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An Exploration of the Cultural and Social Experiences of Urban High School Students Attending Schools Outside of their Communities

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An Exploration of the Cultural and Social Experiences of Urban High School Students of Color Attending Schools Outside of their Communities

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Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project (or thesis) has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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ABSTRACT

The historic residential racial segregation in the United States results in racially segregated public and private schools. Higher achieving schools tend to be in more affluent areas and are more accessible to white students. Schools that are older, in need of repairs, and tend to be identified as low-achieving, remain in the poorer areas and are mostly attended by students of color. Despite the 1954 landmark case that declared separate but equal schools unconstitutional, public schools are more segregated now than before the Brown v. Board of Education case was heard by the US Supreme Court. As a result, some families choose to send their children to private schools with reputations for academic rigor. However, when students leave their communities to attend school, they are put in a position of acclimating to new academic standards and are required to navigate different social and cultural expectations of a new community. This is especially true for students of color entering predominantly white spaces. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to identify and analyze the ways in which urban high school students, who identify as people of color, were shaped by experience of attending school outside their home community. The results of this study illustrate that students of color may face a variety of challenges, as well as experiences that may have a positive impact on their ability to navigate the world beyond their local communities. The study concludes that it is necessary for schools to be more intentional in their efforts to ensure the success of these students.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

The historic residential racial segregation in the United States results in racially segregated public and private schools (Orfield, Ee, Frankenburg, Siegel-Hawley, 2016). Racial segregation has been driven by racist policies and actions such as redlining and white flight. With the birth of suburbs, those who could afford it moved away from crowded urban areas, resulting in racially homogenous residential spaces. More often than not, the populations moving away from cities were made up of more affluent, white families while families of color remained in cities (Hannah-Jones, 2015). Families of color were placed in segregated neighborhoods with inferior, segregated schools (Hannah-Jones, 2019). In turn, this created racially segregated public school systems throughout the country (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Once white families moved out, so did their tax dollars, creating a void in opportunities and resources, especially in regards to local public schools.

White families were able to buy their way out of urban areas and in most cases, this resulted in securing an all-white or almost all-white education for their children as well (Hannah-Jones, 2015). Higher achieving schools tend to be in more affluent areas and are more accessible to white students. Schools that are older, in need of repairs, and tend to be identified as low-achieving, remain in the poorer areas and are mostly attended by students of color (Woodward, 2011). In addition, the option of private or parochial schooling was available for those who could afford it, though private schools generally have high populations of white students. For students of color, the option to attend higher-achieving or integrated schools would

likely mean traveling outside of their local communities while white students attended schools more local to their communities (McNeal, 2009).

During the Civil Rights Movement there was an attempt to desegregate public schools in an effort to diversify schools, and to ensure equal access to resources for the students of color (Orfield & Lee, 2005). This began with the landmark supreme court case that desegregated public schools, Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 but there was no real enforcement of desegregation for almost a decade after (Hannah-Jones, 2015). With the 1964 Civil Rights Act, schools were under threat of being sued if they did not comply with desegregation. By 1972, most of the Black students in the South were attending desegregated, white majority schools - most outside of their home neighborhood. This practice continues today, not just through busing, as most court ordered busing has ended, but because students of color are recruited by private schools and charter schools to attend predominantly white private schools (Woodward, 2011; McNeal, 2009; Hammack, 2010). Currently, public schools are more segregated than before the Brown v. Board of Education decision (Frankenberg, Ee, Ayscue, & Orfield, 2019; Rothstein, 2013). Residential segregation also still exists and is mutually reinforcing with the segregation that exists in public schools (Williams & Emamdjomeh, 2018).

Background and Need

The United States (US) school system is becoming increasingly diverse as the United States itself shifts to becoming a majority minority country (Orfield, et al., 2016). However, residential and school-based segregation continue to negatively impact low-income families and those who identify as people of color (Frankenberg, Ee, Ayscue, & Orfield, 2019; Rothstein, 2013). Resources and access to opportunity are not equitably distributed in the US as a whole,

and factors such as race, ethnicity, native language, immigration status, and socioeconomic status influence a host of life outcomes including financial, mental, and physical well-being (Williams, Mohammed, & Collins, 2010; Williams, Priest, & Anderson, 2016). These same factors also influence the types and quality of schools that families are able to access. Low-income students and students of color typically suffer under these conditions. While those who can afford it are able to attend elite public and private schools, many families have no choice other than to send their children to their local public schools (Orfield, 2008).

A great deal of literature describes the reasons for and impact of segregation (Reardon & Owens, 2014; Schofield, 1991). There is also a robust body of scholarship that describes the difference between public and private education (Chubb & Moe, 1990; NCES 2020). However, there have been few explorations of the experiences of students who travel outside their home community to attend school, especially when they are students of color traveling to predominantly white institutions (PWI) outside of their local communities (Orfield & Lee, 2005). When this happens, students may encounter situations that impact their identity and feeling of belonging, as well as their ability to learn in a safe and comfortable environment (Oto & Chikkatur, 2019). It is important for literature of this type to exist because it is important for educators and school administrators to understand the experiences of these students in order to promote inclusive school cultures within highly segregated educational spaces.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this work is to conduct a phenomenological study to explore the phenomenon of students attending high school outside of their neighborhood communities, and to identify the ways that high school students' experiences are shaped by their environment.

This research hopes to explore the social, cultural, and educational influence of attending a school outside of one's neighborhood and how this can contribute to students' feelings of belonging, identity, and academic achievement. The results of this study will add to the small body of literature that explores this topic from the perspectives of the students themselves.

Theoretical Framework and Rationale

This research will use the concept of navigational capital, as understood through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework, as a theoretical rationale. According to Yosso (2005), CRT is "a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses" (p. 74). This framework challenges existing educational practices which "often oppress and marginalize" people of color (Yosso, 2005, p. 74). Yosso's concept of navigational capital, understood through this CRT lens, refers to the ability to " maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind" (p. 80). This is one of several domains within culture capital.

The other types of cultural capital include (a) linguistic capital, (b) familial capital, (c) aspirational capital, (d) social capital (e) resistant capital. According to Yosso (2005), aspirational capital "refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77). Linguistic capital "includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (p. 78). Familial capital "refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" (p. 79). Social capital "can be understood as networks of people and community resources" (p. 80). Resistant capital "refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that

challenges inequality" (p. 80). Yosso organizes these types of capital, along with navigational capital, under the title *Community Cultural Wealth,* a form of and informed by cultural capital. Instead of seeing students of color as lacking cultural capital, Yosso uses a CRT lens to identify these different forms of wealth.

For the purpose of this study, CRT will provide a theoretical framework and navigational capital will serve as a theoretical rationale. When students of color attend schools outside of their communities, they are likely to experience educational settings that were not constructed with them in mind. Critical Race Theory, with its emphasis on the ways that race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses, is a useful framework for understanding the experiences of students of color who attend predominantly white institutions outside the home community (Yosso, p. 74). The concept of navigational capital provides a rationale for this study because it implies that students of color are able to successfully "maneuver through institutions not created" with them in mind (p. 80). If students of color are able to do this, an exploration of their experiences may provide insight into the ways in which they persevere by actively navigating the inherent bias of educational structures. Ideally, this may help educational systems facilitate avenues of success for students of color by celebrating their inherent strengths and cultural wealth rather than perceiving their differences as representing a lack in ability and agency.

Research Questions

1. What are the social, cultural, and educational experiences of students attending schools outside of their neighborhood/community?
2. Why do students of color and their families choose to attend schools outside their

neighborhood?

3. How does attending a school outside one's neighborhood affect one's ability to navigate relationships in one's community?

Methodology

Research approach

This thesis used research obtained through the phenomenology approach. According to Creswell (2006), phenomenology contains four philosophical perspectives: returning to the Greek origins of philosophy as a search for wisdom, suspending judgments of what is considered real until more certainty can be determined, the intentional focus of the conscious towards an object, and the understanding that the meaning of an object only exists due to a conscious perception of it. There are many different types of phenomenology. Hermeneutical phenomenology focuses on the interpretations of the researcher rather than the descriptions of the interviewees (Adams, 2008; Creswell, 2006). Alternately, transcendental phenomenology is more focused on the experiences themselves and emphasizes the importance of bracketing - ensuring that the researchers do not allow their own perspectives to influence their observations and instead review the experiences as if seeing them for the first time (Creswell, 2006). There is also existential phenomenology - which looks at lived experiences before reflecting on said experiences, linguistic phenomenology - which explores the connections between culture, historicality, identity, and human life, and ethical phenomenology - which focuses on relationships between otherness, identity, and the essence of things as manifestations of the self (Adams, 2008).

The use of the phenomenology approach poses some challenges. Because phenomenology requires interviewing multiple individuals to gain an understanding of the experience, the interviewer must carefully choose participants and carefully decide what to include in their description of the common experiences (Creswell, 2016). Additionally, the researcher must be sure to practice bracketing and identify personal connections, while ensuring they do not interfere with the participants' accounts (Creswell, 2016). Phenomenological methodology focuses on the lived experiences of multiple individuals in order to determine a shared concept or phenomenon (Adams, 2008; Creswell, 2016). The goal of phenomenology in general, and of this study in particular, is to explore the ways in which individuals experience the world, and how they perceive the meanings of such experiences (Adams, 2008).

Participants

For this thesis, three individuals who identify as people of color were interviewed about their high school experiences. The purpose was to understand the ways in which their environment affected their academic experiences and contributed to their feelings of belonging, identity, and academic achievement. These adults were recruited from a conveniences sample of the researcher's colleagues and personal acquaintances, and were chosen to be interviewed according to the following criteria:

- over the age of 18
- attended a private high school outside of their local community
- attended high school in a major metropolitan area

Participants were sent a list of the questions for their interview, in advance, so as to prepare themselves and have answers ready. It was made clear that the participants should only

answer the questions with which they were comfortable. The participants were informed that their interview would be audio recorded and transcribed for the use of this study. They were also informed of their freedom to end the interview and cease involvement with this study at any time throughout the process. All participants signed consent forms. (Appendix A)

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study were collected through interviews. These interviews were conducted one-on-one between the researcher and the participant, at a location of the participant's choice. The interview questions asked the participants to reflect on their personal community, their high school experience, and their reflections on this experience in hindsight, as an adult. Conducting interviews allowed me to interact with the participants and create a personal relationship with them in regards to this study. Additionally, it allowed me to ask follow-up questions and clarify their responses when necessary. I believe it provided me with authentic understanding of their experiences. The collected data was then explicated into themes, using the bracketing technique to acknowledge and limit my own interpretations or assumptions (Creswell, 2016). (Appendix B provides an explication of this data).

Limitations of the Study

This study was influenced by several limitations. These included the duration of the study and the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. The duration of the study was limited to one semester and reflects the expectation that this study be completed in one semester. Additionally, this study was conducted in the midst of a pandemic, making data collection less feasible and forcing one interview to be done remotely rather than in person. Due to the short amount of time, follow up interviews and further discussion were not available. These limitations suggest

that the results of this study cannot be generalized to represent the experiences of the participants in the entire population of urban high school students who attend schools outside of their local communities.

Significance of the Thesis

This study may hold significance for several groups. It may interest students and families who identify as people of color and are either considering, or currently attending, a predominantly white private K-12 educational institution outside their home community. It may also interest teachers and administrators in predominantly white private schools that actively recruit and serve students who identify as people of color. Finally researchers in the field of education may find this study to hold significance because it could lead to additional studies on a topic that is crucial to the equality of US education.

Definition of Terms

Busing - the practice of assigning and transporting students to schools within or outside their local school districts in an effort to reduce the racial segregation in schools.

Desegregation - the ending of a policy of racial segregation (particularly in schools)

Gentrification - the process of repairing and rebuilding homes and businesses in a deteriorating area (such as an urban neighborhood) accompanied by an influx of middle-class or affluent people and that often results in the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents

Othering - the practice of denying the humanity of individuals, or their ability to belong to a group, by calling attention to difference

Integration - incorporation as equals into society or an organization of individuals of different groups (such as races)

Magnet schools - a school with superior facilities and staff and often a specialized curriculum designed to attract a diverse student body of pupils from throughout a city or school district

School choice - a program or policy in which students are given the choice to attend a school other than their district's public school (as at a charter school, private school, home school, or at a public school in a different district)

Segregation - the separation or isolation of a race, class, or ethnic group by enforced or voluntary residence in a restricted area, by barriers to social intercourse, by separate educational facilities, or by other discriminatory means

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Universal access to quality, free education in the United States is a growing problem. Although there have historically been attempts to desegregate United States (US) schools, many remain segregated and as a result, the access to a quality education has become racialized as well. This research aims to identify the ways in which students are affected by the decision to leave their communities in order to access a higher quality of education. The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature relevant to my study, which focuses on students' academic experiences. First, I will discuss the history of busing as an attempted solution to overcome school segregation and the ways this institutionalized the phenomenon of students of color leaving their neighborhood communities to attend school. Then, I will review the literature on magnet schools - public schools designed to attract a more diverse student body than they would naturally by offering more unique or advanced instruction than other public schools. Lastly, I will look at literature focused on students of color attending PWIs and the social and cultural effects this has on the students.

Segregation, Integration, Desegregation

In an article by Jennifer Woodward (2011), she explained the burden placed on Blacks in Nashville in regards to desegregation attempts through school busing. Nashville initially utilized the "grade-a-year" plan, allowing them to only integrate one grade level at a time, starting with the incoming first grade class; at best, schools would achieve full integration in twelve years. This was considered a victory and compromise for many Nashville citizens who wanted credit

for complying with *Brown vs. Board of Education* with as little required effort as possible; white parents still protested by withholding their children from school.

Eventually, it was declared that the Nashville school district was not doing enough to integrate their schools. Thus, new plans were introduced which included rezoning and busing over 13,000 Black students in order to achieve the goal of having Black students represent 15%-35% of each school's student body. The grade-a-year plan was replaced by busing Black students to white schools. Black parents generally went along with it under the assumption that it was the only way for their children to get quality, equal education.

This plan faced financial limitations when it was determined that there were not enough buses, nor sufficient schedules that would ensure the health and safety of students on their way to school. Other complications and lack of funds demonstrated "a lack of commitment at both the federal and local level," (p. 25) eventually leading to an abandonment of integration attempts and a prime example of a predominantly white school board failing the Black members of their community. Additionally, so many white students ended up transferring to other schools in order to avoid attending schools with the Black students, that the schools remained segregated despite the busing program.

Black families brought a case against the Nashville public school district arguing against the burden placed on Black students. It was determined that when Black students were forced to change schools from year to year rather than attend local neighborhood schools like their white would-be-classmates, this discontinuity "harmed [Black students] emotionally by removing students 'from a familiar, friendly, and supportive environment into what can often be a hostile and unfamiliar environment'" (Woodward, 2011, p. 26). Pearl High School, a historically Black

school, was greatly affected by busing when half of its students were sent away despite being a "source of ethnic pride and symbol of Black achievement," (p. 27) putting the school at risk for closure and negatively impacting the resources available for the school. This article relates to my topic because it provides a perspective for Black students' experiences who leave their neighborhoods for schooling. Though much of the stress was associated with the hostility they faced at the white schools, in part their stress was a result also of leaving their own communities.

