas	Dad and brothers	6 years old	methamphetamines, heroin, Klonopin & marijuana
William	Older friends	*	marijuana
Zachary	Cousins and friends	14 years old	bath salts, prescription pills, & alcohol

illicit or stolen prescription drugs. As for the social domain, family drug histories and the effects of friendships that centered on using drugs dominated the discussions.

In addition to how it affected their lives in the three domains, participants discussed with whom they used, at what age they began using, and the types of drugs in which they engaged. This information provided a picture of how money was not a barrier to using any type of drug. Many of the participants came from working class or poverty stricken families, but had little to no difficulty obtaining their drugs of choice. An overview of drug use by participants is found in Table 10.

Drug Use and the Academic Domain

Using drugs affected the participants' lives in the academic domain. Their stories varied from an inability to function to legal consequences. Drug use at school served both as a barrier to academic success and as an interference to forming positive relationships in school. For six of those participants, personal drug use interfered directly with classroom performance. This information is shared in Table 11. In addition to the direct impact on academic performance while in school, participants shared how their drug use affected their education in other ways. For William, marijuana use interfered with his ability to complete homework and study. He was quoted earlier, whereas he shared,

> But, say, once you got out of school—school's over, like, nobody, some people go like to a friend's house like, you know study and stuff like that, and help each other. But, mine's usually the opposite. Like, come over and smoke pot, and not talk anything about school.

Andrew, Thomas, and Michael all faced legal consequences because of their drug use and interactions with drugs. Thomas was caught in school with prescription Klonopin and charged with possession with the intent to deliver. He was attending an alternative education school at the time. According to Thomas, they were for personal use, to help him, "get through my day". Michael was charged with possession of a marijuana pipe at school and was consequently expelled. When Andrew was asked about his school experiences, he responded, "I don't know. I sold a lotta drugs--nothing school wise." Andrew further stated that this was his only reason for attending school in the first

place. After he was caught stealing $40,000 from his drug supplier at the age of fourteen, Andrew ran away from home and never attended school again.

Table 11

Academic Effects of Drug Use

Participant	**Academic Effects of Drug Use**
Brandon	"I would leave school, in the middle of a class, with friends and then go get high and come back."
James	"After I started doing drugs in the seventh grade, I was barely passing the seventh and eighth grade." "'Cause, when I was in school, I wasn't sober, and I just kept on flunking."
Nicholas	Said he would try to "act like a chameleon" if he was high at school
Robert	"…I always felt like I was getting interrupted 'cause I had to go to school. And they (friends) always had drugs and that was what I wanted to do at the time, so that's what I went and did. And just said 'screw school'."
Thomas	"I was about getting high--I would get high in school too." "They (teachers) had to know. I'm sitting in the middle of class, nodding off, smacking my head off the middle of the desk and not even wake up…"
Zachary	"The teachers thought it was all a big act, when I would come in sick or hung over or something. Because, when I was younger I did that just to get out of school. If I came into school sick between the ages of fifteen and 18, there was probably a reason I was sick. Either I was going through some pretty serious withdrawals, or I was hung over, or coming down off my high or something". Zachary said he would sometimes vomit in the classroom from drug use.

Drug Use and the Emotional Domain

Emotionally, participants shared barriers they faced, such as mental health concerns and relationship issues. Specifically, participants addressed how drugs were directly involved in creating emotional barriers and emotional relationship problems. Four of the participants discussed how drug use was tied to emotional relationships with parents. The information they shared is found in Table 12.

Table 12

Emotional Relationships and Drug Use

Participant	Emotional Relationships and Drug Use
Andrew	"I came from a good family, ya know what I mean? So they (his parents), like, kept me off in the corner. I was like the fuck up."
Brandon	Brandon's father had been incarcerated most of Brandon's life and was "big into drugs". "Drugs-ended up losing everything. Tested positive for marijuana. And that's when he (his father), like, just pushed me away. He said, 'Get the fuck outta my life'."
David	"I didn't really have nothing. I mean, my mom was always a drug addict--so I kinda just did whatever I wanted, I never had no rules…"
James	"I think that if my mom woulda stayed sober, she coulda told me, at least game me a better influence-not be high and tell somebody else they can't be high."
Michael	"I tried cocaine. There was a time I tried crack. A few times, actually-it sounds horrible, and it is horrible. I tried to tell my mom about this stuff, and she was like, 'I don't want to hear it'."

Regarding mental health concerns and their connections to drug use, the stories varied among eight of the young men who were interviewed for the study. Whether it be homelessness, victimization, or using drugs just to survive the day, each of these participants shared an emotional need as a reason for drug use. Their stories are summarized in Table 13.

Drug Use and the Social Domain

The social domain addressed life of a participant outside of school. Socially, drug use was a barrier that affected the participants' friend associations, after-school jobs, and family relationships. For Robert, using with his friends resulted in school becoming an interference in his life. William began friendships with people four or five years older than him as they were the suppliers of his drug using habit. For eight other participants, drug use was directly related to their family relationships. Whether it was the effects of parental use, using with family members, or how personal use impacted the family, all

eight of the young men discussed how drugs were part of their family dynamics. These

statements are found in Table 14.

Table 13

Emotional Health and Drug Use

Participant	Emotional Health and Drug Use
David	"I'm seventeen years old, and my mom is living in [town] and doing drugs. And I was just roaming around. I was homeless for a long time."
James	"Because, when you're on drugs you're hiding a bunch of stuff. There is something that you won't let go."
Kyle	Kyle suffered from depression and had multiple admissions to a psychiatric hospital. He connected his depression to his drug use, "smoking pot…'cause that's what I wanted to do--it also unmotivated me. I didn't want to get up in the morning--messed up my sleep schedule."
Michael	Michael used marijuana with his stepfather. His stepfather was dying of cirrhosis and hepatitis, "I took care of him…seeing my old man die, that was rough."
Nicholas	Nicholas was given a prescription to address his depression from his primary care provider, then, "I got some little bit of pot, got higher than hell. Then I started drinking again, then I started doing pills, got addicted to cocaine, then I got addicted to methamphetamines, then I got addicted to bath salts. It was ongoing. I was dangerous. I'm surprised I'm not dead. I should be dead. I died four times on the table, overdose, twenty Klonopins. How did I not die? Why am I here?"
Thomas	"I'll just keep doing drugs and sit in the background (laughs). I kinda felt like an outcast, know what I mean? Maybe kids were smoking pot at that age, but they weren't doing meth and heroin." Regarding his relationship with his brothers and sister, who introduced him to drug use at age six, "They figured it'd be funny…They're all clean now. They're all clean. They got good jobs, good houses, good wives. And I'm here. They don't even talk to me no more." "I thought it brought us closer together, at the time. I only realize now that it was pushing us apart, because they weren't--addicts. And, I am."
Zachary	"I just like the way they made me feel. I still do." On a friend moving away, "I got all depressed and shit, so I got high. Pretty much. Started out with pills, gradually went up from there." "I was drinking, I hung out with different people, and my cousin introduced me to the bath salt and I'm like 'Huh, this shit ain't too bad. I like this. And (lets out big sigh) it went downhill from there. When I started doing bath salt, I was sixteen years old. I lost a lot, I used to be big. I used to be real big, I used to be jacked. Then I lost all my weight. Lost everything I had, pretty much."

Summary of Drug Use

Of the twelve young men who participated in the study, eleven of them shared how drug use significantly impacted all aspect of their lives. Drug use prevented them from functioning academically, fulfilled emotional needs, or caused destruction in their relationships. Regardless whether it was personal use or drug habits of family members, the impact was still tremendous. It became clear that drugs were an overarching element in the lives of those who shared their experiences in an attempt to better understand school dropout.

School Dropout

The purpose of the study was to understand experiences of young men prior to their decision to drop out. The experiences explored in the academic, emotional, and social domains were described by participants who were ultimately incarcerated. The following section summarizes reasons the participants gave for dropping out of school and whether they believe anyone could have prevented them from doing so. In addition, the participants shared feelings about dropping out and provided educators with some advice. The advice includes ways the individuals could have been helped or how they felt rejected by the education system. Because school teachers and administrators are the primary adults with the power to mold the school experience, the comments of the participants needed to be heard.

