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RESILIENCE THROUGH ADVERSITY:
A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF EXPULSION
FROM SCHOOL

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Nadia Coleman Krivenkov
March 2013
Director: Susan Korach, Ed.D.

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Title: RESILIENCE THROUGH ADVERSITY: A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF EXPULSION FROM SCHOOL

Advisor: Susan Korach, Ed.D.

Degree Date: March 2013

Abstract

Expulsion from school is life changing. This single event can alter the trajectory of a student's life—for better or for worse. How life changes is unique for each individual student. Risk and protective factors that impact an individual student's resilience determine the level of positive or negative outcomes experienced as a result of expulsion. Educators have the opportunity to take advantage of this disruption in students' education to improve the trajectory of students' lives. However, without thoughtful intervention from caring educators, this interruption in students' education may have an irreparable destructive impact on students' future.

The purpose of this study was to understand the expulsion experience from the point of view of the student in order to represent this critical stakeholder group in future policy and program development, implementation, and decision-making. Students' narratives are a means for members of the educational community to access students' experiences and perceptions in order to understand the impact of expulsion on students' lives. Students' perspectives are presented through thick description in this narrative case study.

The experience of these eight students is evidence that expulsion can change students' lives in a positive way. Knowing this, responsible educators must develop

interventions for expelled students that channel the positive life-changing potential of this experience. Educators must develop interventions focused on bringing forth protective factors that are documented to increase resilience and to make students less susceptible to the risks inherent in removing them from school. Recommendations for educators and policy-makers are presented to assist educators in preventing expulsion and improving educational and socio-emotional outcomes for expelled students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

Expulsion from school is life changing. Along with no longer attending school, expulsion has many additional consequences. Serious negative consequences of expulsion have been documented over the past several decades. Students who have been expelled from school have lower grades and show poorer achievement on standardized tests than do their peers (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Morrison & D’Incau, 2000; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Expelled students also graduate from high school at lower rates than do their peers (DeRidder, 1991; Morrison & D’Incau, 2000; Schwartz, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Expelled students may also have a lack of access to appropriate educational alternatives (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Burns, 1996; Christensen, 2003; Massachusetts Department of Education, 1998; Morrison & D’Incau, 2000). Exclusion from school has been documented to lead to long term social exclusion (Ball, Maguire, & Macrae, 2000; Maguire & Milbourne, 2003) and increased involvement in illegal activity (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1994; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Excluded students also experience increased mental, physical, and emotional problems (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000). Since expulsion has a large effect on a student’s day-to-day life and

has many negative consequences for expelled students, closer examination of students' expulsion experiences is warranted.

Background

Expulsion not only has a profoundly personal impact on students, but it is also a highly politicized practice related to several high-profile issues in education. The discipline gap and overrepresentation of certain student groups in exclusionary discipline are directly linked to student expulsion. Expulsion from school, the discipline gap, and overrepresentation over certain student groups have implications for educational equity, specifically the achievement gap. The politics of expulsion, primarily fueled by concerns regarding school safety and the popularity of zero-tolerance policies, are also directly related to equity issues and student achievement. This study explored the links and relationships between these topics: how expulsion from school is impacted by these areas and how expulsion from school impacts these areas.

Educational equity and the achievement gap.

In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), the Supreme Court laid the legal foundation for educational equity for all Americans. Both before and since the landmark *Brown* ruling, a plethora of lesser-known educational rights cases have protected and expanded the educational rights of all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, language, gender, or disability (*Davis v. Monroe County School District*, 1999; *Gebser v. Lago Vista Independent School District*, 1998; *Guey Heung Lee v. Johnson*, 1971; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974; *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 1923; *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*, 1950; *Sweatt v. Painter*, 1950).

Despite the work of educators over the past decades to provide all children with a quality education, an academic achievement gap exists between White students and their Black peers (Lucas, 2000; Olszewski-Kubilius, Lee, Ngoi, M., & Ngoi, D., 2004). Although the achievement gap between Black and White students is most well known and widely documented, an achievement gap also exists between White students and students of most other minority groups. This has been well documented on almost every measure of achievement (Olszewski-Kubilius, Lee, Ngoi, M., & Ngoi, D., 2004). Despite the extensive research on the achievement gap and the numerous initiatives aimed at closing the gap, educators have made little headway in reducing the gap (Kulm, 2007), and it still exists on a national scale (Roach, 2001; Williams, 2011).

Since the passing of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation in 2002, policymakers and educators have focused on improving achievement of low-performing student groups, including Black, Latino, and Native American students, students with limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities (Hoff, 2006; Seed, 2008). Educators have focused on identifying and utilizing best practices with the goal of 100% proficiency by the year 2014 (Williams, 2011). Educational policies and practices, from the individual classroom level to the national level, have been overhauled with the goal of closing this academic achievement gap (Seed, 2008). Thus, promoting equity among all student groups has become a moral and legal imperative for all educators.

Effects of the discipline gap.

Marrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong, & Morrison (2001), Arcia (2006) and Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) documented that inequities in disciplinary

procedures, commonly called the discipline gap, impact the academic achievement gap. Therefore, in hopes of helping to close the achievement gap, school exclusion practices have come into question on national, state, and district levels. Understanding and preventing school exclusion is critical in closing the achievement gap, because research has indicated that school exclusion is linked to low student achievement (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Students who have been expelled from school dropout at significantly higher rates than do their peers and are more likely to drop out, the longer the term of their expulsion (Marrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong, & Morrison, 2001). Low-achieving students are more likely to be suspended from school, and in turn, increased suspension leads to lower academic achievement (Arcia, 2006). Furthermore, Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1997) and Greenwood, Horton, and Utley (2002) found that the amount of time engaged in an academic setting is one of the strongest predictors of students' achievement. Thus, keeping students in school through fewer expulsions and shorter expulsion terms is a prerequisite for increasing student achievement and closing the achievement gap.

Politics of expulsion.

While issues related to educational equity and closing the achievement gap frame one end of the politics of expulsion, concerns about school safety frame the other end of the debate. Just as concerns about equity and the achievement gap have come to the forefront over the past three decades, concerns about school safety have also come to the forefront in the media, lawmaking, policy-making, and the courts (Gonzales, 2002). A heated debate has emerged regarding best practices for keeping schools safe. Schools

have become the focal point of a fierce debate over safety of both students and staff (Christensen, 2003).

Since the 1990s, dozens of school shootings in communities of all types have caused increased focus on keeping weapons out of schools (Gold & Chamberlin, 1996). The overwhelming media coverage galvanized public opinion in favor of zero-tolerance policies, which dictate harsh and mandatory penalties for students who bring weapons to school (Casella, 2001). In the wake of this highly publicized issue, lawmakers did not want to appear soft on crime or violence and passed laws across the country (Ashford, 2000). The national war on drugs over the previous four decades also brought increased attention on drugs in the public schools and has contributed to school drug and alcohol policies becoming increasingly strict, both in the definition of offenses and in the punishment of policy violation (Gonzales, 2002). The debate was brought to the national level when the National Panel on Goals declared that, by the year 2000, every school in the nation would be free of drugs, alcohol, violence, and the presence of firearms, and would provide a disciplined environment conducive to learning (Gold & Chamberlin, 1996).

School exclusion through zero-tolerance policies.

Often the school safety debate surrounds removing from school those students who are deemed dangerous or harmful to the school environment through suspension or expulsion. While both suspension and expulsion are used as punishment through exclusion from school, expulsion is a substantially more serious punishment than suspension. Suspension is a mandatory leave, which can last from one to ten days, during

which time the student cannot attend regular school. Expulsion is an involuntary withdrawal from school for a period of 10 days to over a year (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). Expulsion acts as the final separation between the school and the student.

One increasingly common method of regulating weapons and drugs in school are zero-tolerance policies (Casella, 2001). Zero-tolerance policies are policies that punish any rule infraction, regardless of circumstances or intentionality. Rice (2000, p. 556) defines zero-tolerance policies stating:

Zero-tolerance policies specify which conduct is unacceptable at school and the consequences that will follow for those who engage in the proscribed conduct; as suggested by their name, the zero-tolerance policies allow for no exceptions, compromise, or discretion.

One major component of these policies is automatic suspension and expulsion of students who violate these policies (James & Freeze, 2006). Legal battles over the appropriateness and legality of these policies, as well as controversy in the public media, have also ensued (Adams, 2009; Harris, 2000). Proponents of zero-tolerance policies argue that these policies prevent drug abuse and violence in schools, while critics argue that these policies often result in consequences that are unfair and overly severe (Noguera, 1995; Scringi, 2008).

Today zero tolerance suspensions and expulsions account for a high, and growing, percentage of school exclusions (Rice, 2009). Educators have brought into focus the contradiction of practicing zero tolerance policies in inclusive schools. Rice (p. 557) states:

In short, we in U.S. society find ourselves at a historical juncture where schools are implementing zero tolerance policies and – at the same time – also trying to promote tolerance, typically across differences such as race, class, culture, ability,

and religion. Both these efforts respond to deeply held and serious concerns. But depending on the particulars of the schools and policies involved, these efforts are often in tension, if not conflict.

James and Freeze (2006, p. 581) echo this sentiment:

The policy of inclusive schools for all is contradicted and undermined by the practice of zero tolerance policies, especially suspensions, expulsions, and segregation. Therefore, inclusion and zero tolerance are not complementary, but rather mutually exclusive, both in terms of rhetoric and implementation.

Overrepresentation in exclusionary discipline.