Lemke (1979) reported on the evaluation of Peoria, Illinois public school integration attempts and the effects of busing on both white and Black students. The public school district of Peoria, Illinois renovated school buildings and began a busing system in 1979 in attempts to integrate their school system. In order to evaluate effectiveness, students in second through eighth grade were assessed using standardized tests as a measurement of student achievement (Lemke, 1979). In contrast to Woodward's (2011) study, Lemke found that busing actually increased the academic performance of students.

The study compared student success on standardized tests for white students who were bused against white students who were not. It also compared Black students who were bused to Black students attending their local, predominantly Black schools. For both Black and white students, those bused scored higher on the given standardized tests (Lemke, 1979). In the case of Black students, they tended to perform even better at white schools. Arguably the most significant test results are those from the language tests. These results for Black students are, in part, explained by the results on the language tests. Predominantly white schools tend to use language that is more similar to that used in the standardized tests, while predominantly Black schools are more likely to use language that is influenced by Black culture and less likely to be

considered “academic language” (Lemke, 1979). When bused to white schools, Black students became more exposed to the language used on standardized tests.

Although the results of this study are speculative, the cultural aspect of language and academic success are noteworthy. This study also raises questions about the resources available to public school students and the way these resources are - or are not - distributed throughout the district. Students should not have to leave their neighborhood, community, or culture in order to have more access to academic settings that will make them more successful. Research done by Bergin and Cooks (2002) and discussed in the section of this thesis on students of color attending PWIs explores the cultural and social effects some students face once they have experienced this type of school setting. The following section makes connections between past integration attempts and current school segregation.

In a case study of two public school districts, McNeal (2009) evaluated the effectiveness of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) fifty years after its implementation. Although celebrated as a civil rights success at the time, McNeal (2009) analyzed the reality of the resegregating US school systems and what that means for current students attending segregated schools. To conduct this study, McNeal (2009) explored the outcome of the Supreme Court case *Parents Involved in Community Schools vs. Seattle School District No. 1* and the impact it has on public school integration now, determining that *Brown* remains more of a symbolic achievement than demonstrating “substantive legal reform [that] makes a positive impact on the social problem” it was designed to resolve (McNeal, 2009, p. 564).

It is undeniable that *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) impacted the United States public school system and its existence represents what was an immense victory for the Civil

Rights Movement. However, the number of school districts which still have yet to achieve acceptable integration, over fifty years after the case was won, raises the question of how successful *Brown v. Board* (1954) really was. As of McNeal's study in 2009, over 250 school districts were still segregated, many are functioning this way despite court ordered desegregation attempts. Segregated schools are most obvious in urban settings where there are also many students living in poverty and high populations of minority students. The correlations between race, wealth, and school resources are painfully obvious and damaging to opportunities for academic achievement. Even more concerning is how quickly efforts for integration have turned around. After the "wave of progress" between 1964 and 1988, multiple court hearings - particularly *Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell* in 1991, *Freeman v. Pitts* in 1992, and *Missouri v. Jenkins* in 1995 - lessened the city and district responsibility for maintaining integration. These cases essentially ended court ordered desegregation and as a result, allowed resegregation to occur without conflict (McNeal, 2009). Additional court cases have arisen more recently, further removing district responsibility to work for desegregation due to logistical complications for parents and students. When parents complained that their children had to travel further from their neighborhood to attend school in the efforts of integration, the courts determined that school districts could not force this upon families as demonstrated by the Louisville, Kentucky Plan of 2001 (McNeal, 2009). In 1998, the Seattle School District also faced scrutiny for denying white students their top choice of high school in order to maintain the proper percentage of students of color and be considered integrated (McNeal, 2009). As a result, segregation continued, denying students access to truly equal education.

This information provides foundational context for the remaining research throughout my

thesis. When white students are forced into busing, they have been able to avoid the burdens of busing by opting out or suing the district to avoid busing (and to avoid integration efforts more broadly) (McNeal, 2009). However, if students of color seek alternative school placements in the hopes of receiving a better education, they have few options other than private schools, which tend to be predominantly white institutions, or a different public school that might be further away from home, have more white students, or feel outside of their community for a number of reasons. It also highlights the complex nature of the problem and calls for additional efforts to continue integration, rather than abandoning the few attempts and achievements previously made. The remaining research will explore these potential scenarios.

Magnet Schools and School Choice

A qualitative study by DeSena (2006) used the gentrification in Brooklyn, New York to demonstrate the difficult choices parents have been faced with in rapidly gentrifying areas when it comes to schools and communities for their children. The article also addressed the relationship among neighborhoods, schools, and community and what happens when new neighborhood inhabitants, especially "gentrifiers" or those of greater wealth, disown or disregard the existing local residents and their school communities. DeSena studied the decision making process in regards to school choice by conducting interviews of mothers living in the community of Greenpoint, Brooklyn in the late 1990s. The interviews included both newer, gentry residents and working-class, long time community members. This study offers an oppositional lens to the topic of students of color leaving their neighborhoods to attend PWIs and rather focuses on mostly white families leaving their geographic communities in an attempt to create an educational experience for their children in schools that are also predominantly white.

Many of America's major cities have become witness to the effects of gentrification in recent years. Although the first of these effects that may come to mind likely include housing prices, rapidly transforming neighborhoods, and displacing local populations, gentrification also takes a toll on the local school systems. For example, Greenpoint - located in Brooklyn, New York - had been home to mostly low-income and working-class families before the influx of gentry, or middle-class families, young couples, and singles (DeSena, 2006). As the study showed, families with young children in this area were likely to choose between local public schools or Catholic schools, due to it being the only private school option. Although the majority (74%) of the population of Greenpoint in 2006 was White, there was a racial as well as socioeconomic divide between children who attended public schools and those who could afford to attend the private Catholic schools. This divide became even larger with the arrival of the gentry population, which rejected both local public and private schools for their children (DeSena, 2006). Instead, they turned to options throughout all of New York City, further isolating themselves from the communities in which they lived. On the other hand, middle class and low income residents - "ordinary" women as DeSena calls them - put more time and effort into being part of and working to enhance the community (DeSena, 2006). Even when choosing a Catholic school, options remained local in order to maintain a sense of community. The newcomers, however, found the local schools either too rigid, too difficult to explore prior to entry, or felt unwelcome due to the fact that they had the choice to leave (DeSena, 2006).

Contrary to prior research, the gentry did not necessarily leave their neighborhood schools for private schools, rather they utilized other public school options throughout the city that "ordinary" families were less aware of or had less access to. Middle-class families had

options that differ from families with less money including time to commute from Brooklyn to Manhattan or other parts of New York because a parent worked from home or had flexible hours, exploring and accepting alternative education options, providing home schooling, or even renting an apartment in a more desirable neighborhood in order to be considered a priority within school lotteries (DeSena, 2006). Despite expressed desires for their children to be part of the community, and even an attempt to create their own school in order to create the exact type of community they were hoping for, this likelihood seemed to be disappearing as more elite gentrifiers moved to Greenpoint, bringing different visions for their children's education. Instead of hoping for a sense of community, the new generation would rather send their children to schools outside of the area, creating "segregation and stratification by social class is maintained and reproduced by separating the neighborhood's children" (DeSena, 2006, p. 54-55).

This article illustrates options that are more feasible and realistic for parents of white children or those in more comfortable socioeconomic situations (i.e. gentrifiers) while folks who had long occupied the neighborhoods had little option or desire but to send their children to the neighborhood schools. This is significant due to the common connection between race and socioeconomic status - gentrification creates segregation by class at school and a feeling of tension within the community in addition to educational disadvantages (DeSena, 2006). In a country with so many struggling public school systems, gentrification and resegregation continues to add to the problem - not for middle class and wealthy students, but for low and working class children at school and at home in their communities. However, as Hammack (2010) has proven, the process of public school admission and maintaining diversity throughout

the US public school system is another problem in itself.

In his study, Hammack (2010) compared the school systems and public school choice processes for high schools in New York and San Francisco. The study identifies and analyzes the ways in which public school acceptance has gone from being a free right and privilege to being an elite competition for high-status schools. Hammack addresses the processes of application, acceptance, and rejection that local students face in these two urban settings.

New York City and San Francisco have both been scrutinized for the lack of racial and socioeconomic diversity - to the point of representing city demographics - at their elite public high schools. In the absence of equally distributed resources and equally acclaimed public school options, the most academically strong schools have been required to create fair admissions processes that will maintain both academic rigor and student diversity. However, these cities have shown how this becomes complicated when things like race and ethnicity became major factors within the criteria for admission (Hammack, 2010).

In New York, for example, the elite schools required students to take an exam to determine their eligibility. Although not directly linked to race or ethnicity, the examination schools enrolled disproportionate amounts of white and Asian-American students as compared to other ethnicities, which could be due to their access to greater academic resources prior to taking the entrance exam (Hammack, 2010). Eventually, a bill passed determining that only academic performance on standardized tests focused mainly on math and science would be taken into consideration for school admission, regardless of other factors. An addendum to the bill allowed for students who had been part of certain programs for disadvantaged students to also have the ability to apply and gain access into the schools in an attempt to maintain greater levels of

diversity and academic rigor at the same time.

Lowell High School in San Francisco, however, has been facing criticism since at least the 1960s for their lack of racial balance (Hammack, 2010). Lowell High School is considered to be the main elite school in San Francisco, requiring it to determine admission for applicants from all over the city. For many years, Lowell required applicants to self-identify their ethnicity upon applying and used this information to attain certain percentage quotas for each (Hammack, 2010). At times, this led the school to hold different standard passing rates for applicants who were Chinese; applicants who were white, Fillipino, Japanese-American, or Korean-American; and applicants who were African-American or Latino in order to reach diversity quotas (Hammack, 2010). This policy, along with other similar attempts, were deemed illegal and failed to solve Lowell's segregation issues (Hammack, 2010). Additionally, the lack of Black and Latino students seems to have deterred other students of similar background from seeking educational opportunities there despite their potential and academic ability (Hammack, 2010).

This study is significant because it illustrated the systems in place that make it so difficult to achieve racial equality in urban public high schools in the US. When all of the resources are concentrated into one or two elite schools within a city, it is unlikely that the demographics of students who have access to such schools will reflect the demographics of the city.

Students of Coloring attending Predominantly White Institutions (PWI)

The following research describes significant research about the experiences of students of color in primarily white spaces. It is my hope that my own study will build on this research, focusing on their experiences in white spaces outside their neighborhoods. In their study, Oto and Chikkatur (2019) utilized their researcher-practitioner positionality to explore the best ways

to reshape conventional discussions on race and carry out more intentional conversations in their predominantly white school. This research was done by a history teacher and outside researcher at a predominantly white college preparatory school. The school had a history of strained and unclear attempts at inclusivity and promoting diversity. In a History of Race class offered at the school, the five students of color ended up feeling a forced responsibility for educating their white peers, rather than having the class be a "space *for* them… to go for help, support, advocacy, resources, and so forth" (Oto & Chikkatur, 2019, p. 149).

As a result, Oto, the instructor, created a separate students of color affinity group - "a setting *for them*" (Oto & Chikkatur, 2019, p. 153) - to guide them in debriefing the tense experiences in their classroom. Through these meetings, Oto found the students to be feeling frustrated and isolated within the classroom, but comforted and feeling in solidarity when able to connect with their peers of color outside of class. Eventually, the meetings became a space where the students could build on their knowledge together with their shared understanding of context, historical situations, and personal experience. It allowed them to discuss the struggle with race within not only the History of Race class, but their school as well and identify their feelings of frustration at being expected to act as teachers to their white classmates.

This is relevant because it addresses the need for PWIs to implement intentional conversations and spaces for students of color to share their experiences, feel heard, and find the deeper connections they may be lacking in their classes and throughout the rest of the school in order to "engage deeply with each other's stories and histories without needing to explain themselves to their white peers" (Oto & Chikkatur, 2019, p. 152). The following research addresses additional barriers to achievement for students of color in predominantly white

institutions.

In a different study, Bergin and Cooks (2002) built on previous research around the stereotypes regarding Black student achievement and resistance to being perceived as white by their peers when they are academically successful as well as the "social pressure to avoid acting white" (Bergin & Cooks, 2002, p. 116). Bergin and Cooks interviewed 38 Black or Mexican-American students - 28 enrolled in a "scholarship incentive program targeted at groups underrepresented in higher education" (2002, p. 116) called EXCEL and 10 as a comparison group - from a predominantly white midwestern city. The students were asked questions about their ethnic identities as well as "acting white".

The findings of this interview process determined that, unlike the previous data that the researchers had looked into, these students did not express a disinterest in their academic achievement in response to accusations of acting white. All of the students interviewed were considered high achieving, with at least a B average, entering eighth grade and were interviewed years later, with plenty of time to change their academic focus or be swayed by peer perceptions. While the students were all successful academically, they did not identify their academic success as a reason for being accused of acting white. Rather, sometimes their academic achievement simply meant that they were in more honors or advanced placement classes and therefore spent more time with white classmates (Bergin & Cooks, 2002). However, the reasons they were accused of acting white had more to do with their way of dressing, speaking, or spending time with white students.

The results also varied depending on the racial makeup of the school. These students attended various different high schools including a high achieving Catholic all-girls' school, a

predominantly Black school, and a public mixed-race school all serving a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. In PWIs, it seemed that students of color were rarely accused of acting white because there were so few other students of color to make such accusations (Bergin & Cooks, 2002). Although the students may have stuck out racially, it could be argued that the lack of racial diversity made it easier for students to blend in academically. However, in both predominantly Black schools and racially balanced schools, it appeared to be more likely that high achieving students of color would be accused of acting white because their high achievement was more noticeable or due to the racial polarization and feeling the need to "choose sides" (2002). Students may also be more susceptible to perceptions of acting white if they have seemed to "abandon" their neighborhood school, or chosen to attend either a private school or a different public school.

This study is relevant because my area of interest focuses on the ways school culture or community can affect student achievement. Although none of these students tried to disguise their high achievement or change the way they acted in school, they still acknowledged the idea of "acting white" and showed irritation when they were accused of doing so. My interest also lies in the way students are perceived within their own neighborhoods when they are no longer attending schools with their neighbors and this study identifies reactions to such scenarios. The following literature addresses teacher perceptions of students of color at independent schools in the US.

In an analysis of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Schneider and Shouse (1992) provided insight on an eighth-grade cohort of students of color at independent high schools. Data was collected by student, parent, teacher, and principal questionnaires

answering questions about family background, student engagement and progress, general school information, educational opportunities outside of school, and financial planning for education purposes. The study looked into 60 elite private schools considered to be independent schools and 1,509 students, 83% of which are white.