When the interviews were near close, the participants had a final reflection question, "Was there anything I didn't ask you that you would like to share?" It was during this moment that some of the most important information was shared. Most

Table 14

Family Relationships and Drug Use

Participant	Family Relationships and Drug Use
Andrew	"I took, like, $40,000 from a drug dealer. So, I had to leave-had to leave town." Andrew, at age fourteen, ran away to Texas to avoid court ordered placement. For the next ten years, his family did not know where he was, "I called them every once in a while, like four times a year."
Brandon	Said his father was, "big into drugs" and that his mother, "really didn't care at all. She was--a crack head. She was big into drugs." Brandon stole Percocet from his mother. He said she has been fighting cancer.
David	His mother's addiction and legal decision to terminate parental rights left David homeless, "Just roaming couch to couch. And now I'm like, 'I have no idea what I'm gonna do'. I can't even get a job 'cause I don't have any experience, I'm seventeen and I've only worked on this family farm for the last five years."
James	His mother was, "Smoking weed, but she was an extreme pill popper." His mother had several psychiatric admissions that left he and his brother alone.
Michael	On using marijuana with his stepfather, "It's not a drug. I hate when people call cannabis a drug. We'd smoke a little pot together."
Nicholas	Regarding when he lived in Philadelphia with his mother, "She never even talked to us. I was angry at her too…It was a bad childhood. She got people bringing guns into the house." Nicholas said his father was shooting heroin, up to ten bags a day, when he just quit, "And he said, he made me cry when he said it to me, I was like maybe fourteen or fifteen years old. I finally asked him, 'What made you quit?' He just said, 'You guys. I looked at the way you guys were suffering and what I was doing to myself upon you guys and so I quit and brought you guys up here'." Once Nicholas succumbed to addiction, his father could not understand his struggle. It strained their relationship.
Thomas	Regarding using drugs with his father, he said they, "smoked pot. I wasn't using meth with him or nothing. Didn't seem like a big deal at the time." Thomas began using drugs at age six with his older brothers, because, "They figured it'd be funny…I thought it brought us closer together, at the time. I only realize now that it was pushing us apart…"
Zachary	Because of his drug use, Zachary's relationship with his father became strained. To fulfill his need, Zachary began taking abusing resources and finances of the family garage, "the last couple years, not so good. I was into drugs and stuff and he didn't like it. I don't blame him, because of some of the stupid stuff I was doing. I was on drugs, to get my drugs. Being that we owned a garage, you understand why he kinda got mad when I was doing drugs. There are certain things you must do to get your drugs. If you don't get your drug, you do whatever it takes to get your drug."

participants reflected on regrets regarding school. It is in this section where those stories are told.

Why I Dropped Out

When the participants explained their reasons for dropping out of school, the prevailing theme was drug use. For nine of the participants, drug use was a primary factor in the decision to drop out. However, not all participants had control over the decision to drop out. Some of the young men were sent to prison from high school and others had new priorities that pulled them out of school. Their explanations for dropping out are found in Table 15.

A few of the participants talked about what interventions may have prevented their decision to drop out. For Nicholas, he was clear in explaining that his drug addiction was taking over his life. Nicholas explained,

> I told them, no matter what you say, I'm dropping out. It doesn't matter, I'll just quit. And, I did quit. No matter what they said, I was dropping out. I didn't want to be in school. I felt like it was a big waste of my time, at that time. All my motivation went to doing drugs.

Brandon, however, centered his discussion on his feelings of being rejected by the education system. "There's no point in going to school if you're just gonna get thrown out anyway." However, James, Thomas, and Andrew believed that if someone stepped in, it might have made a difference. James struggled with a heroin addiction and needed the school to intervene in his using. He needed counseling and said it was never offered to him. Thomas had a similar experience. He explained, "They could have tried to send me to rehab or something. Tried to get me some counseling or something." Thomas said

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counseling or help were never offered to him. Andrew, on the other hand, wished his family stepped in. He wished they "made me go to that thing," referring to juvenile residential placement. He said, "They didn't do anything. I know if I had a kid and they were in the same boat, I woulda made 'em do it."

Table 15

Reason for Dropout

Participant	Reason for Dropout
Andrew	Andrew left school when he ran away to Texas to avoid placement.
Brandon	"I started selling in school. That's the reason I'm in here (prison). For manufacturing."
Christopher	"I got incarcerated. I never wanted to drop out. It was forced upon me."
David	David reenrolled twice. "And I truly feel like I just couldn't (succeed in school), no matter how hard I tried. I kinda felt like I was on my own." He quit school to go to work full time.
James	"My choice to drop out of school was just because I didn't want to go anymore. I much rather be on the outside world doing drugs."
Kyle	"Especially the smoking pot. I will say that. That was a big thing. 'Cause that's what I wanted to do--it also unmotivated me." When the school proposed a way to withdraw Kyle from school at age fifteen, Kyle agreed to drop out, "It was my best intentions. Because if I kept going the way I was going in school, they were just going to take me away from my family."
Michael	"So, I signed myself out of school. I had a girlfriend, we had problems, and I wasn't thinking right." Michael later reenrolled, then unenrolled.
Nicholas	"I dropped out because I was never--I never had, when I was growing up, everything around me was negative. Most of my life in childhood was negative. I've seen a lot of drugs. I grew up thinking that was okay, that that type of life was the life to live. I gave up school, I hurt people, I stole from people, for my addiction."
Robert	"Well, I got around the wrong group of people and started smoking marijuana and stuff, ended up having two kids. And I just dropped out. Just didn't want to go no more."
Thomas	"I was about getting high. I would get high in school too."
William	William was encouraged to drop out by the juvenile probation department, "Well, uh, like you like keep saying I dropped out, like I had a choice."
Zachary	"…it's all my fault, because I dropped out of school. I went into doing drugs and shit, and all I had to do-all I had, I only had to do like 2 or 3 months of school my 12th grade year and I coulda graduated."

Advice for Educators

Throughout the interviews, participants shared words of advice for educators on

helping students reach graduation. Earlier, participants shared words of encouragement

regarding what educators are doing right. Others discussed where some educators could

improve. However, this table includes participant reflections on how educators can

facilitate young students reaching the goal of graduation. The participants stressed the

relationship between student and teacher and the need for appropriate interventions.

Regardless, their words of advice cannot change their past. They are merely reflections

of their own experiences and what they believe can be done better for the next generation.

Table 16 provides a glimpse of the participants' advice.

Table 16

Advice for Educators

Participant	Advice for Educators
Andrew	Stated that he has ADHD, bi-polar disorder, and schizophrenia. He believed that his teachers could have noticed, then "I probably could got on medication when I was younger. That probably would've helped out a lot. But, then again, I don't know."
Brandon	"Why don't you put the same ones in a classroom instead of doing something, instead of pushing these kids aside and make them feel like they can't even attend an actual school. Get a real class, get a real teacher instead of sending them to [partial hospitalization or alternative education schools]." "I would feel more comfortable. Because, at least I know the people around me are just like me and they're not going to--degrade me. Because I've been called 'retarded' at times, like childish. Being accepted into a school is better than being denied every five minutes."
Christopher	"Knowing that the teacher is not just there to get their paycheck and go home. I felt like they're just teaching you, they don't care if you fail or not. They (teachers) got their education, it's not important to them." "If you're teaching kids...that could be your son's age, that doesn't affect you in any way?"

David	"I just think that maybe they should pay more attention. You hear 'we care so much about the kids' education', but, when it comes down to a school and teachers, it don't seem like nobody cares. When I dropped out of school it was like, 'Mr. [David], well he's just another drop out'."
James	"I think they should have a drug and alcohol counseling there." "I really think they need to have A.A. meetings, because people are starting at, like, the age of fourteen, fifteen, doing heavy drugs, because I was using heroin when I was in the ninth grade." "And, I think people should speak up more about it to kids. People know who is the druggies in class. Teachers should sit down with the kids and be, like, off the record 'what's going on at home?' Because I think most people never ask those questions. Because, when you're on drugs you're hiding a bunch of stuff. There is something that you won't let go."
Kyle	"They weren't worried about my education. They were worried about their own 'nuts'."
Michael	**"The teachers, they tell you to remember for Friday. They don't teach you, they don't make you learn. I want to remember this for the rest of my life! I would ask a lot of questions, they would get flustered, and I would feel the energy and I would get flustered."**
Nicholas	"Teachers need to learn how to handle a situation. You don't have to have a lot of experience. But you can't leave kids in the dust. You can hold somebody to their actions, but I wouldn't say that you can judge." "They bring A.A. to school, think about it, they bring guys with 20, 30, 40 years clean coming in and telling these kids. These kids, they're gonna look up to these guys. That's a positive influence. That makes a big difference in somebody's life. If you're a naive teenager, and you can look up to somebody in your life. Put your faith and your trust into them, that's a big step. That's something hard for a teenager to do."
Robert	"They expel you for simple reasons that you shouldn't be. I would get expelled, and another kid would do the same thing and not get expelled. Or, written up for simple stuff, like walking too long in the hallway or something like that."
Thomas	"They 'coulda listened to me. About needing help, because I get frustrated easy. I don't like being a person who can't do something. I like to show people I can do whatever."
Zachary	Zachary believed that school personnel treated students from social classes differently, "Not be so snotty to people who ain't got money. The way [school name] looks at it is if you ain't got money and you don't play sports, they don't really care (about that student)."

How I Felt About Dropping Out

Eleven of the participants shared their feelings about dropping out. For some of the young men, the reflection came as part of the discussion in the interview. For others, after the study purpose was explained to them two weeks prior, they took the time to ponder how they felt about dropping out. Their explanations included how their dreams for the future were affected, where they believed they would have been if they finished, and how they felt about not graduating from high school. Table 17 displays the core of this qualitative study, how school dropout affects youth.