The main findings of this study determined that African-American students were less academically successful than their peers. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) has been known to educate students with similar backgrounds. The vast majority of NAIS students were white, came from two-parent families, and had parents with higher education levels as well as high incomes (Schneider & Shouse, 1992). This norm did not apply for the majority of the African-American students in this study. Almost 20% of African-American NAIS students received financial assistance, students generally performed lower than their classmates from other ethnic backgrounds, and according to their teachers, they performed below their ability more than any other group. Additionally, it appeared that NAIS teachers more frequently communicated with the families of African-American students in regards to their behavior (Schneider & Shouse, 1992). The numbers gathered in this study demonstrate consistently lower academic success rates. The authors argued that this might be due to the lower socioeconomic status of many of the African-American students and therefore less access to outside tutors or additional help, student feelings of being less favored by their teachers than their classmates, or "limited access to friends or family members that could help them" understand or complete their homework (Schneider & Shouse, 1992, p.232). This feeling of distance and low achievement often resulted in students' feelings of isolation or a lack of belonging within their school communities.

This study relates to my overall research because it demonstrates the ways in which African-American students tend to trail behind the norm even more than other students of color and white classmates, particularly in this private, independent school setting. This coincides with the other research I have found in demonstrating the additional obstacles and challenges that students of color - in this case, particularly African-American students - face, especially when making up such a small percentage of their schools. It is additionally of concern when students do not feel a connection or appreciation from their teachers, therefore limiting their potential for improvement amidst conditions that are not necessarily in their favor.

Summary

To summarize, there is a clear need for school district zoning reform in the United States. The impacts of segregation still remain and districts are struggling to reverse these effects despite years of legal mandates and integration attempts. In some cases when segregation was first outlawed, busing began to facilitate change, but it did not do enough. In addition, when busing was successful in moving students across schools, the students themselves sometimes suffered academically and socially. Lastly, in private institutions catering to mostly white students, with small populations of students of color in their student body, we continue to see students of color affected by attending predominantly white schools. It is problematic that there is still such a great racial divide between schools, especially in diverse urban areas. Additionally, these current school systems often require students to travel well beyond their neighborhoods in order to get to school and achieve a quality education, which can have impacts on their feeling of belonging within their schools, neighborhoods, and identity.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Access to quality, inexpensive educational opportunities is not available to all United States (US) students. Students of color and students from low-income families, particularly those living in urban areas, tend to have less access to high-achieving schools in comparison to their white peers from affluent backgrounds. When students of color are able to access higher quality schools, it often requires the students to leave their local community and enter a world much different from their own. In order to understand the phenomenon of students attending a school outside of their local community, I interviewed three individuals who identify as people of color and attended a private high school outside their home community.

The following research questions guided this phenomenology study:

1. What are the social, cultural, and educational experiences of students attending schools outside of their neighborhood/community?
2. Why do students of color and their families choose to attend schools outside their neighborhood?
3. How does attending a school outside one's neighborhood affect one's ability to navigate relationships in one's community?

Data Collection

Methods

Data for this phenomenology was gathered through interviews with the participants. As previously stated, participants were provided with consent forms and basic information on the purpose of the study (see Appendix A). All interviews were audio recorded and later

transcribed. All names of people and places have been changed in order to protect their privacy. The interview with the first participant was conducted in person. The interview with the second participant, who lives at a distance from the researcher, was conducted over a video call. The third interview was conducted over the phone due to the social distancing requirements of the shelter-in-place caused by COVID19.

Participants

The three participants who were interviewed each attended a private high school outside of their local community. The first participant was Genesis Cruz. She attended an all-girls Catholic high school in a metropolitan area in Northern California. She is of Filipino descent, is in her mid-twenties, and is now a teacher at another all-girls Catholic high school in Northern California. The second participant was Harry Williams. He attended the same private, Predominantly White Institution (PWI) from grades five through twelve in a metropolitan area in Pennsylvania. He identifies as African-American and is in his mid-twenties. The final participant, Carmen Carcamo, attended the same all-girls Catholic high school as Genesis, about twenty years earlier. She identifies as Latina and is also an educator in Northern California. I have personal relationships with each of these participants and as such, developed relational trust prior to our interviews. Although our friendships facilitated the interview process, I did my best to bracket these relationships in order to limit the influence of my affinity for the participants on the results (Groenewald, 2004). The results of the interviews were explicated into themes (see Appendix C). The following sections present the results of this study, organized by research question, and according to theme.

Research Question One: Social, Cultural, and Educational Experiences

The data gathered in response to the first research question can be organized according to the following themes: (a) racial consciousness (b) experiences of being *othered.* Theme one presents findings related to in-group relationships, out-group relationships, and interactions with teachers. Results that describe experiences of recognizing wealth disparity and access to school are presented under the heading for theme two. The paragraphs below review these findings.

Theme One: Racial Consciousness

Peer In-Group

The participants were asked to describe their relationships with peers of similar backgrounds. In reflecting on these relationships, the participants described a variety of experiences and levels of connection. Genesis Cruz noted that, while she was friendly with many classmates of different racial identities, her main groups were always Filipina, like her. She explained:

> For whatever reason, people stuck with their ethnic groups and so I definitely hung out with a lot of Filipinas. And it's funny because in my neighborhood it's mostly Filipino. And in my youth group: mostly Filipino. In my dance group: mostly Filipino. It might just be like a [local city] thing where like, because it's where we all grew up, like this is very much so our community and so in school I definitely was known to be a part of the Filipino group… And I of course found myself hanging out with other people and still interacting with other classmates of different cultures, but in terms of people that I was with all the time that were people that were my solid group of friends, they all were Filipino.

She went on to acknowledge the ways in which self-isolating in racial and ethnic groups can seem "tribal," "excluding," or could make "people feel left out or othered." Harry Williams shared a similar experience with in-group self-isolation, after transferring to a new school in fifth grade.

As Harry, who identifies as Black, attempted to mingle and get to know all of his new peers, he recalled one of the other Black kids calling for his attention. Harry reflected:

> I remember in my head being like, 'I don't *have* to hang out with you just because we're both Black.' But like, we are friends, [he's still my best friend to this day], but I [wanted] to also get to know everyone else too. But he was just excited because he had been in this school for five years already and he was the only Black kid.

As Harry continued on at that school, he remembered, "I was tight with my friends that looked like me," in addition to friends from different sports teams. He noted, "it was impossible not to have friends outside of the three other Black guys that were in my grade." In contrast Carmen Carcamo, who identifies as a Latina, shared a different experience. She expressed:

> At first I wanted to *just* hang out with the Latina girls at the school, but I found out quickly that I didn't have that much in common with them… A lot of them were kind of what we would call the richer Latina who were from the [affluent neighborhood], their parents owned their homes, you know which was *not* my reality… and a lot of them didn't speak Spanish. So culturally speaking, I didn't identify with them.

Throughout the interview, Carmen shared her difficulties with maintaining her cultural identity at a school with so few other Latinas like her, and her difficulty determining what *being Latina* meant for her.

Peer Out-Group

The participants were also asked to describe their relationships with people of different racial and cultural identities. In response to this, Genesis Cruz described the difficulty of maintaining friendships with non-Filipino students. She noted:

> I tried to like, if I had other friends, just bring them into the group, but then it would just naturally go where they wouldn't feel like they belonged. And that includes my church group and things like that. People entered in and they're like "whoa there are so many Filipinos here" and they feel left out.

While Genesis experienced difficulty making new friends feel welcome in Filipino spaces, Carmen found an opportunity to navigate her difficult friendship dynamics. Carmen explained the ways in which she taught her diverse friend group about her Salvadorian culture. She shared:

> I would introduce my friends to Salvadorian food, mainly pupusas of course because a lot of them had never had one! And I would like to tell them about famous authors that my grandmother had talked to me about that we weren't studying in school, little things like that.

However, it is important to note that Carmen also shared the experience of a negative perception from her non-Latino peers.

While Carmen enjoyed sharing her Salvadorian culture with her friends, she also experienced being stereotyped. She shared, "a lot of the other girls just presumed that [I] was in

a gang, too, and that [I] knew how to fight. So nobody really messed with [me]" other than her close group of friends. Harry identified a similar experience. As one of the few African-American students at his school, Harry shared that:

> Culturally, [I did kind of take on] - not necessarily the token because there were plenty of us African-American [and] minorities at the school [so I] wasn't literally [the only] one - [but] there was this sense of like, that's who I am. Culturally I *am* the Black kid among my group of friends.

When asked to describe their relationships - both with people who identified like them, and people who identified differently than them - the participants in this study shared a complex range of experiences. These experiences contributed to the participant's growing racial consciousness. A similar range of experiences became evident when the participants shared their experiences with teachers.

With Teachers

In addition to peer interactions, the participants recalled interactions with teachers that contributed to their growing consciousness of their racial and cultural identity. Similar to her experience described above, Carmen shared that some of her teachers also assumed she was a gang: "They felt sorry for me because I came from a very poor neighborhood or they were like… 'she's gonna raise hell, she's gonna be talkative in class, she's gonna be disruptive." However, there were some teachers who recognized her struggle. Carmen recalled her dean noticing that she was frequently out of dress code and reaching out to help her rather than punishing her.

> My dean could tell that I was having a really hard time adjusting. He was a very loving human being and was like, 'You have so much potential, you don't need to

> be getting in trouble for really stupid things.' So you know, he took it upon himself to really help me out with staying focused and not getting in trouble.

Carmen had similar interactions with her religion teacher who Carmen recalled saying,

> You're trying to find yourself and that's okay. But who you are isn't defined by your geography. It's who you want to be. Once you figure that out, then you figure out ways to honor the other parts of yourself and incorporate those into your life.

Carmen experienced both race-based stereotypes, as well as support from teachers as she navigated school outside her home community. In contrast, Harry did not have that help.

Entering a K-12 school in fifth grade posed unique challenges for Harry. The students who had been enrolled in the school for five years were familiar with the teachers, academics, and expectations. Harry was not. He reflected,

> I don't think there was as much attention paid to helping me along and to get accustomed to that more rigorous academic work. 'Cause I could do all my schoolwork with my eyes blindfolded at the other school. This school was much more intense and I think one of the first things where I was kind of set off at a disadvantage was like, we'd be in history class talking about whatever topic we're on and the teacher would say "and you guys all remember the Greek gods, you know, god of this, god of that…" and I'm like… we weren't studying that shit in 4th grade at [my old elementary school] … I think that was a smaller piece of the bigger thing around them not really looking at some students like me and saying 'okay, maybe we have to be a little bit more deliberate about some things'.

Harry did mention the development of some relationships with his teachers as he got older and spent more time at the school, but not when he was first making the transition to a new place.

As some of the participants identified, being aware of the diversity - or lack thereof - in their schools led to developing a consciousness of race. Both Carmen and Harry felt that they were at a disadvantage because of their racial identity, and where they came from prior to attending their new schools. For all three participants, gravitating towards peers of the same racial or cultural identity was sometimes easier, but the participants also maintained friendships with members of other racial and cultural groups. When in the other groups, the participants were very aware of the ways in which they were different or were perceived by their peers, leading to experiences of being *othered.*

Theme Two: Experiences of Being *Othered*

The concept of *othering* refers to the practice of denying the humanity of individuals, or their ability to belong to a group, by calling attention to difference (Miriam et al., 2018). In their interviews, each participant shared at least one experience in which they were in a situation that clearly drew attention to the differences between themselves and their peers. Harry explained:

> Like *going* to some of these houses and seeing how different they lived versus me… Because I grew up in the inner city, row houses, 20ft by10ft yard, if you wanna call it that, nothing you'd ever play anything in… then to yards where there was landscaping, there's people working around ... Initially the cultural impact, I think was like "Wow, this is what rich white people are like. And… they just *live* this way." And I think having that exposure at a young age allowed

> me to understand that people, just because they grow up a certain way or come from a different culture, isn't a bad thing, it's just different.

Even with his African-American peers, Harry "very quickly realized the difference between where I lived and like where some of my friends lived." After the initial shock of not belonging, he accepted the difference.

Genesis shared a similar experience of noticing differences and feeling like an outsider, when she first saw some of the houses where her friends lived. Describing this experience, Genesis remembered:

> One time freshman year I was invited to a friend's house but it was all the way in like [affluent neighborhood] and I'd never been there before. Almost near [landmark] like that kind of area and I was like "Oh my God this is so far." And it was like these huge houses that I've never been inside of. I'm like "Oh my God like what is this world?!" And it was kind of like a culture shock to me because, coming from [my city] like we're not that rich over there, you know?! So like when I saw a rich person's house I was like "Oh my god. This is cool!"

In addition to their shock, and admiration, Harry and Carmen both described feelings of shame or resentment towards their own neighborhoods. Carmen noted:

> I was really resentful of my neighborhood for a while. I hated that I couldn't hang out outside while I was a kid and then later as a teenager, my parents being so strict, and it's always because the neighborhood is so dangerous and you need to be careful of who you're hanging out with and whatever… Once I was in college, I think that's sort of when I started to appreciate the neighborhood I lived

> in. I started taking La Raza literature classes at [my college] and sort of started to see the art that was in my neighborhood and really appreciate how alive the Central-American culture was there, but again it was kind of masked by the problems that my brother was having with his life and his involvement in that life.

Harry echoed this outsider experience, and explained his feelings for his neighborhood, especially in comparison to where his peers lived. He remarked:

> There was some shame on my part where I'd go to my friend's houses and see these insane houses with these nice cars in the driveways and I'm like, my family doesn't own a car and our house is this fucking hundred year old row house. I was embarrassed to invite friends over because of the neighborhood, because of what our house looked like compared to theirs, the fact that if we wanted to go get ice cream or something, like we're getting on the bus 'cause we don't have a car and all that.

In addition to feeling like an outsider when visiting the homes of their peers, another challenge that set the participants apart from their peers had to do with their access to school.

All three of the participants related that although they only lived about fifteen minutes away from school by car, they had to find other means of transportation; rides from their parents were not a guarantee. As Harry mentioned, his family did not own a car so he would occasionally get a ride from a friend or resort to other options. He described his options as such:

> I would either take a bus to another bus or I would walk. In my senior year I found out that I could take a bus to the train station that was about a mile away from the school. They had a shuttle that would take kids getting off the train

> down the road to the school, which was funny because it was like the shuttle for kids getting off the train, but the train was coming from the further out suburbs so there was no real intent on how to get kids from my community there [to the school].

While Harry found a solution to his transportation issues, he also noticed that the transportation system was set up so that it catered to his peers, but excluded him. Genesis shared a similar experience.

Genesis had to work with her mom's schedule; as a nurse, her mom worked long hours and was not always able to drive Genesis and her sister to school. Genesis recalled,

> When my sister was entering her freshman year going into [school], my mom was like "Okay you need to learn how to take the bus… We're going to take the [bus] from our house and we're going to take it all the way to [the school] because, what happens if" - cause my mom is a single parent - and like what happens if she has work, we don't have any rides and we have to take the bus? Then we got onto the bus, the three of us, and it took us an hour to get to school. One way. And then we walked around a little and when we finished we got back onto the bus, took it back to our house and it took another hour. So, commuting time was like 2 hours total and I just remember my mom being like "I do not want you to do this. I do not want you taking the bus for that long."

As a result, Genesis and her sister would get rides from their grandparents or local friends when they could. These examples illustrate experiences being *othered.* As each of the participants became aware of the wealth disparity between their own families and their peers' families, they

understood that they were excluded from their peer group by factors such as geography and income disparity. This sometimes caused them to resent their own homes or communities, feelings that their more affluent, White-identified peers likely did not experience.

In conclusion, the first research question, "What are the social, cultural, and educational experiences of students attending schools outside of their neighborhood/community?" elicited responses that can be organized according to two themes including (a) racial consciousness and (b) experiences of being *othered*. The next section presents findings that address research question number two.

Research Question Two: The Choice to Attend Schools Outside Their Neighborhood

The data gathered in response to the second research question can be organized according to the following themes: (a) academics and reputation (b) avoiding public school options (c) opportunity and expanded worldview. Theme one presents findings related to the desire for a focused academic environment and school reputation. Results that articulate concern in regards to the local public school options and hoping for other school options are presented under the heading theme two. Theme three presents findings that address opportunity and expanding one's worldview. The paragraphs below review these findings.

Theme One: Academics and Reputation

A common conversation throughout the three interviews focused on the comparison between public and private school options. Each participant attended a private high school, but also had access to public school options. During the interviews, the participants were given an opportunity to discuss and compare these options. As previously mentioned, Harry transferred to his private K-12 school in fifth grade. He recalled that he had always enjoyed school and found

that it was easy to succeed in the public school setting. Harry experiences frustration in his public school setting because it would take so long for the other students to quiet down at the beginning of a lesson. Comparing this to his first visit to the school into which he transferred, Harry recalled:

> I remember when I visited in 4th grade before I actually came, the thing that shocked me more than anything else - other than there being a ton of white people - the thing that shocked me more than anything else was the fact that the teacher got up, said "Alright class, let's get ready" and it was like, you could hear a pin drop within a second. And I was like, "What the hell, okay, that's pretty cool."

Even as a child, Harry recognized a difference between public and private school settings.

Harry understood that the private school was able to create and maintain a successful learning environment. Genesis recounted a similar experience that fueled her desire to attend a specific school. Explaining the influence of the school's reputation, she explained:

> Ten of my other [elementary school] classmates - all of us went to [the same high school]. So most people, if they went to a private school, they went to [this school] or [the brother school], and only a few people went to [the elite Catholic school] … From similar conversations that people have had with their parents [about] the reason why they all sent us to private school was, again, so that we can get a good education or a better education. I mean we couldn't afford to go to like the top top top Catholic schools, but [it was] just enough where we still had some sort of prestige.

Genesis knew that many others from her elementary school and local community had attended her high school and that it was a desirable option. Harry recognized the respect within the classroom that allowed for organized and focused classes. Both of the participants recognized that the value of their schools was based, in part, on the schools' academic reputation. This had a positive influence on their decision to attend school outside their home community. Another factor that influenced this decision was the desire to avoid public school.

Theme Two: Avoiding Public School Option

The reputation of local public schools also influenced the decisions of the participants to attend school outside their community. In Harry's case, because he had been identified as a gifted student in his early elementary years, he had more public school options than his public school peers who were not identified as gifted. When asked about his options, Harry described both the public schools in his neighborhood and the public school he might have attended as a student identified as gifted. Describing his growing understanding of the public schools in his neighborhood, compared to private school he eventually attended, Harry stated:

> It just felt so much to me like those [public] schools were where you're just mixed in with all the riff raff, like kids that sell drugs and do all that crap. Like, it took me a little while to understand that that did still exist where I did go to school and that, you know, that's a whole other layer of like white collar issues and the issues that kids who come from families with a lot of money have, as opposed to kids where I'm from who don't have a lot of money. At the end of the day, it's a lot of the same stuff, but it just looks very different... I felt like I had this opportunity to go to a better school, and if I didn't have this opportunity, I don't know how I

> would fit in. I was a tiny-ass kid, would I get beat up by these drug dealers and angry kids that don't have this worldly view?

Describing the other public school option, Harry stated:

> There was another school, which I'm like ninety nine percent sure it was public, but it was for gifted students… So I know that would've been their other option. [My parents would've thought] "If it's gonna be a public school, let's try to get one of the public schools that actually selects kids." So it would've been a different experience….

According to his recollection, Harry's parents viewed a school with a selective admissions process as superior to the neighborhood public schools. This was true for Genesis' mother as well.

For Genesis, her mother's desire to avoid public schools was a result of her mother's own educational experience. Before Genesis entered high school, she and her sister moved to a new city in order to be in a public school district that her mother viewed as more desirable. Despite this, Genesis' mother was intent on sending her daughters to a Catholic high school. Genesis claimed that mother's rationale for this was that "public schools were inferior." She further explained,

> I think for [my mom] growing up in the Philippines - they also had Catholic private institutions very similar to how we have it here. And so my mom always thought "I have to send them to a private school because I'm paying for a higher education… that's why I'm paying. So that they can get the best education around." And my mom, as well as many of the people in our community that

> send off their kids to private schools, they have this belief that the schools that they're paying for, especially if they're expensive, will already be more prestigious, but also will have better teachers, will have better… I don't think they think that they have better teachers or better curriculum, but I think [to my mom] because it costs something it must be better and it must be top education.

As illustrated by these quotes, both participants acknowledged the negative reputations of their local public schools and the reality that for their parents, public school was not an option.

Theme Three: Opportunity and Expanded Worldview

Closely related to the perception that public school was not an option, both Harry and Genesis shared their parents' determination to provide the best for their children. This came in the form of opportunities from which the participant's parents had been excluded. In Harry's situation, neither of his parents had attended college. They wanted their children to have access to higher education and the ability to experience life away from home. Although their family could not afford the $20,000/year tuition at his elite private school, Harry's family learned about a scholarship program that would provide merit and need based tuition assistance. Harry explained:

> We got into the school with [a scholarship program] … some lady, I think back in the 80s or 90s, endowed a scholarship so that kids from my zip code and the neighboring zip code were able to go to the school if they were smart enough, if they did well enough on this independent schools test, and they would cover up to 100% of the tuition, as much as was needed.

He continued, sharing what he believed to be his parents' motivations:

> My parents didn't go to college. I'm pretty sure they both graduated high school. My dad got a GED … I think for them it was the thinking of "We need to provide a better opportunity for our kids, put them in a better position to do better than we're doing or we did.... We need to give them a better path, we want them to go to college. We didn't go to college so we need to set them up for that." And this school was like 99% of people go to college… I think a lot of the idea was, like I said before, putting us in a good position to go to college, making sure that we were well-positioned with a good education for years down the road and just getting a little bit further away from [our city], even though you were literally across the street from [it] with our school, it was such a bubble.

His parents were intent on providing more opportunities for their children than they themselves had been afforded. This included higher education and ensuring that their children were able to see the world beyond the bubble to which Harry referred.

This was also true for Carmen's mother. As has been previously mentioned, Carmen characterized her neighborhood culture as Latino. It was important to her parents that she expand this worldview by attending school outside the neighborhood. Explaining this, Carmen shared:

> It taught me a lot about how to interact with people who are not part of my culture and who are not of the same race as me… My father so pointedly said "Listen, you need to see the world outside of [this neighborhood], because the world in the [neighborhood], is not the greater picture, it's not the bigger picture." And he was 100% right.

According to Carmen, interacting with students and teachers, with different racial and cultural identities than her own, forced Carmen to learn about other cultures, connect with those who were different from her, and see the world beyond her predominantly Latino neighborhood.

Harry also attributed his ability to interact with a diverse range of people to what he learned by attending school outside his home neighborhood. He explained:

> It really gave me a broader perspective on the world in a sense where going to school in my community, I was around people that looked like me all the time, it was very homogeneous. I remember I always tell people I went from a school where there was like "*the* white kid" to being at a school where "*I* was *the* Black kid, or in the group of Black kids." So I think it definitely allowed me to, at a young age, see what the world looked like outside of my community and allowed me to interact, at a young age, with people that I didn't really have a lot of similarities with, at least on the surface.

Both participants acknowledged the ways in which their experience in high school prepared them for life outside of their neighborhood and aided in their ability to navigate the world as a whole.

In summary, the second research question, "Why do students of color and their families choose to attend schools outside their neighborhood?" elicited responses that can be organized according to three themes. These include theme one, which illustrates the impact of a school's reputation on a family's decision-making process. Theme two describes the desire to choose a selective school environment, often based on the negative perception of local public school options. Theme three articulates the hope of the participants' parents for providing better opportunities and an expanded worldview for their children.

Research Question Three: Ability to Navigate Relationships in the Home Community

The data gathered in response to the third research question can be organized according to the following themes: (a) connections within home community (b) identity formation (c) life after high school. Theme one presents findings related to belonging within the community, feelings of disconnect, and continued relationships. Results that articulate cultural and faith formation are presented under the heading theme two. Finally, theme three presents findings that address adjusting to life beyond high school and career readiness. The paragraphs below review these findings.

Theme One: Connections within home community

The participants shared a range of connections to their communities. Genesis found it to be more natural and convenient to maintain community relationships. Genesis recalled that she spent a lot of time in her home community, even throughout high school. For a while, the majority of her social life was in her local community and involved the friends she had maintained since before entering high school. She shared:

> My social life would be mostly in [the community] because it was so much easier just to get there and so much shorter… And in addition to that I was also dancing and so my dance studio was also in [the community]. vSo everything in my life… I did a bunch of stuff outside of school. cAnd it just helped that all of the people that I hung out with were all at these places and I had responsibilities in, you know, my dance school and also I had responsibilities at my church group.

While she was still very invested in her home community, Genesis voiced her desire to balance her time in both worlds and her confidence in being able to do so. She recalled:

> I don't think my home life weakened or my community life weakened because I was at school or vice versa. My relationships at school didn't lessen when I had really busy stuff outside. I was always trying to balance it or I was always trying to please everyone.

Genesis acknowledged the difficult nature of trying to keep everyone happy in all of her social groups. For similar reasons, Harry and Carmen identified experiences of being disconnected from their local neighborhood and community.

For example, being one of only a few students from her elementary school to go on to her exclusive private high school, Carmen quickly lost touch with a lot of her previous friends. She explained,

> I sort of lost touch with [my old friends]. Even when I got the acceptance letter to [high school], a lot of my friends were like "Oh you're going to that white school" and then "You're gonna become whitewashed." That was always the comment. We'd get together every once in a while but always sort of, the commentary was how I was becoming white… But I mean, I found out who my real friends were because most of the girls I hung out with in 8th grade, most of them I did not hang out with anymore [once we were in high school].

As previously mentioned, forming and maintaining her cultural identity was extremely important to Carmem. Carmen's friends' reactions caused her to reflect on what it really meant to be Latina, and what it meant to balance her high school identity with her community identity. For example, she shared:

> I was more into rock music. I don't know why, but that was just my preference, and of course, rock is very much associated with white people. So that took some points off my 'Latina-ness' if you wanna call it that.

It took Carmen some time - and guidance from her religion teacher - to accept that she could be interested in different things and go to "the white school," while still honoring her Latina culture. Although Carmen was able to stay connected to her community in some ways, the friends that she left behind were not a part of that.

In contrast, Harry felt very little connection to his community even before transferring to the predominantly white school. He shared that there were very few times that he interacted with his neighbors more than greeting them in passing. He reflected:

> There just became a point where I just didn't interact with anybody [in the neighborhood]. And some of that happened before. So it was like, we were already kind of in our little bubble in our house, but after I went to that school, it was like I really had no connection or tie to anybody… We started to isolate in some ways ourselves, but it definitely didn't help being that you went to school elsewhere, because when you're in school that's your entire day. I didn't have a job in the neighborhood or anything like that so there was not much interaction to begin with.

Maintaining relationships while splitting time between two communities proved challenging to all of the participants. While Carmen and Genesis were able to maintain connections through previous connections and their involvement in local activities, Harry had less of a desire to seek out relationships with the people and places of his community.

Theme Two: Identity Formation

In addition to navigating relationships in the community, the participants also shared experiences related to navigating their own identity development. Carmen and Genesis both discussed aspects of their school and community lives that informed their identity formation. For example, Carmen grappled with what it meant to be Latina and to honor her culture while attending high school outside her home community. She took it upon herself to learn as much as possible about her culture. She sought out sources of information and different ways to grow in her personal identity. She declared the importance of keeping up with her Spanish language and shared that she even switched from French classes to *Spanish for Native Speakers* in order to maintain her Spanish language proficiency. She recalled:

> I made it a huge point to learn more about our history. My grandmother was such a huge part of that because I would come home and I would ask a question - cause she lived with us for a while - so I would ask her questions about how they got to this country and what were some traditions that we celebrated in El Salvador and to me, that was what I realized, that was the most important part. It wasn't to uphold these stereotypes that people had of Latinos from the **[**neighborhood], it was to truly know more about your culture and then figuring out a way to live it.

While Carmen felt it necessary to search outside her school community for experiences that validated her Latina identity, Genesis shared that her high school experiences enhanced her existing values and interests.

Growing up in a Catholic household and attending a Catholic elementary school, many of the values that Genesis had developed were based on religious teachings. In high school, she developed an expanded set of beliefs. Genesis explained:

> There was a real obvious sense of women empowerment and feminism, which was really interesting because it was a Catholic school and I guess the assumption is like "Oh yeah women are these minor roles in the church or in the Bible and like they don't really matter." But it was the first time that I saw, in a religious context, that women were in the forefront and we were making, you know, changes and we were being radical and we were being active parts of our communities and I felt like [my school emphasized] that school culture and it really made me proud to be a woman.

In addition to identifying the importance of women within her faith, at her high school Genesis also learned about the social connections and real world implications of the Catholic values she had always been taught. She continued:

> It really shaped my faith in so many ways. More so in that it made me be concerned for other people. There was a really huge element of social justice in the curriculum, but also kind of like in the overall student activities or student life. There was always a charity to be informed about, there was always an issue that was being displayed and I felt hyper aware of the issues going on in the world. And it made me feel like I had a responsibility to contribute to my community, but also I felt like fired up to do something or make changes in the world.

These are feelings that Genesis continues to carry today and which she now lives out through her work. Harry shared an interest in the values that were taught at his school, originally founded by the Quakers.

Harry discussed how his school emphasized love for all and acceptance for everyone, concepts that he enjoyed learning about. He shared:

> It eventually did get to a point where I was like, a lot of the things they preach in Quakerism, I kinda like, like peacefulness and simplicity and service, and treating others the way you wanna be and all that mushy gushy stuff about being a good person basically.