Table 17

Feelings Regarding Dropping Out

Participant	Feelings Regarding Dropping Out
Andrew	When asked if he thought school was important, "Yeah. Not as important as I do think it is now. Probably, if I could go back, but I can't go back, I would graduate."
Brandon	"I felt like it was important enough, because I had to have an education to do something with my life. But, at the same time, I felt like there was an easier way. I'll just go get my G.E.D. and never have to worry about this being kicked out."
Christopher	"To this day, I still wish I could go back to high school. I tell my mom every time I call her. I wish I could go back to high school so bad, you don't understand. I'm gonna go to college. You think about it a lot when you're incarcerated. You think about how much more I could have did with my life. If I just--took a half hour or hour to do this homework assignment, study for this test. I got my G.E.D., don't get me wrong. I feel that was a big accomplishment for me. But, I still feel like I kinda cheated my life, because that high school diploma is like--solid. I feel like the G.E.D. is like cheating. I wish I could have gotten that high school diploma." "I just wanted a high school diploma, that's all I wanted, so I could go in the Marines."
David	"I just wanted to be able to do something with my life. I really wanted to graduate school."
James	When asked if thought he would be incarcerated if he graduated, James responded, "No".

Kyle	Kyle reflected on a conversation he had with his friends when he dropped out. Kyle shared that his friends told him, "Don't stop there. Just keep going, just to say you did it. And they were right. I would have liked to have walked up on that stage, say 'Hey, look at me now!'" "As a kid, you only get one option, one chance at a real education. And now, looking back, I'd go, I'd do anything to go back to school."
Michael	Michael had dropped out and moved to Oklahoma, then he, "moved back, signed myself back into school because I wanted to graduate. Who goes this many years and leaves school? It's just the stupidest thing I've ever heard." "I was about to go into the Marine Corps. I've taken my ASVABs four times. The school board told me that I would have to go to [alternative education] and I couldn't walk (in graduation). So why am I going to school all these years if I can't even walk, get my diploma, like a regular person?" "'We'll give you your diploma in the mail', That really hurt. 'You can't walk' I spent $400 bucks on a class ring from this school. I wanted to do the whole funny looking cap, shake it, throw it. Man, that's something you wanna do in your life." Michael decided to drop out instead of complete at the alternative education school. When the Marine recruiter he had been working with found out and confronted him, "I cried. What he said made me really feel horrible. I knew it was all over. I had 15 college credits." The Marines would not take him with a GED.
Nicholas	"All those years I was pushing reality away. That's when reality smacks you in the face. I wish I could have completed school. I wish I could have gotten my diploma. But, it just didn't happen."
Robert	When Robert tried to reenroll in school and was rejected, he felt, "they 'coulda accepted me back. I came after my first time out of jail in February or March and when I got out I went to the school, we had to have a meeting and they told me they couldn't accept me back. I was nineteen. They told me to do online schooling and I could still get my GED or, not my GED, but my diploma or take classes. I was a 'tweener' that year, I was in eleventh and twelfth grade." "They told me I was, um, a danger to society and other students, so they could not accept me back. They told me to take my G.E.D. or [charter school] online." He was three months from a diploma. He believed that if he were allowed to return and graduate from high school, "I wouldn't be here."
William	"I still got my graduation equivalency diploma. I did what everyone else had to do to graduate."
Zachary	"…all I had, I only had to do like two or three months of school my twelfth grade year and I 'coulda graduated. And I freakin' had the knowledge. 'Coulda gone to college, to ITT Tech." "If I wouldn't have dropped out of school, I probably wouldn't have gotten myself in trouble."

Summary of School Dropout

The participants shared significant themes of their experiences. Most of the participants struggled with drug abuse or addiction in school, as well as those who had family members experiencing the same phenomenon. Several had words of advice as to how the education system could have approached problems they faced in a different fashion. Most significantly, ten participants experienced regret because of the decision to drop out.

Summary

Twelve young men shared their journeys through school, all in an effort to try and help society better understand reasons for dropping out of school. The participants were incarcerated in a rural county correctional facility where 59% of the inmates failed to graduate from high school. Some of the participants were pulled out of school by the justice system; however, most dropped out of school because of problems related to illicit drug use. The participants shared the belief that the education system had an ability to intervene, as they struggled with family problems, mental health problems, or learning difficulties. As drugs were used to cope with the barriers they faced, the participants revealed that they began using drugs as young as age six. The average age of onset for drug use by the participants was twelve. Some of the participants shared that their drug use began at home with parents or siblings, complicating the dynamics they faced.

The participants shared that drug use affected them across the three domains: social, emotional, and academic. Socially, the participants expressed the highest level of achievements, as they shared stories about jobs, clubs, and sports. However, placements by the court system, family drug use, and lack of parental support became prevailing

themes. These same themes were echoed in the emotional domain, which were complicated by numerous reports of mental health problems. It was not until later in life that these participants were able to understand the weight of their decisions to drop out. As for the academic domain, problems with relationships and other barriers overpowered sports, classes, and electives that were enjoyed in school. Relationships with peers, teachers, and administrators helped to shape their stories as they discussed problems with learning disabilities, grade retention, and discipline. Again, the majority of problems discussed by the participants centered on drug use, whether it be theirs or a parent.

The stories shared in the interviews help society to understand how stressors in participants' lives and modeled behaviors helped to create a circumstance under which dropping out became a viable option. Those stressors mimic the explanations provided in Agnew's General Strain Theory and Revised Strain Theory, as well as Akers' Social Learning Theory.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Numerous studies have researched programs within correctional institutions to identify their effectiveness in reducing recidivism rates. The literature lacks research that explored reasons inmates dropped out of school in the first place. Inmates housed at the county correctional facility featured in this study reported a school dropout rate of 59%. This number falls within the national range of dropout among incarcerated males which is between 39% and 67% (Goebel, 2005; D. Lee et al., 2012). This study sought to understand the essence of academic, emotional, and social experiences of young incarcerated males between the ages of 18 to under 25 prior to their dropping out of school. The purpose of this study was to begin to fill the research gap, better understand reasons for dropout, and design a platform for discussion as to what society can do to address those concerns.

Summary of Purpose of the Study

This study explored the academic, emotional, and social experiences of males incarcerated within a rural Pennsylvania county correctional facility prior to their dropping out of school. The intention of this qualitative study was to gain a better understanding of the reasons for school dropout and to discover whether some reasons are within the control of the educational system. It is plausible that graduation rates can increase and incarceration rates decrease over time if reasons for dropout are subsequently addressed. However, it is notable that reasons for dropout discovered during this study can also be affected by systems in addition to the educational domain. Discovering reasons for school dropout created a platform for discussion with the

educational, political, social service, community, and criminal justice systems within the county of study.

Summary of Theoretical Framework

This study was based on transformative theory, with the expectation that new knowledge gained can be utilized to reframe societal approaches to the identified problem (Creswell, 2013). It was also designed with critical theory in mind, as inmates' expressions of experiences were based upon their own versions of reality as they discussed the stressors faced during adolescence (Creswell, 2013). However, the themes identified for the purpose of this study, as identified through the literature, were based upon three theories designed within the criminal justice and delinquency realm of research: General Strain Theory, Revised Strain Theory, and Social Learning Theory.

General Strain Theory

Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) proposed the idea that there are three types of strain in life; and when those strains are experienced, adolescents tend to react out of anger or frustration (Agnew, 2012). GST includes the concept that there exists a gap between one's desired goal and the ability to achieve that goal. Additionally, stress is experienced by adolescents who experience loss of positive stimuli, which is then replaced by a third stressor, a negative stimuli (Agnew, 2012; Agnew & White, 1992).

Revised Strain Theory

Agnew's Revised Strain Theory supported the idea that an adolescent may choose an illegal escape from an aversive event if no legal escape option exists. This behavior is exhibited when an adolescent perceives a situation from which they desire to escape as

unjust, severe, and persistent. Examples provided by Agnew included ideas such as mean teachers, unfair punishments from parents, or a dissatisfaction with school (Agnew, 1985, 2012).

Social Learning Theory

The final theory applied in conducting this study included Ronald Akers' Social Learning Theory. Akers embraced the idea that adolescents make conscious choices as part of social learning. He believed that adolescents learned behaviors through modeling, but that adolescents weighed the rewards and punishments of engaging in such behaviors as part of the decision-making process. Akers discussed the idea of differential reinforcers. Adolescents must decide which holds a greater reward, social compliance or engaging in the deviant behavior (Akers, 1990; Akers et al., 1979; Lanza-Kaduce et al., 1982).

<div align="center">Summary of Research Methodology</div>

This qualitative study incorporated gathering of data through semi-structured conversational interviews. The study relied upon narrative data as evidence, provided by subjects through interviews, whereas realities of those experiences were shared through different perspectives (Creswell, 2013; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Mertler & Charles, 2011). Those interviews were conducted with participants selected utilizing the county correctional facility's inmate database software, which helped to identify potential participants who were under the age of 25 and had dropped out of schools located within the same county in which they were incarcerated. Once individuals who qualified for the study consented to participate, the researcher interviewed the participants one-to-one, exploring the answers to the following research questions:

1. How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with academic achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

2. How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with emotional achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

3. How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with social achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

Research questions were formulated based upon themes and nodes discovered in the literature. The nodes were identified in a word tree produced through utilization of NVivo 10 software. The research questions were explored through a series of questions found in the Interview Guide (Appendix A), as participants shared their answers in the interview room of the correctional facility. Data were then evaluated and illustrated according to the themes and nodes identified earlier. Additionally, the data revealed new themes warranting individual discussion: drug use and dropout. The data were considered valid and reliable due to implementation of triangulation (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation methods incorporated included peer review, member checking, and an external audit.