Like Genesis, these ideas were not new to him. Rather, they reinforced what he already saw as important life lessons. In these many ways, each participant identified experiences, either within or because of their high school community, that informed their identity formation, cultural connections, and values.

Theme Three: Life After High School

For many, life after high school represents a challenge, as it becomes necessary to independently apply the social and academic knowledge and skills learned through school and from family and community members. Reflecting on this transition, Genesis emphasized the importance of balancing her school life and community life, which she felt prepared her for the transition into adulthood, living away from home, and going to college. Despite her dedication to dancing and her youth group, Genesis remembered there coming a point where she needed to start making decisions about these activities in order to move on to the next stage of her life. She described this process, saying:

> I slowly stopped dancing. From that point, I was still involved in church, but like I was getting prepared for college and it was a complete transition, creating my own life separate from my home community. And I felt like my senior year were the early stages of that. Because I knew that if I wanted to do something well, I had to not have five million things on my plate and if that meant saying no to things back at home, then I was willing to make that sacrifice.

Though bittersweet, she also acknowledged how important it was for her to be her own person separate from the world she had always known:

> Coming from my home community where everyone knows each other, where everyone grew up together, where everyone is Filipino and has very similar stories and narratives, I felt like towards my senior year going into college I was on this new journey of creating my own path that was separate from the community that I had grown up in.

While Genesis described this process as letting go of many connections to her home community, Carmen experienced it as an extension of the transition she made by attending a high school outside of her home community.

Reflecting on her transition to life after high school, Carmen recalled her father's insistence that she experience life outside of her neighborhood. She shared, "I feel like because of that, I was really ready to go to college because I had already spent four years kind of out of my comfort zone, so going to college felt kind of seamless after that." After spending so much time navigating multiple communities, Carmen realized that she had gained a skill set that would serve her well as she moved on to other transitions in life.

In addition to reflecting on these transitions, each participant also identified a connection between their eventual career path and the values or activities to which they were exposed in high school. For example, Genesis identified that the exposure to social issues and real world problems encouraged her to be a teacher. She explained:

> I think that's where it helped me form the career that I eventually wanted because it was when I was [in high school] that I decided to become a teacher. And it was like, I wanted to become a *religion* teacher and it was so weird because that's not really people's instant [thought]. Like "Oh yeah, people want to become religion teachers! No!" It wasn't a conventional thing, but because of the environment, the classes, the teachers, and everything, it all led me to find out whatever I felt like was my calling at the time… I wouldn't have had those thoughts or that career path or that fire or passion for what I did if I didn't go to [high school]. Had I gone to a different school, I probably would have been doing something else completely.

In this way, Genesis reflected that through the profession of teaching she continues to live the core value of service she learned in high school. Carmen also felt the pull to a profession that serves the greater good.

After college, Carmen felt a strong desire to return to her community and work in a place that she knew so well. She recalled,

> I [wanted] to do something to make my community proud of myself. And I think that was a big push for me in college because a lot of the friends that I still sort of talk to in the neighborhood, they were all going to college, too. So that started to

> unify us in this way that was like, "Okay so we need to get a degree and we need to come back here and we need to change the perception, change some of the bad things that are happening in this neighborhood, you know kind of take the neighborhood back." I think a lot of me wanting to become a teacher had to do with having to have a role model that looked like me, which is something that I never had growing up.

Carmen now works at a school in the neighborhood where she grew up and works closely with many students who share similar experiences to hers. She expressed,

> I feel tremendously blessed because I think so many of the conversations that I get to have with the students at [school] come back to what I learned in high school. Where a lot of our students are feeling like, you know they go to a corporate job and they're like, they're the only person of color there. And helping them and guiding them and helping them understand that this is also an important part that you need to learn in life if you want to survive and if you want to be successful. So having lived it and then now being in a position where I can give advice to it, I think is a huge blessing.

Despite these positive feelings, the decision to return to her neighborhood came as a surprise, Carmen never expected to end up working at that school. She shared,

> It was never by design that I went to work at [the school in her neighborhood]. I never in a million years thought that I'd go work there. And that's why I knew how much I missed my neighborhood because when I stepped into the doors there it felt like home and I was like, "I'm actually going to get to do what I've always

> wanted to do." I think I needed to have lived through the whole thing with [her own high school] in order to really kind of answer that mission that I'm doing now.

Similar to Carmen and Genesis, Harry attributed his career path to the activities and programs that he and his brother were enrolled in throughout their childhood and teenage years.

Harry, who now works in athletics, explained the connection between his current profession and the activities of his youth,

> That was their thing, they always put us in these weekend programs and that was how I originally got into sports, which ended up shaping my whole life… It was always basketball this or sports this, they always just wanted us to be busy with stuff so we wouldn't just hang around and I think that was my dad's biggest fear: that we would become these juvenile delinquent criminals that they couldn't control and all that. We were the furthest thing from that, and maybe because of some of the stuff that they did.

The weekend programs led to his participation in high school sports, where he played on a team each season of the school year. Since his parents themselves were not interested in sports, the weekend programs created a pathway for him to explore his interests and incorporate them into his future career. The school experiences of these three participants paved the way for their future careers. Through activities in the community, experiences at school, and exposure to the values of those who cared for and mentored them, each of the participants articulated a connection between high school and their current profession.

In summary, the third research question, “How does attending a school outside one's neighborhood affect one's ability to navigate relationships in one's community?” elicited responses that can be organized according to three themes. These include theme one, which articulates the complexity of the relationships the participants maintained with members of their home communities, while attending school elsewhere. Theme two illustrates the ways in which the participant's identity formation was influenced by attending school outside their respective communities. Finally, theme three describes the connections between the participant’s high school experiences and life beyond high school.

Conclusion

The data gathered for this phenomenology are presented in the sections above. These findings are presented by theme and according to the research questions. The results of the first research question, “What are the social, cultural, and educational experiences of students attending schools outside of their neighborhood/community?” are organized by sections that illustrate the participants’ experiences of racial consciousness and experiences of being *othered.* The results of the second research question, “Why do students of color and their families choose to attend schools outside their neighborhood?” are organized by discussions of school reputations, local public school options, and a parent focus on providing opportunity and expanded worldviews. The results of the third research question, “How does attending a school outside one's neighborhood affect one's ability to navigate relationships in one's community?” are organized by sections that discuss connections within the participants’ home communities, experiences of identity formation, and life after high school. The next chapter presents a

discussion of these results, as well as conclusions and recommendations based on the findings presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite many continued efforts since the Civil Rights era, United States (US) public schools are more segregated than before the Brown v. Board of Education decision that mandated desegregation (Frankenberg, Ee, Ayscue, & Orfield, 2019; Rothstein, 2013). This phenomenon is mutually reinforcing with the systems of racism and segregation that exist within major metropolitan areas in the United States (Williams & Emamdjomeh, 2018). Access to quality, inexpensive educational opportunities is not universally available to all students in the United States. Students of color and students from low-income families tend to have less access to high-achieving schools in comparison to their white peers from affluent backgrounds. When students of color from low-income families are able to access higher quality schools, it often requires the students to leave their local community. When students attend school outside of their local community, they are impacted socially, culturally, and academically.

This chapter includes sections titled (a) discussion (b) conclusions (c) recommendations. In the discussion section, the evidence presented in chapter three is explored. The discussion is organized by research question and includes a discussion of each theme presented in Chapter Three. The conclusion section presents conclusions based on the results of my study. It also relates my findings back to the body of literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The conclusion section is organized according to the themes used in Chapter Two. The final section of this chapter includes evidence-based recommendations related to (a) educational practices and actions that may be taken based on the study results and my conclusions (b) future research

studies that may be carried out to advance the work begun in this investigation. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

Discussion

In this section the evidence presented in Chapter Three is discussed. The discussion is organized according to the research questions that guided this study. These include:

- What are the social, cultural, and educational experiences of students attending schools outside of their neighborhood/community?
- Why do students of color and their families choose to attend schools outside their neighborhood?
- How does attending a school outside one's neighborhood affect one's ability to navigate relationships in one's community?

The following themes are discussed under the heading *Research Question One: Social, Cultural, and Educational Experiences* (a) racial consciousness and (b) experiences of being *othered*. Under the heading *Research Question Two: The Choice to Attend Schools Outside Their Neighborhood* the following themes are discussed: (a) academics and reputation (b) avoiding public school option (c) opportunity and expanded worldviews. Under the heading *Research Question Three: Ability to Navigate Relationships within the Home Community* the following themes are discussed: (a) connections within home community (b) identity formation (c) life after high school. This section ends with a brief conclusion.

Research Question One: Social, Cultural, and Educational Experience

Themes One: Racial Consciousness

The first common theme that appeared within the three interviews was the theme of racial consciousness. The participants described these experiences in regard to their relationships with other peers in the same racial or ehtnic group to which they identified, to peers in different groups, and with teachers. For each of the participants, attending a school outside of their own community contributed to their awareness of their racial or ethnic identity. For example, Genesis felt a strong connection to the other Filipinas for a few reasons. She explained that those connections felt easy and natural. Many of her Filipina friends had gone to the same grade school as Genesis, lived in the same area, or were also involved in her life outside of school. Genesis was still friendly with many of her other classmates, but recognized that it could be difficult for her non-Filipino friends to feel included when they were the only *outsider* in a group of Filipinas. This experience made Genesis conscious of social in-groups and out-groups, and she began to understand how these often aligned with the racial and ethnic identities of the group members.

Similarly, as Harry shared in his interview, attending a school outside his home community forced him to develop a racial consciousness and to grapple with his racial identity. He shared, "there was this sense of like 'I am the minority.' It's just something you can't avoid because, especially at that age you're just different from everybody else and it's just what it is." Harry had gone from an almost all-Black school to a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), and the contrast caused him to reflect on his racial identity. He shared that his primary group of friends were the other students that looked like him, and noted that it was difficult to limit his

friend group to other Black-identifying students because there were so few in his school. Carmen shared a related experience. Initially, she wanted to be friends with the other Latinas in her school, but she was disappointed to find that they actually did not have much in common. As a result, her close friend group was diverse and she was the only Latina in the group. Like Genesis, the demographics of the schools that Harry and Carmen attended prompted them to grapple with their racial and ethnic identities and to develop a consciousness related to race.

Carmen and Harry also expressed an awareness of being different in regards to their interactions with teachers. Carmen knew that, based on her home neighborhood and Latina identity, many students and teachers assumed that she was in a gang. Additionally, many teachers assumed that she would cause trouble in class. The experience of being stereotyped in this way informed Carmen's race consciousness. Fortunately, she also noted that some teachers did recognize the difficulty of being a Latina in a predominantly white school. Two adults in particular encouraged her to recognize her potential. They supported her to find ways to honor her Latino culture even though it was not reflected in her school community. This support helped Carmen to develop a positive ethnic self-identity.

Different from Carmen, Harry did not feel a sense of hostility from his teachers, but he did express feelings of feeling left out or forgotten because he was a transfer student. He had been accustomed to a less rigorous school environment and did not receive the support he needed to help him transition into his new school in fifth grade. Although the school sought out students from his zip code in attempts to diversify the student body, he recognized that there were no intentional actions taken to ensure the success of incoming transfer students. Related to his growing race consciousness, this made Harry reconsider the ways in which he fit in at his school.

For all three participants in this study, these experiences contributed to a growing awareness of their racial and ethnic identities within the school environment.

Theme Two: Experiences of Being Othered

Along with the participants' expressions of a growing racial consciousness, they also shared experiences of being *othered* at school. *Othering* refers to the alienation of groups or individuals by identifying differences between themselves and what is considered to be the mainstream "norm" (Miriam et al., 2018). Due to wealth disparities between themselves and their peers, and because of segregation, all three of the participants experienced feelings of being an outsider. They made reference to the difference between their own homes and neighborhoods, and their classmates' homes and neighborhoods. The wealth of some of their classmates was well beyond what any of the participants had previously experienced. Harry shared that he lived in a neighborhood with row houses and few yards, which made it especially shocking for him when he visited the large homes, with landscaped lawns, of his peers. This experience made Harry feel increasingly aware of the differences between himself and his classmates. Similarly, Genesis recalled visiting certain neighborhoods for the first time and feeling like she was in another world. She too felt out of place and was keenly aware of the income disparity between her family and the families of her peers.

When they had attended their local neighborhood schools, the peers of Carmen, Genesis, and Harry were of a relatively similar socioeconomic status. Once the participants moved to schools outside their home neighborhood, they became outliers. As they realized the difference between their own homes and communities, and the homes and communities of their peers, they experienced being othered, or excluded. This included feelings of shame, resentment, and a

feeling as if they did not belong. For example, after seeing some of the expensive cars that his classmates drove to school, Harry was embarrassed to admit that his family did not have a car. Carmen resented her neighborhood for its reputation and lack of safety which caused her parents to be so strict. Genesis remembered the many hours spent at school after arriving early or needing to stay late at school because of her mother's long work hours. Although the participants expressed feelings of gratitude towards their school experiences, there were still times when they were made keenly aware of the differences between their families, homes, and neighborhoods, and those of their peers. These experiences sometimes made the participants feel isolated and as if they did not belong among their peers, or in the schools they attended outside their home communities.

Research Question Two: The Choice to Attend Schools Outside Their Neighborhood

Theme One: Academics and Reputation

It was clear through the interviews that Genesis and Harry's parents were determined to send their children to schools that had strong academic reputations. Harry described how his parents instilled in him an appreciation for education, even at a young age. He recalled many instances at his public elementary school in which he would get frustrated with his classmates for disrupting class and preventing the teacher from starting their lesson. However, when he visited his new school, he was impressed by the way in which students quickly quieted down when their teacher called for attention. Harry's parents valued the academic reputation of schools and this motivated them to seek opportunities for Harry outside their home community.

For Genesis, making the decision to attend a school outside of her home neighborhood came with the knowledge that many of her peers from grammar school would be attending the

same school. The high school she attended was typically sought after by the students at her grammar school. This allowed for a level of comfort and familiarity even though she did not live in a neighborhood close to the school. The school also had a good reputation and was affordable in comparison to the other Catholic and private high schools in her city. As Genesis explained, many of the families from her grammar school did not have the means to attend the most expensive and elite schools in the area, but they were able to afford her school - a well-known option, with some prestige, at the lower end of the tuition rates. This was true for her family and was a deciding factor for Genesis' mother when making the decision to send Genesis to high school outside her home community.

Theme Two: Avoiding Public School Option

Seeking out schools with outstanding academic reputations was a goal for each of the participants and their families, as they perceived a lack of quality public school options in their home communities. Genesis and Harry described their local public schools as schools as having reputations for drugs, violence, and low academic standards. While Harry noted in retrospect that there were drugs and "other white collar issues" at his new school as well, in Harry's opinion they were much more prevalent at his local public school. In the public school system that served Harry's neighborhood there was a public school for gifted students. Even though Harry had been identified as *gifted,* it still required an application and selection process. Harry noted that his parents considered this the only public school option they would entertain. All other public school options were to be avoided.