Limitations

Limitations exist in this study, as it was conducted with participants who attended and dropped out of school, as well as were incarcerated, in one rural county within Pennsylvania. The findings of this study, therefore, may not be applicable to the

educational, social service, legal, community, or criminal justice systems within other counties or states. However, recommendations for further research and exploration are discussed later in this chapter. Reliability posed a difficulty, in that the researcher was subject to the prison conditions, settings, and schedule. During interviews, the sessions were interrupted for population count and required two inmates' interviews to end. Additionally, the interviews took place in a highly visible interview room and member-checking took place in the library. Both of these areas are in the main hallway of the prison, which is a high traffic area. This location led to multiple inmates passing the rooms during interview sessions many times, likely out of curiosity. These behaviors were somewhat distracting to some of the participants. Finally, the validity of the qualitative study can be questioned because the sources of information were young men who were incarcerated. Triangulation of the data was instituted to help alleviate these concerns and to help establish a higher level of credibility in the data (Creswell, 2013; Mertler & Charles, 2011).

Conclusions

There are several implications of this study. Primarily, understanding and addressing the reasons for dropout could affect social and economic returns to society. Social limits exist for those who do not have a high school diploma in terms of life options, such as well-paying jobs. In return, those without a high school diploma are more likely to engage in criminal behaviors. The relationship between school dropout and the likelihood of incarceration in this particular county is evident in the comparison of numbers whereas 85.5% of Pennsylvanians hold a high school diploma (Lewis & Burd-Sharps, 2010) compared to 41% of the inmates at this particular county correctional

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facility. Research consistently demonstrates that a negative correlation exists between educational success and incarceration rates (Adams et al., 1994; Batiuk et al., 2005; Burke & Vivian, 2001; Cecil et al., 2000; Fabelo, 2002; Flynn, 2005; Gaes, 2008; Kelso Jr., 2000; Lahm, 2009; Robinson, 2000; Saylor & Gaes, 1996; Steurer et al., 2001; Steurer et al., 2003; Vacca, 2004; Wilson et al., 2000; Winterfield et al., 2009). Economically, society will gain from increased graduation rates (Gaes, 2008), with returns between 14% to 26% (Lochner & Moretti, 2004). If fewer people are incarcerated and more people are employed, contributing as taxpayers, it is obvious that it is in society's best interest to invest in facilitating this change.

The significance of this study is its aim to understand reasons for school dropout among incarcerated males, utilizing information learned to create discussions among stakeholders. Those discussions would include ways to identify and implement buffers within societal systems that could increase graduation rates. The learned information may provide society with the ability to improve the quality of life for individuals (Bloom, 2010; Crosnoe et al., 2007; Levin, 2009), the schooling experiences of many, and improve the social lives of others by reducing crime. Addressing the experiences of those who dropped out that are within societal control could potentially increase graduation rates, decrease tax burdening incarceration rates (Bloom, 2010; Gaes, 2008), increase the number of taxpaying contributing citizens, and affect society with an economic return.

Academic Domain

In the academic domain, participants shared their experiences according to their achievements, barriers, and within relationships. In regards to achievements, participants

spoke of success with grades, sports, and other school-based activities. Most commonly, the participants believed their greatest successes in school were marked by athletic achievements, rather than by academic achievements. Although the participants shared their favorite subjects or electives in school, most found success was marked by something others could see: a sporting event, a trophy, or good grades in a class. These outward signs of academic success were symbols of value to the individuals. The literature indicates that academic success, such as in reading ability or in the form of a valued GPA, buffers against dropout (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Zablocki, 2009). However, the number of shared barriers and problematic relationships in school overshadowed the number of shared achievements. As for barriers, the participants spoke at length regarding problems with learning disabilities, discipline, retention, and an overall experience with course failures. Seven of twelve participants had diagnosed learning disabilities, while others shared they believed they had undiagnosed disabilities or struggled with ADHD in school. Of the participants, 83% were retained at least once and 59% of the participants never completed a grade higher than ninth. In addition, the participants shared multiple stories of suspensions and expulsions, including incidents that were intentional in order to avoid a school environment deemed aversive. The experiences of the participants are all predictors of school dropout, as indicated in previous research (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Stearns et al., 2007; Zablocki, 2009). When it came to discussing relationships within the academic domain, participants spoke of adults who invested in them and adults who they believed worked against them in their efforts to achieve academic success. The young men spoke of those who they regarded as heroes, those who sacrificed personal time to assist them,

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and those who refused to provide needed opportunities. Regardless, it became evident that relationships with teachers and administrators in school served as a significant factor in understanding the academic experience. In fact, either the development of or lack of relationships with caring adults in school may be the difference between remaining in school or choosing to drop out (Agnew, 1985; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Osher et al., 2003).

Emotional Domain

As with the academic domain, this study explored achievements, barriers, and relationships within the emotional domain. Similarly, participants had few experiences to share regarding achievements. They spoke of feeling good about successfully competing in community sports and engagement in after school jobs. However, emotional barriers, including problematic relationships, outnumbered positive emotional experiences. Emotional barriers to completing a high school education included new demands as a teen parent, ongoing drug use, lack of parental support, and struggles with mental health diagnoses. Three of the participants were teen fathers. Eleven of the participants spoke about personal drug use, as well as drug use by parents. Explanation of drug use included stories of addiction, lack of safety, and problems with homelessness. The majority of participants also lacked peer support and connection within school. Most peer connections were with older friends outside of school with whom they used drugs. These issues, again, correspond with previous findings, as behavioral problems, lack of peer connections, disengagement in school, and mental health disorders are all factors in predicting school dropout (Agnew, 1985; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Fall & Roberts, 2012; Henry et al., 2012; Osher et al., 2003; Stearns et al., 2007; Zablocki, 2009).

Adolescents may struggle with positive decision-making, as an immature brain tends to succumb to emotional reactions, thrill-seeking behaviors, and instant gratification (Reyna & Farley, 2006).

Social Domain

It was within the social domain that participants reported the highest levels of achievement. Despite many obstacles, they boasted about loving family relationships, passion for hard-labor jobs, and fond memories for community clubs and organizations. The participants spoke about their social lives in ways that dwarfed the significance of their academic lives. Some spoke of admiration for their parents' loving devotion and others spoke of love of learning a new trade, such as landscaping and mechanics. Their lives within the social domain often significantly affected their academic and emotional domains. The participants spoke about friendships that centered around drug use, interactions with law enforcement, and separation from families. Seven participants were removed from their family homes and placed by the court into group homes, foster care, or residential facilities. For most of those individuals, ongoing acts of juvenile delinquency led to placement. Adolescents who are first arrested in high school increase the likelihood of dropping out by six to eight times (Hirschfield, 2009). Education was not a consistent priority in participants' homes. Only three of the participants came from homes where all care-taking adults graduated from high school. In some circumstances, parents or guardians helped to facilitate school dropout. For example, school was seen as an aversive environment to some parents and participants. Parental reactions, economic hardship, and a lack of relationship with school peers all increase the likelihood an

adolescent will drop out of school (Agnew, 1985; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Gasper et al., 2012; Ku & Plotnick, 2003; Stearns et al., 2007).

Drug Use and the Three Domains

Drug use was the most prevalent theme that occurred across all three domains. Drug use by both participants and household family members affected the participants' academic lives, emotional well-being, and social success. Academically, participants shared struggles with drug use while physically in school. Drug use became more important than school success. Emotionally, the participants shared how illicit drugs were used to self-medicate, how addiction controlled their lives, and the negative effects of family members' drug use. Family members' drug use caused homelessness, destroyed the family unit, and introduced participants to drug use as early as age six. Relationships based on shared drug use became the primary factor most participants gave for dropping out of school. Drug use is a prime example of Akers' et al. (1979) social learning theory, whereas peers and parents are significant influences in the likelihood that a teen will engage in drug use.

Dropout

The core issue of the study was to discover why inmates 18 to under 25 dropped out of school. Of the twelve participants, ten voiced regrets regarding not graduating from high school. The participants spoke about missing the chance to walk across the stage to receive their diplomas and not being able to throw that "funny little hat." Reasons for not completing school involved criminal justice system interventions, an inability to be successful academically, or the prevalence of a drug abuse problem. In sharing the reasons for dropout, participants spoke of ways their futures were changed by

this decision, such as an inability to join the armed forces or lost opportunities for a post-secondary education. In explaining dropout, participants provided many suggestions as to how their experience could have been enhanced and, perhaps, more successful. Early in their educational experiences participants fell behind, were retained, or became disengaged in the educational process. In addition, most participants were involved with disciplinary problems and the juvenile court system for acts of delinquency. Disengagement, discipline issues, and juvenile delinquency are significant influences on academic success (Whitaker, 2011) and in predicting the likelihood of dropout (Henry et al., 2012). The decision to drop out of school, for most participants, was a long process that included years of struggles in all three domains. Dropout is rarely an impulsive decision, rather it is often the result of many factors that lead to that journey's end (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

Recommendations for Adults Who Engage With Adolescents

The results of this study encompass a variety of considerations, including those for future research and thoughts on ways communities can work together to change the course of the experience for adolescents in the three domains. This qualitative study can serve as a springboard for movement in the realm of research. Additionally, this study and the suggestions of its' participants give both the rural county of study and other sectors of society opportunities to take lessons learned and apply it in an attempt to decrease dropout rates. This qualitative research provides educators, social service providers, and families with a better understanding of the social reinforcers that existed in the lives of the participants (Akers, 1990), as well as the strains (Agnew, 1985, 2012),

that contributed to their dropping out of school. A sense of social responsibility calls on communities to address these issues with future struggling adolescents.

What has been learned is that success will not be found unless society is willing to embrace a paradigm shift. The positive correlation between school dropout and incarceration will continue to exist unless the dropout problem is approached differently. In the past, educational programming in the corrections system has been the solution to a lack of education among those incarcerated. The solution lies in preventing dropout in the first place. In order to reduce this rate, society needs to accept responsibility in the academic, emotional, and social domains of children. As the decision to dropout is often an end decision as part of a long journey (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004) and not an impulsive decision, the indicators need to be addressed early. A paradigm shift requires cognitive planning (Kumar & Natarajan, 2007) whereas changing the method of approach must be mapped. Additionally, a paradigm shift is necessary in order to allow stakeholders to be effective, to improve the internal processes of organizations, and to respond to the needs of society for a productive citizenry (Cheng, 2009).   The following section includes recommendations for several stakeholders who work with adolescents, including educators, special education teachers and directors, school administrators, vocational and technical school coordinators, drug and alcohol and mental health providers, child protective services workers, juvenile probation department officers, lawmakers, law enforcement officers, juvenile court judges, and the families of adolescents.

It is important to address the attitudes of the young men who participated in this study. Although the topics discussed were sensitive in nature, there was an overall sense

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that these young men took their opportunity to share quite seriously. With the two-week window to ponder questions on the Interview Guide, many participants shared that they spent a great deal of time thinking about what was important to them and worth sharing during the interview. Of the twelve participants, one displayed a flat affect and appeared to lack any emotion regarding any of the circumstances that surrounded his life. It was as if he was sharing all events as matter of fact, lacking any personalization or internalization. Another participant presented as quite narcissistic. He blamed his family, school personnel, and his peers for his hardships. He accepted no personal responsibility. As for the other ten participants, they addressed the questions with maturity and reflected upon their experiences with admirable honesty. Many of the young men often repeated that they accepted responsibility for their actions and did not want to appear as though they were blaming others. There was a prevailing theme in their stories; they were sharing in hopes that they could somehow help other adolescents experiencing the same struggles. Accounts of negative and positive experiences were shared out of a desire to help interested readers understand, not to place blame. In addition, the six participants who assisted with the member-checking process were overwhelmed as they reviewed the data and analysis with this researcher. They were genuinely appreciative that their words were included verbatim and that they believed their perspectives were shared honestly and with respect. It is the hope of this researcher that interested readers approach this study with that in mind.

Recommendations for All Educators

It is evident, reviewing the comments and suggestions of the participants in this qualitative study, that they believed educators could have helped them be more

successful. As adolescents, they were in need of guidance from their teachers academically, emotionally, and socially.

Academic domain. Academically, the participants struggled to ask or receive help. Concerns were shared regarding not being taken seriously when asking for help. Participants worried about appearing as though they were "stupid" in front of teachers and peers. Some participants were too proud to ask for help. Teachers could consider different ways students can ask for help without feeling like the center of attention. The participants shared a belief that they needed to know their teachers cared about their education and about them. Teachers could discuss developing a mentoring program. Teaching teams can identify students at-risk that may need an adult role model academically and emotionally. Teachers could consider devising a plan to help failing students during the school day. Many of the participants had lives outside of school that would not have been conducive to staying after school for extra tutoring. Finally, in the academic domain, the participants spoke about a desire to learn rather than memorize. However, they struggled with ways to incorporate curriculum into long-term learning. Collecting data and evaluating teaching practices will help determine whether instruction is geared toward learning or memorization.

Emotional domain.   Teachers held an important role in the participants' emotional domain. Primarily, the participants shared that a teacher's words were extremely powerful. Whether the words included praise, redirection, or a simple conversation, these participants could recall those words in vivid detail. Through the eyes of the participants, being scolded or redirected in front of peers was deemed detrimental and led to relationships with teachers that lacked respect. Several

participants shared struggles they had with sitting still or remaining focused. Regardless of whether a participant had or suspected they had ADHD, there was a need to find ways to regain or keep attention of students in the classroom who struggled with this behavior. Participants identified two major justifications for acting out in class and challenging teachers, often in a disrespectful manner. The behaviors were often because they felt disrespected by teachers or because they knew the teacher would become frustrated and force the participant to leave the classroom. Questions should be asked as to why students are displaying challenging behaviors in the classroom and reasons why they are acting this way. The participants also talked about the emotional importance of forming bonds with teachers who cared. A teacher who cared was described as one who sacrificed time to provide extra help and who took the time to get to know students, such as by asking about their lives outside of school. Finally, if a participant reported sleeping in class, they shared that it was most often because of drug use. It is important for educators to know that sleeping in class was due to either being high on drugs or because they were coming down off a drug high. The participants wished teachers had noticed and intervened if they were struggling with drug and alcohol problems or mental health problems as students. There were participants who wished teachers told their parents of suspected drug abuse and believed that parents would have appreciated another adult stepping in to help. The current system is not usually friendly to teachers asking or approaching students and families regarding suspected drug, alcohol, or mental health problems. However, it appears as though a system that is more open to approaching these sensitive topics is needed.

Social domain. Socially, the participants had a few requests of educators. They believed if teachers asked about student lives and demands outside of school, it was a sign that teachers cared. Some of the participants had great successes outside of school with sports or jobs, while others faced the pressure of providing for families as teen fathers. Most of the participants spoke of positive experiences belonging to a group, whereas others described lacking a sense of belonging. Educators might consider ways they can help foster students' developing positive friendships in and out of school and encourage students to join in on organized activities. Perhaps the missing piece for some of the participants was that no one asked them to join in on activities. Additionally, understanding what social factors students face outside of school might affect teachers' expectations in the classroom.

Recommendations for Special Education Teacher and Directors

All of the above-mentioned recommendations for educators apply to special education teachers. However, there are specific areas that special education teachers and directors of those services could consider based upon feedback from participants who were assigned special services while in school.

Academic domain. Academically, there were concerns that the Resource Room was a place to receive homework help or to simplify work. However, these services did not translate into a better understanding of academic work and a lack of understanding often resulted in failing grades on exams. The participants wanted to understand the curriculum, not just have it simplified. In addition, in the academic domain, participants understood that educators held a lower expectation of them as students receiving special education services. They believed that compliance with rules, rather than academic

achievement, was the only expectation in some situations. They found this expectation to be insulting and another example that special services teachers and directors truly did not facilitate their ability to learn. Special service educators may want to consider Individual Education Plan goals and question whether the rigor expected is appropriate for meeting academic goals.

Emotional domain.   Emotionally, the participants shared situations where they claimed they were called "retard" or "retarded" by teachers or administrators. Regardless if this concern was real or perceived, it is evident that special service educators can help facilitate an awareness of the effects of using such terms aimed at students with all adults who work with such students.

Social domain. Finally, in the social domain some participants struggled with creating social relationships. There were issues with isolation, a lack of peer groups outside of the special education department, and a fear of making friends. It is evident that the special education department professionals can benefit these students by identifying ways to help facilitate social participation.

Recommendations for School Administrators

According to the experiences of the participants, there were needs that could be met directly and indirectly by administrators. Indirect recommendations are areas where the administrator could consider providing education or facilitate discussions with educators, guidance counselors, social service providers, or families with whom they work.

Academic domain. In the academic domain, participants saw administrators as primarily responsible for issues concerning discipline and retention. Participants deemed

it important to share that they often intentionally earned an in-school or out-of-school suspensions. These suspensions provided an escape from a teacher deemed aversive, an opportunity to sleep as they came down from a drug induced high, or a chance to be in the community and use drugs with friends. The participants believed administrators needed to take the time to find the reasons behind acting out behavior rather than just the behavior itself. For some of the participants, their behaviors led to extreme consequences from administrators. Whether it was an expulsion hearing, not allowing a student re-entry after placement, or sending a student to be educated elsewhere, the participants did not believe administrators considered how those decisions would affect a child and his education for the rest of his life. Additionally, the participants believed there lacked a fair and consistent discipline policy in schools. There was a belief that administrators treat students differently based on their backgrounds, regardless if they committed the same offenses. This perceived disparity left the impression that preserving the education of some students was more important than preserving that of others. In regards to retention, the science behind its effectiveness has long been debated. Ten of the participants had been retained and some participants believed they were pushed to the next grade level. Regardless, participants did not believe either method addressed the gaps in learning that existed. Perhaps administration can brainstorm, attempt, and identify effective ways to address course failure or gaps in learning. Interventions during the school day may prove more effective with students, as the participants' lives outside of school were not always conducive to staying late after school. Transiency was a concern among participants, often for reasons outside of their control. Within the county of study, most of these participants moved between school districts. A change in

academic coursework from one school to the next proved difficult. School administrators may find it worthwhile to discuss a countywide curriculum sequence to help alleviate this inconsistency in education.