For Genesis, she understood her mother to have the belief that private schools were inherently better than public schools. Genesis attributed this to her mother's upbringing in the

Philippines and the preference for private Catholic institutions that she experienced there. Genesis recalled that it was common among parents in her community to believe that there was a relationship between the quality of a school and the cost of the school. Parents in her community seemed to agree that more expensive schools were higher in quality, and less expensive schools were lower in quality. From this perspective, free public schools were of the lowest quality and were to be avoided. As an educator, Genesis acknowledges that this is not always the case. However, because many parents of her mother's generation strongly believe that the value and quality of education must be superior if it has to be paid for, their children were sent to private Catholic schools.

Theme Three: Opportunity and Expanding Worldview

Despite the financial hardship they experienced by sending their children to private schools, the participants' parents equated attending a private school with an increase in opportunity. Each of the participants in this study recalled that their parents worked hard to secure this for their children. In addition to sending their children to schools with strong academics, in order to provide them an opportunity for a more financially secure future, the participants' families also hoped that attending a school outside of their local community would expand their children's worldviews. Carmen and Harry both described their neighborhoods as highly segregated spaces. Although their high schools also lacked diversity among the student bodies, both Carmen and Harry learned to navigate communities with different socioeconomic, cultural, and racial norms than their own home communities.

Although this could be isolating at times, their parents considered this ability to navigate other communities a positive attribute. Carmen explained that her father wanted her to see the

world outside of her neighborhood because he did not believe their neighborhood to be representative of the world as a whole. In hindsight, she agreed that he was right and she identified how her high school experience taught her how to interact with people from many different backgrounds, and helped to prepare her for navigating college. Harry also reflected on his ability to successfully navigate different communities and groups due to his school experience. Because of this, he felt that he could understand many different perspectives and worldviews, and had a broader understanding of the world in general. These reflections and experiences validate the beliefs of the participants' parents, that attending school outside their home community would provide their children with an expanded range of opportunities and with an expanded worldview.

Research Question Three: Ability to Navigate Relationships within the Home Community

Theme One: Connections in Home Community

As a result of attending a high school outside of the neighborhood, Harry and Carmen described changes in their relationships with the community. Many of Carmen's friends from grammar school expected her to become whitewashed once she started attending high school and they quickly lost touch after eighth grade. Carmen grew tired of constantly defending her Latina identity to those friends and found that they did not have much in common anymore. Harry also felt a disconnect from his community, but he identified that it had always been there in many ways. He and his family rarely interacted at length with his neighbors so attending a school outside of the neighborhood only reinforced the alienation that they were already experiencing.

On the other hand, Genesis continued to feel a strong connection to her community throughout high school. Due to her involvement in things like youth group and dance, which

took place in her community, she found herself spending more time with them than with her friends from school. Because it was more difficult to get to the homes of her school friends or go into the city where their school was for social outings, she continued to be involved in her community. For the participants who had already started to feel a disconnect from their community, attending a different high school exacerbated the disconnect. Genesis however, was able to maintain her community relationships while balancing her social life at school as well.

Theme Two: Identity Formation

High school years are formative years in the identity and personality development of students (Verhoeven et al., 2019). This was shown to be true of these participants both culturally and spiritually. For example, since she had grown apart from her neighborhood friends, did not connect with the other Latina students at her own school, and did not have any close friends of the same background, Carmen took it upon herself to continue to explore her Salvadorian culture throughout high school. She enlisted her grandmother's help in learning more about the history and culture of El Salvador, and taught her friends about it as well. While she showed an interest in traditional Salvadorian culture during her high school years, she acknowledged that she did not appreciate the cultural wealth and influence of her neighborhood until she studied La Raza classes in college. These experiences helped her realize that there was more to her neighborhood and her culture than the negative stereotypes that others had and she was determined to learn about her culture and live it out.

In Genesis' experience, high school helped to reinforce and expand her interest in the values of her family. For example, while Genesis practiced Catholicism her whole life, it was in high school that she developed new understandings about the role of women in the bible and in

the church, the elements of social justice embedded in the Catholic faith, and how to be an active and influential member of her local community. As a result, she felt like she had "a responsibility to contribute to [her] community, but also… [was] fired up to do something or make changes in the world." Harry was also exposed to religious teachings that aligned with his instilled values. He shared that some of the elements of Quakerism taught at his school, like peacefulness, simplicity, and service, were things that he enjoyed learning about and practicing.

The experience of attending school outside their home community influenced the identity and personality development of the participants in this study. In some cases, as with Carmen and Harry, the experiences at their new schools underscored the participants' existing beliefs and values. In other cases, as with Genesis, experiences in the new school expanded the participants' understanding of the world around them. This led to the formation of new or revised beliefs and values. In a final example at least one participant, Carmen, developed a more robust cultural identity because her new school environment failed to address this element of her identity development. In response to being excluded from the cultural and social norms of her new environment, Carmen engaged with her grandmother in order to develop her identity as a Latina. From exposure to new ideas, information, and interpretations - and in one case from the experience of being excluded - the participants developed new or revised identities based on their high school experiences.

Theme Three: Life After High School

As a result of their high school experiences, the participants in this study claimed that they were better prepared for the transition away from their communities after high school. They also felt well-prepared for college and the later transition on to their career paths. For example,

although Genesis maintained community relationships throughout high school, that dynamic shifted as she prepared for graduation and moved away for college. She realized that the balancing act would not be sustainable and she began prioritizing certain activities and ending her engagement in other activities, like dance, all together. Genesis clarified that she was not necessarily growing apart from her community, but learning who she was overall. She remembers thinking,

> Is this who I am simply because I'm with these people all the time? Is it a part of me? And if I can be somewhere that's separate from my community and still have these same values and still have these same characteristics about myself, then maybe this is really a part of my actual identity.

In a similar way, Carmen felt that her experience attending high school outside her community prepared her for college, even if her college was physically close to home. When it came to meeting and interacting with new and different people, Carmen felt prepared because she had already been doing that throughout her four years in high school.

Additionally, each of the participants attributed their experiences - both in and out of their community - with guiding them towards their career paths in some way. Genesis reflected that it was during high school that she became drawn to the idea of becoming a religion teacher. The classes, school environment, and teachers at her high school led down a path that brought her to become a teacher at another all-girls school in the area. In a different way, Carmen felt drawn to return to her home community in order to make a positive impact and to "take the neighborhood back." Carmen recognized that her high school experience would have been different if she had been afforded mentorship from someone who identified as Latina. This

experience prompted Carmen to work in a place where she could be that role model for young girls. In her current position as an investment program manager and work study liaison, she is able to connect with students of color and help them navigate their experiences in a predominantly white workplace. She reflected, "I think I needed to have lived through the whole thing [at school] in order to really kind of answer that mission that I'm doing now." Harry's career path was more closely related to his participation in sports than by his direct experiences at school. As Harry shared, this led to a career working for college athletic programs. For each of the participants, navigating relationships within their home community, while attending school outside of this community, had an impact on their life's trajectory.

Conclusion

The previous sections discussed the evidence presented in Chapter Three. The discussion was organized by research question and included, under the heading *Research Question One: Social, Cultural, and Educational Experiences,* a discussion of: (a) racial consciousness and (b) experiences of being *othered*. Under the heading *Research Question Two: The Choice to Attend Schools Outside Their Neighborhood*, (a) academics and reputation (b) avoiding public school option (c) opportunities and expanding worldviews were discussed. Under the heading *Research Question Three: Ability to Navigate Relationships within the Home Community*, the topics (a) connections within home community (b) identity formation (c) life after high school were discussed. The next section draws conclusions based on this discussion.

Conclusions

In this section, conclusions from the results of this study are reviewed and related back to the body of literature reviewed in Chapter Two. In Chapter Two, the literature related to the

cultural and social experiences of urban high school students attending schools outside of their communities was reviewed. This included a review of scholarship on the following topics (a) school segregation has a negative impact on students who identify as people of color (b) magnet schools and school choice disproportionately benefit some students and not others (c) students of color at PWIs experiences a range of negative experiences that require navigational capital. This section is organized like Chapter Two and includes conclusions related to each of these bodies of scholarship. In each section, the conclusions are linked to the theoretical framework provided by Critical Race Theory, and the theoretical rationale provided by Yosso's (2005) concept of *navigational capital.* This section ends with a brief summary.

Conclusions Related to Segregation, Integration, and Desegregation

According to the existing literature there have been issues with school segregation, integration, and desegregation since the Reconstruction era (Hannah-Jones, 2019). The initial policies, which created restrictions on Black and white students attending school together, were contested throughout the Civil Rights Movement with varied levels of success. Integration efforts were met with resistance by white families who often transferred their children to other schools and both local and federal governments who showed a lack of commitment to creating diverse and equitable schools (Woodward, 2011). This study also found that segregation negatively impacted Black students. The participants in this study perceived the segregated public schools in their home communities as wanting in academic rigor. In the predominantly white private schools they attended outside these communities, the participants sometimes experienced hostile and unwelcoming environments as well feelings of not belonging or being *othered* (Miriam et al., 2018).

Related to this, the literature also revealed that one of the main reasons segregation exists is because of the power that white parents hold over the options for their children, while parents of color have little influence over local school decisions (McNeal, 2009). Historically, when students of color were bused to schools outside of their neighborhood, it was seen as an opportunity to pursue a better education. The findings from my study confirm this because the participants and their families viewed private schools outside their home communities as more rigorous, and more desirable, academic environments. For this reason, they pursued alternative schooling options through scholarships or by attending less expensive private schools. However, they did encounter challenges and inconveniences, such as long commutes, feelings of isolation, and difficulty in acquiring the background knowledge and experience that facilitated the academic success of their White and more affluent peers.

According to Yosso (2005) navigational capital is required for people of color to successfully maneuver "through social institutions… not created with Communities of Color in mind" (p. 80). The challenges mentioned above required the participants to engage their *navigational capital*. Carmen either had not yet developed this type of capital, or was unwilling to engage it because it felt like a cultural compromise. Over time, she gained a willingness to develop and engage her navigational capital because several teachers helped her to see that she could navigate the school without compromising her own identity. Describing this process, Carmen remembered a teacher telling her,

> You're trying to find yourself and that's okay. But who you are isn't defined by your geography. It's who you want to be. Once you figure that out, then you figure out ways to honor the other parts of yourself and incorporate those into your life.

In contrast, Harry was able to rely on his existing navigational capital, which allowed him to maneuver his new school environment successfully.

Harry used social cues and the ability to participate meaningfully in class discussion, in order to both mask and build his background knowledge. Explaining this, Harry stated:

> I was really good at, if the homework was to read chapter 2 and 3, I'd be like alright, I'll look at the Cliffnotes or Sparknotes or ask my buddy who reads everything, "What'd I miss in this and this?" And then during the class discussion, as long as I'm not the first one to answer a basic plot question, I can pick up on queues that other people are answering questions with to make it seem like, alright let me get that one question answered and I'll be fine. I'd put my hand up to answer that question instead of the teacher, who's already assuming I didn't read, waiting to pick on me, I'll pick my question and offer myself up.

Evidence from this study indicates that there is reason to acknowledge and celebrate the inherent strengths and cultural wealth of the participants who were able to engage and/or develop navigational capital in order to maneuver successfully through the PWIs they attended outside their home communities.

Conclusions Related to Magnet Schools and School Choice

Related to this, the existing literature demonstrates that magnet schools and school choice disproportionately benefits white students. This is because students who identify as White and/or come from affluent families, do not often attend their local neighborhood schools. This leaves behind a segregated public school student population composed mainly of students of color and students from low-income families. The findings from my study confirm this

literature. Each of the participants described their neighborhood public school as highly segregated and low-performing. For these reasons, the participants's parents went to great lengths to avoid their public school options.

However, by avoiding the segregated public schools system, the participants attended schools that were not designed with people of color in mind (Yosso, 2005). Being in this type of setting required the participants to engage and/or develop their navigational capital. CRT provides a framework for understanding this scenario. According to Yosso, CRT is "a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses" (p. 74). Race and racism clearly impacted both the participants in this study, the public schools in their communities, and the elite private schools they attended outside their communities. Evidence from this study suggests that public and private educational institutions clearly have more work to do in order to create less segregated and more equitable educational opportunities and spaces.

Conclusions Related to Students of Color at PWIs

Finally, the existing literature illustrates a range of student experiences among students of color at PWIs. These include (a) literature that demonstrated that students of color benefit from affinity groups (Oto and Chikkatur, 2019), (b) research that addressed feelings of isolation among students of color in PWIs, as well as the difficulty students of color report when defending themselves against accusations of *acting white*, (Bergin & Cooks, 2002), (c) a study analyzing teacher perceptions of students of color at predominantly white independent schools (Schneider & Shouse, 1992). The findings from my study confirm the existing literature and the participants' shared experiences related to each of these topics.

In relation to the benefit from affinity groups, Carmen's reflection illustrates what can happen in the absence of an affinity group. Because Carmen was unable to connect with the other Latinas at her school, she began to explore her Salvadorian culture outside of school. She needed a space to analyze the construct of race, and to analyze the role race played within their entire school community (Oto and Chikkatur, 2019). Carmen found this in her interactions with her grandmother, and later as she began La Raza classes at college that allowed her to explore her identity with other college students from her neighborhood. If she had been afforded this opportunity at her high school, she may have experienced less difficulty developing and engaging her navigational capital.

On the topic of isolation among students of color in PWIs and the difficulty of defending themselves against accusations of *acting white*, (Bergin & Cooks, 2002), Carmen shared that when her friends in eighth grade learned that she had been accepted at a PWI, they immediately assumed that she would become whitewashed - a fear that Carmen carried with her. Similarly, while Harry described his school as very accepting and did not discuss accusations of *acting white*, he did express concern for what would have happened to him at the local, predominantly Black public school he would have attended. Because he was focused on academics, it may be that Harry feared that his public school peers would have accused him of *acting white.* Understanding experiences such as these, and how they require navigational capital, can be understood through a CRT lens that interrogates the impact of race and racism on educational structures, practices, and discourses (Yosso, 2005, p. 74).

Finally, related to analyzing teacher perceptions of students of color at PWIs, Carmen shared that both her classmates and teachers assumed that she was in a gang because she was a

Latina from a particular neighborhood. This is an example of the phenomenon explored by Schneider and Shouse (1992). In this study the authors found that students in PWIs who identified as people of color felt less favored by their teachers and felt like they did not belong in their school communities. This was true for Carmen. She felt that she did not belong in her school communities because many of her teachers and peers allowed stereotypes to inform their perceptions of her. This type of experience is why it is important to employ a CRT lens when exploring the experiences of people of color who attend schools outside their home communities. Because PWIs are designed without people of color in mind, it is necessary to employ "a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses" (Yosso, 2005, p. 74).