Emotional domain. Emotionally, the participants struggled most significantly with drug abuse. Often that drug use was a method for self-medicating mental health issues. The participants believed teachers were aware of their problems, but were not brave enough to intervene. Administrators should decide whether teachers and staff are unaware of the signs and symptoms of drug, alcohol, or mental health problems in children. Perhaps professionals from these service areas should be invited regularly to present during professional development days. Administrators should question whether current methods for addressing these problems are adequate and teachers who know students best should be invited to participate in those discussions. Question should be asked whether policies limit assisting these students. Administrators should brainstorm ways to involve parents and guardians in updating their policies to help facilitate a more open and inviting atmosphere. There were concerns from participants that if they or their families asked for help administrators would punish them for admitting to drug use and drug problems. Administrators should question whether current policies within their districts help or punish students and families. Additionally, the participants were not convinced that educators were aware of what their lives were like outside of school. Social service professionals invited to professional development days can educate educational teams on community issues and student struggles with issues such as abuse, homelessness, and poverty. Finally, the participants viewed administrators as the bearers of punishments. Several of the participants stated they never spoke with administrators

outside of a conversation regarding negative behaviors. These young men wished their administrators knew them for their good behaviors as well. Administrators should consider engaging with students in ways that are viewed as positive by students and that take place outside of the main office to help foster relationships.

      Social domain. Many students depend on their school as a place to prepare them socially. Local social service agencies, including drug and alcohol services, mental health services, child protective services, and juvenile probation departments have a plethora of resources and knowledge to share with schools. Administrators need to consider whether their drug education programs are offered early enough. The participants in this study were using drugs as early as age six. Many of them believed drug education programs needed to start earlier in schools. They were not aware that they could receive free counseling at school or that they could consent to rehabilitation admissions at age 14 in Pennsylvania. Early social education and intervention programs are a necessity and administrators need to find ways to make that information readily available to their students. There is a need to promote what social services are available for students while in school.

Vocational and Technical School Coordinators

      Overwhelmingly, it became apparent that the participants were kinesthetic learners. They often held after-school jobs that involved hard labor, such as learning to be a mechanic, stacking stone, or landscaping. However, most of the participants never reached the eleventh grade when vocational education was offered by their schools. Coordinators should decide whether the vocational program is offered early enough and whether it meets the demands of students who are interested. In 2012-2013,

Pennsylvania spent an average of $15,341 per year per pupil ("School spending," 2013) whereas it spent $32,059 per year per inmate (J. Wagner, 2011). Stakeholders should discuss whether it would be wise to consider allocating funds to expand the vocational and technical programming. A change in how finances are spent could mean providing job skills to adolescents at an earlier age and may consequently reduce the costs of incarceration. A final recommendation for vocational and technical career coordinators is to consider arranging tours of facilities to middle school students. Tours may help students who struggle with school with a vision for a new educational plan.

Recommendations for Drug and Alcohol and Mental Health Service Providers

As drug abuse was the primary factor attributed to school dropout and engaging in juvenile delinquent acts, providers of drug and alcohol related services need to consider how to best educate and inform children of their available services. There was an overwhelming agreement among participants that they were unaware that services could be accessed by them in times of need.

Academic domain. Children need to be reached where they are available. The best forum for reaching them is at school. Students and teachers may be unaware of services available and ways to refer individuals to those services provided through community agencies. School-based programming available for education or intervention was not widely understood by participants in this study. Although they needed services, they were unaware of how and when they could receive those services in school. Providers of these services should approach school administrators to discuss ways to make programming more available and visible within their schools. Additionally, participants believed teachers knew about their drug and alcohol or emotional struggles

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and ignored them. Whether or not educators understand these phenomena is questionable. Drug and alcohol and mental health providers should consider approaching school administrators to offer providing annual professional education on the signs and symptoms of adolescents struggling with these issues.

Emotional domain.   Participants were not only unaware of services available to them, they were unaware of how their rights in Pennsylvania change at the age of 14. There were concerns expressed by participants about being punished for engaging in drug use or being denied access to services. Emotionally they worried about unmet mental health needs and often self-medicated via drug use. Students need to clearly understand drug addiction and how community agencies are designed to help them in times of need.

Social domain. Social networking is a highly visible method of reaching adolescents. Available services to adolescents can be freely advertised and widely distributed via social networking. If community agencies are not already doing so, they should establish community awareness campaigns utilizing outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Social networking sites might propel agencies into a visible light within a community. Adolescents visit these websites and are more likely to become aware of available services if they are advertised within adolescent attracting realms.

The participants were also unaware of community programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. There was an expressed need to find adults who understood their struggles and who could meet their needs for a role model. The participants were unfamiliar with these community programs or did not know how to access them when they were struggling with addiction as adolescents. These community-based twelve-step programs should also consider advertising on social networking sites.

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Recommendations for Child Protective Service Workers and Juvenile Probation Department Officers

Most participants were involved with child protective services or with the juvenile probation department, if not both. In the county of study, providers of these services visit adolescents at school in addition to visits at their homes. Academically, this service helps to reinforce the importance of school to their clients. Emotionally, these service providers helped to create an atmosphere where the participants felt protected. Supervision by these workers and officers gave the participants an excuse not to get into trouble or not to engage in drug use on many occasions. In fact, most of the participants believed they were more successful and less likely to get into trouble while under supervision of court-ordered departments. However, there were occasions when these service providers were forced to remove the participants from their homes. Socially, to help adolescents be more successful the participants suggested these departments engage in higher levels of supervision. For example, many participants believed being placed under house arrest was helpful. Some participants failed to remain off drugs or to comply socially when their terms of supervision were expired. The caseworkers and officers involved should determine whether enough levels of supervision exist for juveniles. When a juvenile's term of probation is expired, perhaps referring the adolescent to a minimal supervision program within child general protective services could benefit those in need ongoing supervisory assistance.

Recommendations for Lawmakers, Law Enforcement, and Juvenile Court Judges

In speaking with the participants, a few areas of concern are worth sharing with those responsible for the laws that affect juveniles. The current system affected the participants academically, emotionally, and socially both in school and in the home.

Academic domain. Academically, when juveniles are moved between home environments and facilities outside of the home there is a disruption in learning. Curriculum taught within school districts is inconsistent. As many of the participants were identified with learning disabilities, being moved between schools severely complicated their already difficult learning process. As was mentioned in the recommendations for child protective services and juvenile probation, lawmaking and law enforcing officials should question whether the highest levels of supervision are available and utilized prior to moving a child out of their home or home district.

Emotional domain. Emotionally, removal from the home environment was draining on most participants. Delinquent offenses were often committed because of issues outside of the crime itself, such as to fulfill a need based upon drug addiction. In the least, departments responsible for juvenile laws can discuss how to best protect the victims of crime while implementing mechanisms that rehabilitate young offenders. Research on the effects of breaking up a nuclear family should be reviewed regularly.

Social domain. Lawmakers and law enforcers hold great power to create opportunities for adolescents in their communities. Lawmakers and law enforcers should work with other community agencies to help create positive social opportunities for adolescents and find ways to engage in those activities with them. Adolescents should

see lawmakers and law enforcers as resources and role models, rather than as the ones who hand down punishments.

Recommendations for Families

Of all parties, family members had the greatest influence and ability to affect decisions made by participants. Families played a major role in the academic, emotional, and social domain of each of the twelve participants. Participants shared ways their families successfully intervened and provided suggestions as to how families could have provided greater guidance.

Academic domain. Overall, the participants did not view their parents or guardians as being involved in school. The participants struggled in school behaviorally and academically. Communication between the school personnel and family at home is vital to academic success. Parents and guardians need to act as an advocate for their child. In return, parents and guardians need to allow educators to advocate for students. When teachers, administrators, or guidance counselors suspect a student is struggling with mental health or drug abuse issues, families need consider their advice. Educators spend eight hours a day with a student and may see behaviors that families do not. Participants identified drug abuse as the primary cause of academic struggles and problematic drug use can affect anyone. Family and school personnel should develop a good working relationship if they share the goal of serving a child's best interest.

Emotional domain. Several of the participants believed their parents or guardians knew they were struggling with mental health or drug abuse issues, but were afraid to admit it. Additionally, many of the participants were under the impression that parents or guardians did not want to admit there was "something wrong" with their child.

Fears aside, these participants needed an adult to intervene and to facilitate accessing help. Parents and guardians need to be forthright with primary care providers if they suspect drug abuse, as several participants abused prescription drugs.

Emotionally, most participants wished parents and guardians intervened more often. The participants described parental consequences for behaviors as either inconsistent or non-existent. Parents and guardians who handed down consequences or checked on their child at friends' homes where they suspected troubled behaviors were taking place were viewed as parents and guardians who cared. Adolescents want and need parents to set limits and intervene. Regardless if the participants retaliated or continued with the behaviors, they did not want parents to give up trying.

Social domain. Participants bragged about their parents' jobs or about job skills they learned from parents. Not only were they gaining valuable job skills, but the participants began to set life goals based upon examples set by their parents. Whether it was watching a parent wear business suits to work, learning how to change a motor in a car, or understanding how to run a farm business, these participants found hope in their futures because of their parents. None of the participants used a parent's lack of a high school diploma as an excuse to drop out. Families need to talk about the future with their adolescents and help them realize their options.

Socially, the participants identified participation in sports or extra-curricular activities as outward signs of achievement. The participants shared stories of competing in BMX bicycle races, engaging in Boy Scouts, or belonging to a church youth group. Belonging to these groups were not only important to the participants, but they served as buffers against engaging drug use and delinquent behaviors. One participant would not

use drugs if he was going to a church youth group activity. An adolescent needs to feel

as though he belongs somewhere. If he is not athletic, it is important for families to

identify some other activity in which he can participate.

Summary of Recommendations for Adults Who Engage With Adolescents

The list of stakeholders involved in the success of adolescents is long. Multiple

stakeholders means there exists a variety of experts with valuable skills and resources to

offer an adolescent. None of these recommendations can be administered in isolation.

For example, if school administrators want to meet any of the aforementioned

recommendations, they will depend on the cooperation of teachers, mental health

providers, drug and alcohol providers, and families. Every set of recommendations

requires several stakeholders to work together. It would seem prudent to start with

community roundtable discussions. Representatives from each group should sit together,

discuss the problems their community is facing, and decide which options are feasible

and realistic. It is not until a community works together that a community can solve its

problems.

<center>**Opportunities for Future Research**</center>

There are many opportunities for future research based upon the findings of this

study. This study may be replicated in other prison settings. Whether the study is

conducted in another rural county, another county in Pennsylvania, or an urban county in

another state, it would of interest to society to determine whether these same findings

exist and whether the similar recommendations would be made. Additionally, it would

be of interest to determine if this same data would be elicited in a study among inmates

who are in a higher level of incarceration at a state prison. This researcher does not

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believe this study would be effectively replicated at the federal prison level, as the offenses that are required to be housed as such a level are typically white collared crimes and often are committed by those with an overall higher level of education. This research was limited to male inmates who were from one rural county and under the age of 25. Although trends in education are often fluctuating, it may be of interest to discover whether these same conditions surrounding dropout existed for older inmates, as well as for female inmates.

There are opportunities to investigate motivators within each individual domain. This qualitative study has only begun to explore the dynamics taking place within the academic, emotional, and social domains. Further research can examine the questions and experiences posed with a focus on only one of these domains. This qualitative study researched broad areas and a study with a narrow focus could be beneficial in better understanding each domain. In addition, drug use surfaced as the most significant factor identified by the participants. A study on the academic, emotional, or social factors that contribute to drug use may help to provide a better understanding as to why adolescents use drugs.

Finally, this qualitative study only provided one perspective. All of the information provided and the basis for recommendations result from the participant perspective. A qualitative study that explores these same issues from the perspectives of families or school personnel may either support or refute the findings. In order to understand the whole problem surrounding a decision to dropout it would be necessary to include the perspectives of all stakeholders.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the academic, emotional, and social experiences of males incarcerated within a rural Pennsylvania correctional facility prior to their dropping out of school. After evaluating the data, recommendations were made to all stakeholders responsible for the welfare of adolescents. The recommendations included methods to improve the experiences of future adolescents who are at-risk for dropping out of school based upon feedback received from twelve incarcerated men between the ages of 18 and 24. The recommendations identify ways to assist in the three domains, as well as shed light to the problems they faced with drug abuse. Through discussions regarding their achievements, barriers, and relationships in each domain, the participants identified the strains they faced and how social learning influenced the decisions they made. Their stories support the ideas proposed in the General Strain Theory and Revised Strain Theory of Robert Agnew and the Social Learning Theory of Ronald Akers. Should the stakeholders involved in the lives of adolescents discuss and implement feasible recommendations as proposed in this study, it is possible that school dropout rates will decline.

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INTERVIEW GUIDE

Central Research Question: How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their academic, emotional, and social experiences prior to dropping out of school?

Inmate Pseudonym: _____

ACADEMIC DOMAIN

Research Sub-Question: How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with academic achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

Probing Questions: The following questions are asking about your academic experiences while in school:

1. Can you describe any achievements you had in school, such as with academics, grades, clubs, sports, or activities?
2. Can you describe any barriers or problems you had in school, such as with academics, grades, learning disabilities, repeating a grade, or with switching schools?
3. Can you describe any barriers or problems you had with behaviors or discipline while still in school?
4. Can you describe your relationships while in school with your peers, teachers or administrators?
5. Can you describe ways your parents or guardians were involved with your schooling?
6. Can you explain if any of these issues with school made a difference in your deciding to drop out of school?

EMOTIONAL DOMAIN

Research Sub-Question: How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with emotional achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

Probing Questions: The following questions are asking about what your life was like emotionally while you were in school:

1. Can you describe any achievements you had while you were still a student that made you feel good about yourself?
2. Can you describe any barriers or negative experiences in your life while you were in school that made you feel bad about yourself?
3. Did you feel that school was important?
4. How did you feel about your relationships with your peers, teachers, administrators or family members while in school?
5. Did any emotional issues you had while in school make a difference in your decision to drop out of school?

SOCIAL DOMAIN

Research Sub-Question: How do incarcerated males, between the ages of 18 and 24, describe their experiences with social achievements, barriers, and relationships prior to dropping out of school?

Probing Questions: The following questions are asking about what your life was like socially while you were in school:

1. Can you describe any achievements or successes you had outside of school, such as with non-school clubs, sports, jobs or activities, while you were still a student?
2. Can you describe any barriers or problems you had in your life outside of school, such as within your neighborhood or with the legal system, while you were still a student?
3. Can you describe your relationships, such as with your family, friends, other important adults, or neighbors, outside of school while you were still a student?
4. Did your parents or guardians graduate from high school?
5. How did your family or friends feel about your dropping out of school?
6. Did your relationships outside of school make a difference in your decision to drop out?

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Department of Professional Studies   724-357-2400
 in Education   Internet: *http://www.iup.edu*
Davis Hall, Room 303
570 S. Eleventh Street
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705-1087

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

General Information: You are invited to take part in a research study that will look to understand reasons why people drop out of school. This form is to help you make an informed decision about whether or not you want to participate. I am interviewing ▮▮▮▮▮ County Correctional Facility inmates who dropped out of ▮▮▮▮▮ County schools. I am researching this topic as part of my studies as a doctoral student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

What is the Reason for the Study? The purpose of this study is to help understand what was happening in the lives of teens at school, at home, and in the community when they decided to drop out. There are a high number of people in jails or prison who dropped out of school. I am looking to understand what pushes teens to want to drop out and what can schools do about it.

Why am I Being Asked to Participate? You are being asked to participate in the study because you are at least 18 years old, but not older than 25. You also are being asked to participate because you dropped out of a school that is in ▮▮▮▮▮ County.

How Long Will It Take? I will interview participants to ask about experiences while still in school. The interview will take between 1 hour and 1 ½ hours. We might meet more than one time. I will also be back to talk with some of the participants for them to check to make sure I got all of their information about school experiences correct.

Can the Study Harm Me? Your identity will be confidential. It has nothing to do with why you are in BCCF and I will not talk with you about the reasons you are here. This research is not part of or connected to the ▮▮▮▮▮ County court system or the Pennsylvania court system.

What are the Benefits if I Participate? There are no benefits for you if you participate. However, the information you share might help schools figure out ways to help teens want to stay in school.

What Options Do I Have? You can choose not to participate in the study. ***It is completely voluntary.*** You can also choose to participate and then withdraw at any time. You do not have to have a reason to withdraw from the study.

If you want to withdraw from the study (stop participating) at any time, you can do this by notifying the prison counselor, the warden, or me.

How Will My Identity be Protected? The information I collect from interviews will be used for my dissertation, it may be published in academic journals or be presented at academic meetings. However, any personal information about you (such as your name) will not be revealed. Pseudonyms (fake names) will be used in the research report.

During the interviews, I will take notes and the interview will be audio recorded. However, your personal identity will not be recorded on either the notes or the audio. I will use your pseudonym (fake name) on both. Additionally, both my notes and the audio recording will be destroyed within three years, after the entire study has been completed.

What if I Need to See a Counselor after an Interview? Should you need to speak to a counselor after the interview, because the interview caused you to become upset, let me know. I will arrange with the corrections staff to have a counselor see you as soon as one is available. I will work with the warden to try to schedule interviews at the same time that a counselor would be available.

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone 724/357/7730).