Summary

In this conclusions section, the results of this study were reviewed and related back to the existing body of literature. In summary, evidence from this study suggests that (a) school segregation continues to have a negative impact on students who identify as people of color (b) magnet schools and school choice disproportionately benefit affluent students and students who identify as white (c) students of color at PWIs are susceptible to a range of negative experiences that require them to to develop and engage navigational capital. These conclusions are important because they reflect the challenges that students of color face in accessing a quality, affordable high school education within a system that was not created with them in mind (Yosso, 2005).

Recommendations

In this section, I make evidence-based recommendations for educational practices and actions related to creating educational environments that challenge "the ways race and racism

impact educational structures, practices, and discourses," as well as recommendations for future research on ways in which public and private schools can be more diverse, equitable, and accessible for all US students (Yosso, 2005, p. 74). Recommendations for educational practices and actions include (a) transfer programs and affinity groups for new students (b) increased cultural and religious awareness (c) professional development opportunities for school faculty and staff related to cultural diversity and acceptance within school systems. Recommendations for future research include (a) interviews with students of color who attended magnet schools (b) a focus on students who participate in scholarship programs or culturally diverse private schools (c) investigating the impact of schools with a variety of opportunities for expressing, valuing, and validating (d) understanding the experiences of students who live in neighborhoods experiencing gentrification. Following this, the chapter ends with a brief conclusion of this thesis as a whole.

Recommendations Based on the Findings of This Study

Recommendations for educational practices and actions include (a) transfer programs and affinity groups for new students (b) increased cultural and religious awareness (c) professional development opportunities for school faculty and staff related to cultural diversity and acceptance within school systems. Related to transfer programs and focus groups for new students, I recommend the implementation of programs that will assist incoming students - particularly students of color - with their transition into a new school. This might include assigning an adult or peer mentor who is also a person of color and can serve as a guide to incoming students as they familiarize themselves with what may be more rigorous academic standards and a new school culture. This may also be facilitated by affinity groups for students

of color to share their experiences, celebrate their culture, and learn more about their cultural identities. Similarly, I recommend schoolwide observances of holidays from a variety of cultures as well as protected spaces for students to observe religious practices such as prayer.

Finally, related to conversations on the topics of race and racism and their impact on educational structures, practices, and discourses, I recommend regular professional development for all school faculty and staff (Yosso, 2005, p. 74). During these sessions, adult members of school communities might learn to engage in and facilitate dialogue in spaces that allow participants to be brave, as this "is foundational to diversity and social justice learning activities" (Arao & Clemens, 2013, p. 135). This may help to build a community of welcoming and acceptance through the recognition and validation of a diverse set of cultures, languages, religions, and identities. This may also result in implementing culturally relevant pedagogies, disciplinary practices, and school policies. In addition to these recommendations, the following section described an additional set of recommendations, for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research include (a) interviews with students of color who attended magnet schools (b) a focus on students who participate in scholarship programs or culturally diverse private schools (c) investigating the impact of schools with a variety of opportunities for expressing, valuing, and validating (d) understanding the experiences of students who live in neighborhoods experiencing gentrification. Related to students of color who attended magnet schools, I recommend exploring their process of gaining admission to such schools and experiences within the school, particularly those experiences related to the use of navigational capital. Related to students who participate in scholarship programs, I recommend

research focused on the academic and social experiences of scholarship students in elite schools, their feelings of acceptance or rejection within the community, and their use or development of navigational capital.

Similarly, related to students who attend culturally diverse private schools, I recommend identifying the successful practices that create affirming, inclusive, brave spaces. Finally, related to students who live in neighborhoods experiencing gentrification, I recommend identifying the experiences of low-income youth whose home community is changing and the effects that process has on their cultural identity. Similar to this study, a study of the impact of gentrification on students who identify as people of color would benefit from the use of a CRT lens. These types of research may extend the existing literature by continuing to explore the experiences of students of color attending schools outside of their neighborhood and in predominantly white spaces and creating systems that promote and celebrate student diversity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, systems of education in the US continue to be founded on and influenced by racist policies and ideologies. Schools disproportionately promote the success of affluent and white students, while penalizing students of color and low-income students. While efforts like busing, school choice, and scholarship opportunities have attempted to create more equal access to education, they have not been successful. Even when students of color access elite schooling options, they remain at a disadvantage due to the cultural differences and expectations of their institutions. These students are required to do the added work of developing and engaging navigational capital in order to succeed in academic environments that privilege their white and more affluent peers. They do this while trying to maintain relationships with their own culture

and local community, a process that also requires the use of navigational capital. Though students may benefit from learning to navigate multiple communities and cultural norms, it is often a difficult and isolating process. More effort needs to be made within public school systems in order to provide equitable and accessible education to all students, reducing the need for students to travel outside their home communities in search of high quality, rigorous, academic opportunities.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORMS

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study entitled An Exploration of the Cultural and Social Effects on Urban High School Students Attending Schools Outside of their Communities conducted by Kerrin McKenney, a Masters student in the Department of International and Multicultural Education at the University of San Francisco. The faculty supervisor for this study is Professor Colette Cann, a professor at the University of San Francisco.

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:

The purpose of this research study is to look into the ways in which high school students' experiences are shaped by their environment and the experience of students attending high school outside of their neighborhood communities.

WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:

During this study, the following will happen: I will ask you questions from the list provided to you and ask that you share information and experiences from your time in high school. I will record the audio of our conversation and transcribe it at a later date.

DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:

Your participation in this study will involve one session that lasts about one hour. The study will take place at a convenient location somewhere in the San Francisco Bay Area.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:

The risks associated with this study are a loss of your time and the risks associated with regular activities. The benefit of the study is that it may add to the research on the field of education and international/multicultural issues. This information, once collected, might be read by policymakers, educational experts, educators and scholars and could affect educational practice. If you do not want to participate in the study, you will not be mentioned in any documents of the study, and your decision to not participate will not be told to anyone. You may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty. If you are upset by any of the questions asked, the researcher will refer you to counseling services available publicly or at the university if you are a member of the academic community (student, staff or professor).

PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:

Any data you provide in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In any report published, no information will be included that will make it possible to identify you or any individual participant. Specifically, all information will be stored on a password-protected computer and any printouts in a locked file cabinet. Consent forms and any other identifiable data will be destroyed in 2 years from the date of data collection.

COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:

There is no payment or other form of compensation for your participation in this study.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits. Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:

Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: Kerrin McKenney at XXX-XXX-XXXX or kmckenney@dons.usfca.edu or mckenneykerrin@gmail.com. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at IRBPHS@usfca.edu.

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE ***DATE***

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date:
Time:
Location:
Name of person interviewed:

- ❑ Informed consent form signed
- ❑ Participant rights form signed

Pre-Interview Protocol for Researcher:

- Recruitment: Set up a time that is convenient for prospective participant to speak about the project. Be mindful and accessible. Be present and build a relationship with the individuals asked to be participants of project. Talk about project and be transparent about my interest in learning more from them and ask if they would be willing to be a part of the project. Share more of my background and motive in doing the project.
- Arrive at location for interview on time
- Bring audio recorder and interview protocol.

Script:

- Set up a time that is convenient to prospective participant to speak in-person, preferably. Provide consent form and participants rights form to participant(s). Be mindful and accessible.
- Go over consent form and participants rights form. Make sure all forms are signed and approved by department beforehand.

Thank you again for your time and for agreeing to participate in this research with me. The purpose of the research is to learn more about different high school experiences in urban areas and the connection between community, belonging, and academic experiences. The purpose of this interview is for you to share your own high school experience in order to add more first-hand accounts to this research.

Before we begin, I would like to go over important information regarding consent and your right as a participant in this project. This information may help educators and policy makers improve academic conditions. Your name will be changed whenever mentioned in the study in order to protect your identity and privacy. If at any time you change your mind about wanting to be included in the study, you are welcome to tell me and you will not be included. If any of the questions are uncomfortable or you would prefer not to answer that is also fine. Please take a moment to look over both forms and confirm that you would like to participate and that you consent to being audio recorded for the purpose of this project. Please remember, that you are allowed to withdraw from this project at any time with no negative consequences to you. Do I have your permission to move forward?

Give the participant a signed copy of the consent form and the participant rights form.

For interviewer use only:

Restatement of the research questions:
What are the social and cultural effects on urban high school students attending schools outside of their community?

Interview questions:
Research Question 1 (*provided for interviewer use only*): What are the social, cultural, and educational effects on students attending schools outside of their neighborhood/community?

- Related Interview questions to ask:
    - Please describe the high school you attended including size, demographics, and proximity to your home community.
    - Please describe the impact of attending school outside your home community.
    - What effect did attending school outside your home community have on
        - Your social life?
        - Your cultural identity?
        - Your education?

Research Question 2 (*provided for interviewer use only*): Why do students of color and their families choose to attend schools outside their neighborhood?

- Related Interview questions to ask:
    - Why did you/your parents decide to send you to school outside your neighborhood?
    - How did you feel about this decision?

Research Question 3 (*provided for interviewer use only*) : How does attending a school outside one's neighborhood affect one's ability to navigate relationships in one's community?

- Related Interview questions to ask:
    - Please describe your relationship to your community before, during, and after attending school outside your home neighborhood.
    - Please describe your relationships with people in your community before, during, and after attending school outside your home neighborhood.
    - Please describe your school community, particularly in comparison to your neighborhood/local community.
    - Looking back as an adult, how do you think attending a school outside of your local community affected your relationship with that community?

Possible prompts/Follow-up Questions

- Did you attend a public or private high school?
- Was this school considered to be “local” or close to where you grew up/were living at the time?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW EXPLICATION

Research Question 1: What are social, cultural, educational effects of students attending schools outside of their neighborhood/community?

Theme: Racial consciousness

Units of meaning: In-group relationships

- Genesis Cruz
    - For whatever reason, people like stuck with their ethnic groups and so I definitely hung out with a lot of Filipinas. And it's funny because in my neighborhood it's mostly Filipino. And in my youth group: mostly Filipino. In my dance group: mostly Filipino. It might just be like a [city] thing where like, because it's where we all grew up, like this is very much so our community and so in school like I definitely was known to be a part of the Filipino group**…** And I of course found myself hanging out with other people and like still interacting with like other classmates of different cultures, but like in terms of people that I was with all the time that were people that like were my solid group of friends, they all were Filipino…
- Harry Williams
    - I remember in my head being like, "I don't have to hang out with you just because we're both Black." But like, we are friends, you are my best friend, but I want to also get to know everyone else too. But he was just excited because he had been in this school for five years already and he was the only Black kid…I was tight with my friends that looked like me
- Carmen Carcamo
    - At first I wanted to just hang out with the Latina girls at the school, but I found out quickly that I didn't have that much in common with them… A lot of them were kind of what we would call the richer Latina who were from the [neighborhood], their parents owned their homes, you know which was not my reality… and a lot of them didn't speak Spanish. So culturally speaking, I didn't identify with them…

Units of meaning: Out-group relationships

- Genesis Cruz
    - I tried to like, if I had other friends, just bring them into the group, but then it would just naturally go where they wouldn't feel like they belonged. And that

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includes my church group and things like that. People entered in and they're like "whoa there so many Filipinos here" and they feel left out

- Carmen Carcamo
    - I would introduce my friends to Salvadorian food, mainly pupusas of course because a lot of them had never had one! And I would like to tell them about famous authors that my grandmother had talked to me about that we weren't studying in school, little things like that…
- Harry Williams
    - Culturally, it did kind of, like took on - not necessarily the token because there were plenty of us African American [and] minorities at the school where it wasn't literally just one - there was this sense of like, that's who I am. Culturally I am the Black kid among my group of friends… I mean it was impossible not to have friends outside of the three other Black guys that were in my grade

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Units of meaning: Interactions with teachers

- Carmen Carcamo
    - They felt sorry for me because I came from a very poor neighborhood or they were like "she is gonna be… she's gonna raise hell, she's gonna be talkative in class, she's gonna be disruptive… My dean could tell that I was having a really hard time adjusting. He was a very loving human being and was like "you have so much potential, you don't need to be getting in trouble for really stupid things." So you know, he took it upon himself to really help me out with staying focused and not getting in trouble. … And then my religion teacher… [would] take me aside and be like "you're trying to find yourself and that's okay. But who you are isn't defined by your geography. It's who you want to be. Once you figure that out, then you figure out ways to honor the other parts of yourself and incorporate those into your life."
- Harry Williams
    - I don't think there was as much attention paid to helping me along and to get accustomed to that more rigorous academic work. Cause I could do all my schoolwork with my eyes blindfolded at the other school. This school was much more intense and I think one of the first things where I was kind of set off at a disadvantage was like, we'd be in history class talking about whatever topic we're on and the teacher would say "and you guys all remember the Greek gods, you

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know, god of this, god of that…" and I'm like… we weren't studying that shit in 4th grade at [my old elementary school]. … I think that was a smaller piece of the bigger thing around them not really looking at some students like me and saying "okay, maybe we have to be a little bit more deliberate about some things.

Summary statements:

- As some of the participants identified, being aware of the diversity - or lack thereof - in their schools led to developing a consciousness of race.
- Both Carmen and Harry felt that they were at a disadvantage because of their racial identity, and where they came from prior to attending their new schools.
- For all three participants, gravitating towards peers of the same racial or cultural identity was sometimes easier, but the participants also maintained friendships with members of other racial and cultural groups.

Composite summary statement:

- When in the other groups, the participants were very aware of the ways in which they were different or were perceived by their peers, leading to experiences of being *othered.*

Theme II: Being *othered*

Units of meaning: Wealth disparity

- Harry Williams
    - I very quickly realized the difference between where I lived and like where some of my friends lived**…** Like going to some of these houses and seeing how different they lived versus me… Because I grew up in the inner city, row houses, 20ft by10ft yard, if you wanna call it that, nothing you'd ever play anything in… then to yards where there was landscaping, there's people working around **...** But initially the cultural impact, I think was like "wow, this is what rich white people are like. And this is what it's like to… they just live this way." And I think having that exposure at a young age allowed me to understand that people, just because they grow up a certain way or come from a different culture, isn't a bad thing, it's just different.

- Genesis Cruz

    - One time freshman year I was invited to a friend's house but it was all the way in like [neighborhood] and I'd never been there before. Almost near [landmark] like that kind of area and I was like “oh my God this is so far.” And it was like these huge houses that I've never been inside of, I’m like “oh my God like what is this world?!” And it was kind of like a culture shock to me because, coming from [her city] like we're not that rich over there, you know?! So like when I saw a rich person’s house I was like “oh my god. This is cool!”

Units of meaning: Neighborhood shame

- Harry Williams
    - There was some shame on my part like where I’d go to my friend’s houses and see these insane houses with these nice cars in the driveways and I’m like, my family doesn’t own a car and our house is this fucking hundred year old row house. I was embarrassed to invite friends over because of the neighborhood, because of what our house looked like compared to theirs, the fact that if we wanted to go get ice cream or something, like we're getting on the bus cause we don't have a car and all that.
- Carmen Carcamo
    - I was really resentful of my neighborhood for a while. I hated that I couldn’t hang out outside while I was a kid and then later as a teenager, my parents being so strict, and it’s always because the neighborhood is so dangerous and you need to be careful of who you’re hanging out with and whatever… once I was in college, I think that's sort of when I started to appreciate the neighborhood I lived in. I started taking La Raza literature classes at [college] and sort of started to see the art that was in my neighborhood and really appreciate how alive the Central American culture was there, but again it was kind of masked by the problems that my brother was having with his life and his involvement in that life. And then of course then, my shift was like “I want to do something to make my community proud of myself.”