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Department of Professional Studies
 in Education
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570 S. Eleventh Street
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705-1087

724-357-2400
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VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM

Inmate's Name/Pseudonym: _____

ID#_____

I have read the consent form and it has been read to me. The researcher answered any questions that I had about the study. I understand why I am being asked to participate in the study. I understand the risks of participating and my right to drop out of the study at any time.

I am volunteering to participate in the study.

Inmate Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher
Jessica Attardo-Maryott
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Davis Hall, Room 303
570 South Eleventh Street
Indiana, PA 15705-1080
E-mail: J.Attardo-Maryott@iup.edu

Kelli R. Paquette, Ed.D.
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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570 South Eleventh Street
Indiana, PA 15705-1080

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone 724/357/7730).

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Department of Professional Studies in Education Davis Hall, Room 303 570 S. Eleventh Street Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705-1087	724-357-2400 Internet: *http://www.iup.edu*

<div align="right">

Jessica Attardo-Maryott
234 Grange Rd.
Monroeton, PA 18832
(570) 250-1407

</div>

July 17, 2014

███████████, Sheriff
██████████████
███████████████

Dear Sheriff █████

I am Jessica Attardo-Maryott, a doctoral candidate at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I am respectfully requesting your support, as I wish to conduct my doctoral dissertation study at the ████████ County Correctional Facility. The study is entitled *An Exploration of the Relationship between School Dropout and the Social, Emotional, and Academic Experiences of Incarcerated Males*. The study would entail accessing demographic data on inmates at ██████, as well as selecting and interviewing inmates who meet the criteria of the study.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the social, emotional, and academic experiences of males prior to their dropping out of school, who were later incarcerated within a rural Pennsylvania county prison. The study is designed to help understand the antecedents taking place academically, emotionally, and socially during school years prior to a decision to drop out. If the conditions that surround an inmate's reasons for dropping out of school were identified, the educational system may have the ability to assess whether it could address those identified motivators. If identified motivators for school dropout are within an educational system's ability to affect and control, and are subsequently addressed, it may be possible that as graduation rates increase, incarceration rates will decrease.

This study will have a narrow focus in that it will concentrate on the realities of educational experiences as described by Pennsylvania inmates who previously dropped out of ████████ County school districts and are now incarcerated in the ████████ County Correctional Facility. The purpose of the study is transformative in nature. The

researcher seeks to understand the nature of the experiences of those who dropped out of school and were ultimately incarcerated with an intention to create a discussion with stakeholders at the educational, political, and criminal justice system levels within the same county. The results of the study may hold implications as to how ████████ County Pennsylvania social service and education systems can change their approaches with young adults at risk for dropping out. The study is participatory, in that the inmates involved with the study will identify constraints that existed within the county systems, and emancipatory, in that those results will potentially reveal elements for discussing the institution of societal change

Attached to this letter is a copy of my application to Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. It includes the parameters of the study, method of subject selection, plan for protecting all parties involved, and the questions that will be asked of inmates.

I thank you in advance for your consideration. I am happy to meet with you to discuss this plan in detail as well as to present to the ████████ County Prison Board, should they also have concerns. This study would be conducted with no financial cost to ████████ County.

Sincerely,

Jessica Attardo-Maryott

Researcher
Jessica Attardo-Maryott   Kelli R. Paquette, Ed.D.
Indiana University of Pennsylvania   Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Davis Hall, Room 303   Davis Hall, Room 329
570 South Eleventh Street   570 South Eleventh Street
Indiana, PA 15705-1080   Indiana, PA 15705-1080
E-mail: J.Attardo-Maryott@iup.edu

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone 724/357/7730).

APPENDIX E

MEMBER CHECKING FORM

An Exploration of the Relationships between School Dropout and the Social, Emotional, and Academic Experiences of Incarcerated Males

Jessica Attardo-Maryott

MEMBER CHECKING PROCESS OF DISSERTATION

INMATE PSEUDONYM:_____

	YES	NO
Are your views included in the study?		
Do you appear to be respected and supported in the study?		
Do you feel your quotes and interview were accurately represented?		
Do summaries of your views appear accurate?		
Do you agree with the study conclusions?		
Do you agree with the study recommendations?		
Do you feel that the researcher was biased (taking a side) in the study?		
Is there anything the researcher did not include in the study that you shared that you believe should be added?		
Additional Comments:		

Form developed according to questions posed in the following source:
Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry.
Theory Into Practice, 39(3), 124-130. doi: 10.2307/1477543

APPENDIX F

AUDIT FORM

An Exploration of the Relationships between School Dropout and the Social, Emotional, and Academic Experiences of Incarcerated Males

Jessica Attardo-Maryott

EXTERNAL AUDIT OF DISSERTATION

Are the participants' views included in the study?	The researcher allowed for the participants to speak freely and include any relevant information they believed was not included in the interview guide. Appendix A and Chapter 4
Do the participants appear to be respected and supported in the study?	Chapter 4 & 5
Did the participants assist with data analysis (member checking)?	Took place on February 23, 2015.
Is there clear documentation as to research decisions made?	IRB forms, Ch 3 Methodology p. 53, etc.
Is there clear documentation of research activities that took place?	IRB forms, Ch 3 Methodology
Is there a clear process of inquiry?	Ch 3 process, Ch 4 info collected
Is there a clear product as a result of inquiry?	Ch 4 data, Ch 5 analysis
Is there a clear process for data collection and its chronology?	Ch 3 methods
Is there a clear process for recording data?	In inmate interview binder – also, all interviews are audio recorded
Are the findings grounded in the data?	Ch. 5. p. 156, etc.
Are the inferences made logical?	p. 52., etc.
Is the category structure appropriate?	Categories were decided upon because of recurring themes uncovered in data analysis.
Can inquiry decisions and methodological shifts be justified?	The researcher reviewed literature on this topic, and then sought to research an aspect of the problem that is not often researched – the views of the prisoners themselves.
What is the degree of researcher bias?	This was minimized to the fullest extent possible through triangulation of data.
What strategies were used for increasing credibility?	External audit, member checking, and peer review of chapters by multiple professionals

Auditor: _Andrew E. Waleb_   Date: _2/26/15_

Form developed according to questions posed in the following source:
Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry. *Theory Into Practice,* *39*(3), 124-130. doi: 10.2307/1477543

PILOT STUDY FRONT PAGE

IUP Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Pilot Study for my dissertation, entitled *An Exploration of the Relationship between School Dropout and the Social, Emotional, and Academic Experiences of Incarcerated Males.*

You have been asked to participate in the survey because you are certified to teach either Middle School English or Special Education. The inmates that I will interview are expected to function on the typical 7.93 grade level, consistent with national data. They will all have dropped out of school and be between the ages of 18 and 24.

I ask that you review the questions contained in the survey for three items: **clarity, comprehension, and reading level appropriateness.** All questions will be READ ALOUD to the inmates and they will be provided a hard copy, allowing them to follow along with the interview. If you feel that any question does not meet the three requirements, please make a note in the space provided. Please advise me whether you believe I should rewrite the question OR if it can be clarified verbally in the interview.

There are 17 questions for your review. They are organized by Academic, Emotional, and Social domains. It should take you less than 10 minutes to complete. It is NOT necessary for you to comment on each question, I am only asking for feedback on questions that you believe I should readdress.

Thank you for your assistance in helping me complete my dissertation! - Jessica Attardo-Maryott

Which of the following applies to you?

○ I am certified to teach Middle School English

○ I am certified to teach Special Education

○ I am certified to teach both Middle School English and Special Education

How long have you been teaching?

○ 0-5 years

○ 6-10 years

○ 11-15 years

○ 16-20 years

○ 21+ years

>>

APPENDIX H

SITE APPROVAL LETTER

SHERIFF

CHIEF DEPUTY

[ ] **COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE**

October 29, 2014

Jessica Attardo-Maryott
234 Grange Road
Monroeton, PA 18832

Dear Ms. Attardo-Maryott:

The [ ] County Sheriff's Department, [ ] County Correctional Facility Warden, and the [ ] County Prison Board have all read and reviewed your proposed doctoral dissertation study, entitled *An Exploration of the Relationship between School Dropout and the Social, Emotional, and Academic Experiences of Incarcerated Males,* as outlined in your letter to the [ ] County Sheriff and in your protocol approved by Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. The county understands the nature of the study, which will include a review of correctional facility records for demographic data, opportunities to meet with inmates to present the study, the need for facility staff assistance, and opportunities to meet with inmates in a one-to-one setting. The county understands that the study may require access to the facility, its records, and inmates for up to six months.

Our staff will work with you to schedule appropriate times and methods for data collection and interviews, as well as assist in ensuring the safety of all parties involved. It is our understanding that both the Warden and I will have the ability to withdraw any inmate from the study at any time, should we deem it appropriate. It is our understanding that inmate information will be kept confidential as part of the research process and that no information about inmate incarceration will be collected. It is also our understanding that this study is for educational purposes, that final results of the study will be shared with us, and that the study will be conducted at no cost to [ ] County.

With all of the outlined understandings above, we are providing you with approval to conduct your dissertation study as outlined in your proposal at the [ ] County Correctional Facility.

Sincerely,

[signature]

Courthouse, [ ] Pa [ ]