Units of meaning: Access to school

- Harry Williams

    - I would either take a bus to another bus or I would walk and in my senior year I found out that I could take a bus to the train station that was about a mile away from the school and they had a shuttle that would take kids getting off the train down the road to the school, which was funny because it was like the shuttle for kids getting off the train, but the train was coming from the further out suburbs so there was no real intent on how to get kids from my community there.
- Genesis Cruz
    - When my sister was entering her freshman year going into [school], her, my mom, and I were like “okay you need to learn how to take the bus.” My mom was like “we're going to take the [bus] from our house in [city] and we're going to take it all the way to [the mall] because, what happens if” - cause my mom is a single parent - and like what happens if she has work, we don’t have any rides and we have to take the bus Then we got onto the bus, the three of us, and it took us an hour to get to school. One way. And then we walked around a little and when we finished we got back onto the bus, took it back to our house and it took another hour. So, commuting time was like 2 hours total and I just remember my mom being like “I do not want you to do this. I do not want you taking the bus for that long.”

Summary statements:

- As each of the participants became aware of the wealth disparity between their own families and their peers’ families, they understood that they were excluded from their peer group by factors such as geography and income disparity.
- This sometimes caused them to resent their own homes or communities, feelings that their more affluent, White-identified peers likely did not experience.

Composite summary statement:

- These examples illustrate experiences being *othered.*

Research Question 2: Why do students of color and families choose to attend school outside the neighborhood?

Theme I: Academics and reputation

Units of meaning: Academic focus

- Harry Williams
    - I remember when I visited in 4th grade before I actually came, the thing that shocked me more than anything else - other than there being a ton of white people - the thing that shocked me more than anything else was the fact that the teacher got up, said “alright class, let’s get ready” and it was like, you could hear a pin drop within a second. And I was like, “what the hell, okay, that's pretty cool.”

Units of meaning: Reputation

- Genesis Cruz
    - 10 of my other classmates - all of us went to [school]. So most people, if they went to a private school, they went to [school] (if they were a girl), [references all boys school in city], and only a few people went to like [references elite Catholic schools in city] … all of us were just like “oh my God like [her school] is the high school to go to” and then like years after us it continues to be that all of the students from our grade schools always go to [her school]. So it was a common thing... from similar conversations that people have had with their parents that my friends and I talk about like the reason why they all sent us to private school was, again, so that we can get a good education or a better education. I mean we couldn’t afford to go to like the top top top Catholic schools, but just enough where we still had some sort of prestige… I think because none of us had enough money to go to anywhere else that was more expensive and more prestigious… our family at least had the means to go to a private school and [school] was kind of like the lower-end like in terms of price

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Summary statements:

- Harry recognized the respect within the classroom that allowed for organized and focused classes

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- Both of the participants recognized that the value of their schools was based, in part, on the schools' academic reputation.

Composite summary statement:

- This had a positive influence on their decision to attend school outside their home community.

Theme II: Avoiding public school option

Units of meaning: Avoiding environment with drugs and violence

- Harry Williams
    - It just felt so much to me like those [public] schools were where you're just mixed in with all the riff raff, like kids that sell drugs and do all that crap. Like, it took me a little while to understand that that did still exist where I did go to school and that, you know, that's a whole other layer of like white collar issues and the issues that kids who come from families with a lot of money have, as opposed to kids where I'm from who don't have a lot of money. At the end of the day, it's a lot of the same stuff, but just it looks very different… I felt like I had this opportunity to go to a better school, and if I didn't have this opportunity, I don't know how I would fit in. I was a tiny-ass kid, would I get beat up by these drug dealers and angry kids that don't have this worldly view?

Units of meaning: Parental belief that public schools are inferior

- Harry Williams
    - There was another school, which I'm like ninety nine percent sure it was public, but it was for gifted students… So I know that would've been their other option. [My parents would've thought] "If it's gonna be a public school, let's try to get one of the public schools that actually selects kids." So it would've been a different experience….
- Genesis Cruz
    - This is how I interpreted the reason why we went to private school: Because public schools were inferior. I think for [my mom] growing up in the Philippines… they also had like Catholic private institutions very similar to how we have it here. And so my mom always thought "I have to send them to a private

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school because I'm paying for a higher education… that's why I'm paying. So that they can get the best education around." And my mom, as well as like many of the people in our community that send off their kids to private schools, they have this belief that the schools that they're paying for, especially if they're expensive, will already be more prestigious, but also will have better teachers, will have better… I don't think they think that they have better teachers or better curriculum, but I think [to my mom] because it costs something it must be better and it must be top education…

Summary statements:

- According to his recollection, Harry's parents viewed a school with a selective admissions process as superior to the neighborhood public schools.
- For Genesis, her mother's desire to avoid public schools was a result of her mother's own educational experience.

Composite summary statement:

- As illustrated by these quotes, both participants acknowledged the negative reputations of their local public schools and the reality that for their parents, public school was not an option.

Theme III: Opportunity and Expanded Worldview

Units of meaning:Opportunity that parents didn't have

- Harry Williams
    - We got into the school with [a scholarship program] … some lady, I think back in the 80s or 90s, endowed a scholarship so that kids from my ZIP code and the neighboring ZIP code were able to go to the school if they were smart enough, if they did well enough on this independent schools test, and they would cover up to 100% of the tuition, as much as was needed… my parents didn't go to college. I'm pretty sure they both graduated high school. My dad got a GED … I think for them it was the thinking of "we need to provide a better opportunity for our kids, put them in a better position to do better than we're doing or we did.... we need to give them a better path, we want them to go to college. We didn't go to college so we need to set them up for that." And this school was like 99% of people go to

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college… I think a lot of the idea was, like I said before, putting us in a good position to go to college, making sure that we were well-positioned with a good education for years down the road and just getting a little bit further away from [city], even though you were literally across the street from [city] with our school, it was such a bubble.

Units of meaning: Broadened worldview

- Carmen Carcamo
    - It taught me a lot about how to interact with people who are not part of my culture and who are not of the same race as me. … my father so pointedly said "Listen, you need to see the world outside of the [neighborhood], because the world in the [neighborhood], is not the greater picture, it's not the bigger picture." And he was 100% right.
- Harry Williams
    - It really gave me a broader perspective on the world in a sense where going to school in my community, I was around people that looked like me all the time, it was very homogeneous, I remember I always tell people I went from a school where there was like "the white kid" to being at a school where "I was the Black kid, or in the group of Black kids." So I think it definitely allowed me to, at a young age, see what the world looked like outside of my community and allowed me to interact, at a young age, with people that I didn't really have a lot of similarities with, at least on the surface.

Summary statements:

- His parents were intent on providing more opportunities for their children than they themselves had been afforded.
- According to Carmen, interacting with students and teachers, with different racial and cultural identities than her own, forced Carmen to learn about other cultures, connect with those who were different from her, and see the world beyond her predominantly Latino neighborhood.

Composite summary statement:

- Both participants acknowledged the ways in which their experience in high school prepared them for life outside of their neighborhood and aided in their ability to navigate the world as a whole.

Research Question 3: How does attending school outside neighborhood affect ability to navigate relationships in one's community?

Theme I: Relationship to home community

Units of meaning: Disconnect within community

- Carmen Carcamo
    - I sort of lost touch with [my old friends] and even when I got the acceptance letter to [her school], a lot of my friends were like “oh you're going to that white school” and then “you’re gonna become whitewashed.” That was always the comment. We’d get together every once in a while but always sort of, the commentary was how I was becoming white. … But I mean, I found out who my real friends were because most of the girls I hung out with in 8th grade, most of them I did not hang out with anymore … I was more into rock music. I don’t know why, but that was just my preference, and of course, rock is very much associated with white people. So that took some points off my “Latina-ness” if you wanna call it that.
- Harry Williams
    - There just became a point where I just didn’t interact with anybody [in the neighborhood]. And some of that happened before. So it was like, we were already kind of like in our little bubble in our house, but after I went to that school, it was like I really had no connection or tie to anybody**…** we started to isolate in some ways ourselves, but it definitely didn’t help being that you went to school elsewhere, because when you’re in school that’s your entire day. I didn’t have a job in the neighborhood or anything like that so there was not much interaction to begin with

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Units of meaning: Maintaining relationships within community

- Genesis Cruz
    - My social life would be mostly in [city] because it was so much easier just to get there and so much shorter… And in addition to that I was also, like, dancing and so my dance studio was also in [city]. So like everything in my life… I did a bunch of stuff outside of school. And it just helped that like all of the people that I hung out with were all at these places and I had responsibilities in, you know, my dance school and also I had responsibilities at my church group… I don't think

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my home life weakened or my community life weakened because I was at school or vice versa. My relationships at school didn’t lessen when I had really busy stuff

outside. I was always trying to balance it or I was always trying to please everyone [goes on to recognize the unhealthy nature of doing too much at once]

Summary statements:

- Carmen and Genesis were able to maintain connections through previous connections and their involvement in local activities
- Harry felt very little connection to his community even before transferring to the predominantly white school.

Composite summary statement:

- Maintaining relationships while splitting time between two communities proved challenging to all of the participants.

Theme II: Identity formation

Units of meaning: Cultural Identity

- Carmen Carcamo
    - I kept up with my Spanish … I made it a huge point to learn more about our history. My grandmother was such a huge part of that because I would come home and I would ask a question - cause she lived with us for a while - so I would ask her questions about how they got to this country and what were some traditions that we celebrated in El Salvador and to me, that was what I realized, that was the most important part. It wasn't to uphold these stereotypes that people had of Latinos from the [neighborhood], it was to truly know more about your culture and then figuring out a way to live it…

Units of meaning: Faith formation

- Genesis Cruz
    - There was a real obvious sense of women empowerment and feminism, which was really interesting because it was a Catholic school and I guess the assumption is like “oh yeah like women are like these minor roles in the church or like in the

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Bible and like they don't really matter,” but it was the first time that I saw like in a religious context that like women were in the forefront and we were making, you know, changes and we were being radical and we were like being active parts of

our communities and I felt like [school] had that school culture and it really made me proud to be a woman… it really shaped kind of like my faith in so many ways. More so in that it made me be concerned for other people. There was a really huge element of social justice at [school] in the curriculum, but also kind of like in the overall student activities or student life. Like there was always a charity to be informed about, there was always an issue that was being displayed and I felt hyper aware of the issues going on in the world. And it made me feel like I had a responsibility to contribute to my community, but also I felt like fired up to do something or make changes in the world.

- Harry Williams
    - It eventually did get to a point where I was like, a lot of the things they preach in Quakerism, I kinda like, like peacefulness and simplicity and service, and treating others the way you wanna be and all that mushy gushy stuff about being a good person basically.

Summary statements:

- Like Genesis, these ideas were not new to him. Rather, they reinforced what he already saw as important life lessons.
- Carmen felt it necessary to search outside her school community for experiences that validated her Latina identity

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Composite summary statement

- In these many ways, each participant identified experiences, either within or because of their high school community, that informed their identity formation, cultural connections, and values.

Theme III: Life after high school

Units of meaning: Transition to the real world

- Genesis Cruz
    - I slowly stopped dancing. From that point, I was still involved in church, but like I was getting prepared for college and it was a complete transition, creating my

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own life separate from my home community. And I felt like my senior year were the early stages of that. Because I knew that if I wanted to do something well, I had to not have 5 million things on my plate and if that meant saying no to things back at home, then I was willing to make that sacrifice… coming from my home

community where everyone knows each other, where everyone grew up together, where everyone is Filipino and has very similar stories and narratives, I felt like towards my senior year going into college I was on this new journey of creating my own path that was separate from the community that I had grown up in.

- Carmen Carcamo
    - So I feel like because of that [her father insisting she see the world outside the Mission], I was really ready to go to college because I had already spent four years kind of out of my comfort zone, so going to college felt kind of seamless after that.

Units of meaning: Identifying career paths

- Genesis Cruz
    - And I think that's where it helped me form the career that I eventually wanted because it was when I was at [school] that I decided to become a teacher. And it was like, I wanted to become a religion teacher and it was like so weird because like that's not really people's instant [thought] like "oh yeah, people want to become religion teachers! No!" It wasn't a conventional thing, but because of the environment, the classes, the teachers, and everything, it all led me to find out like whatever I felt like was my calling at the time… Essentially I wanted to go back there and teach there, but I'm doing all the things that I wanted to do when I was a junior in high school and all the things that I pictured for myself, it's things that I'm living out current day… I wouldn't have had those thoughts or like that career path or like that fire or passion for what I did if I didn't go to [school] Had I gone to like a different school, I probably would have been doing something else completely….
- Carmen Carcamo
    - "I want to do something to make my community proud of myself." And I think that was a big push for me in college because a lot of the friends that I still sort of talk to in the neighborhood, they were all going to college, too. So that started to unify us in this way that was like, "Okay so we need to get a degree and we need to come back here and we need to change the perception, change some of the bad things that are happening in this neighborhood, you know kind of take the

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neighborhood back. I think a lot of me wanting to become a teacher had to do with having to have a role model that looked like me, which is something that I never had growing up.

    - I feel tremendously blessed because I think so many of the conversations that I get to have with the students at [job] come back to what I learned in high school. Where a lot of our students are feeling like… you know they go to a corporate job and they're like, they're the only person of color there. And helping them and guiding them and helping them understand that this is also an important part that you need to learn in life if you want to survive and if you want to be successful. So having lived it and then now being in a position where I can give advice to it, I think is a huge blessing… it was never by design that I went to work at [job]. I never in a million years thought that I'd go work there. And that's why I knew how much I missed my neighborhood because when I stepped into the doors there it felt like home and I was like, I'm actually going to get to do what I've always wanted to do. I think I needed to have lived through the whole thing with [school] in order to really kind of answer that mission that I'm doing now.
- Harry Williams
    - That was their thing, they always put us in these weekend programs and that was how I originally got into sports, which ended up shaping my whole life… It was always basketball this or sports this, they always just wanted us to be busy with stuff so we wouldn't just hang around and I think that was my dad's biggest fear: that we would become these juvenile delinquent criminals that they couldn't control and all that. We were the furthest thing from that, and maybe because of some of the stuff that they did.

Summary statements:

- While Genesis described this process as letting go of many connections to her home community, Carmen experienced it as an extension of the transition she made by attending a high school outside of her home community.
- The school experiences of these three participants paved the way for their future careers.

Composite summary statement:

- Through activities in the community, experiences at school, and exposure to the values of those who cared for and mentored them, each of the participants articulated a connection between high school and their current profession.