The overrepresentation of racial and ethnic minority students in exclusionary discipline is neither new nor limited to specific states or regions of the country. It has been documented that minority students, particularly Black males, have been overrepresented in exclusionary discipline as early as 1975 (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). Across the nation, Black students tend to be suspended at much higher rates than students of other ethnicities and races (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Hoffman, Llagas, & Snyder, 2003; Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). Unlike other racial and ethnic groups, suspension and expulsion of Black students increased from 1991 to 2005 (Wallace, J, Goodkind, Wallace, C., & Bachman, 2008). Although the overrepresentation of Black students is most documented, other demographic groups are also overrepresented in exclusionary discipline. Achilles, McLaughlin, and Croninger (2007) found that students with disabilities, primarily students with socio-emotional disabilities, are overrepresented as well, although national IDEA legislation specifically prohibits excluding a student from school due to a manifestation of his or her disability. Brantlinger (1991) found that students of low socio-economic status are also overrepresented.

Rationale

A large body of research exists on the demographics of students who are suspended and expelled (Achilles, McLaughlin, & Croninger, 2007; Brantlinger, 1991; Brown & Beckett, 2006; Drake, 1999; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Mendez & Knoff, 2003; NCES, 1999; Skiba, Ichael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Stiles & Thevenot, 2010; Varvus & Cole, 2002), excluded students' low academic achievement and high drop-out rate (Davis & Jordan, 1994; DeRidder, 1991; Morrison & D'Incau, 2000; Schwartz, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2006), the increased risk of social exclusion, mental, physical, and emotional problems for expelled students (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000; Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1994; Macrae, Maguire, & Milbourne, 2003; Skiba & Peterson, 1999) and the consequences of zero tolerance policies (Adams, 2009; Casella, 2001; Casella, 2003; Rice, 2009; Skiba, 2000). However, much less research has been conducted on students' experiences and perceptions of exclusionary discipline (Gordon, 2001; Knipe, Reynolds, & Milner, 2007; Moses, 2001; Soto Carillo, 2004).

Experts in the field have stated that there is a need for a better understanding of excluded students' experiences and perceptions. Morrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong, and Morrison (2001) called to action experts in the field to expand research on the expulsion process and its impacts. Gordon (2001, p. 69) argued for the need for such research in the United Kingdom, "More attention should be given to the opinions and ideas of the excluded children themselves in the search for a solution to young people's

disaffections with education and England's high rates of exclusion." Similarly, young people's voices may be useful in developing solutions that improve student achievement in American schools. Moses (2001) also discussed how impacted students' voices have been silenced and called for redress. This research was an opportunity to act on the recommendations of prior studies and to understand the experiences and perceptions of the stakeholders most impacted by exclusionary discipline – the expelled students themselves. The research brought students' voices to the debate on how to best address the achievement gap while also assuring safe schools.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to provide educators with an understanding of expelled students' experiences and perspectives with the goal of informing policies and practices to improve educational outcomes for students. The research questions addressed in this study were: 1. What is the expulsion experience from the perspective of expelled students? 2. What are the contextual, organizational, and personal issues that emerge from the voices of expelled students? Since the views of adult stakeholders: parents, teachers, and administrators, already defined the school exclusion debate, this study focused on students' report of their own experiences. If students' experiences preceding, during, and after expulsion are better understood, the educational community may be better able to prevent future expulsions, develop equitable expulsion practices, decrease exclusion of overrepresented student groups, improve school climate, better address the needs of expelled students during their time out of school, aid in transitioning previously

expelled students back into the traditional school environment, and increase retention and graduation rates of expelled students.

The purpose of this study was to describe the expulsion experience and to understand expulsion from the point of view of the student. This narrative case study used thick description to describe the expulsion experience. It provides educators with an understanding of expelled students' experiences and perspectives, with the goal of informing policies and practices to improve educational outcomes for students.

This study was conducted in one metropolitan school district in Colorado. Participants were eight students between the ages of 13 and 19, who had experienced expulsion from school. Data was collected through open-ended interviews with students, as well as students' writings and drawings. Themes were identified in the data to distill the essence of the expulsion experience, in order to better understand the experience of expulsion from school.

Five primary reasons exist for understanding students' expulsion experiences: First, if students' experiences preceding expulsion are better understood, preventing and limiting future expulsions may be possible. Second, if the social, emotional, cultural, and psychological contexts of students' expulsions are better understood, causes of overrepresentation in school exclusion could be identified, assisting leaders in developing equitable expulsion practices and decreasing exclusion of overrepresented student groups. Third, understanding students' experiences could improve school culture by understanding what motivates students to engage in expellable behaviors that are harmful to the school climate. Fourth, if students' experiences during the expulsion term are taken

into consideration, school personnel could better address the needs of expelled students during their time out of school through targeted intervention and program design. Fifth, an understanding of expelled students' experiences could also aid in transitioning previously expelled students back into the traditional school environment, increasing retention and graduation rates of this population.

Research questions.

The research questions guiding this study were: 1. What is the expulsion experience from expelled students' perspectives? 2. What are the contextual, organizational, and personal issues that emerge from the voices of expelled students? The stories of students' expulsion experiences are used to inform disciplinary policy and to identify more proactive practices that might reduce the number of expulsions and improve outcomes for expelled students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

This chapter begins with a discussion of students' legal right to a public education and the legal foundations that allow for exclusionary discipline, the state statutes that determine expellable offenses and expulsion protocols within the state this study is conducted, and the legal definitions of suspension and expulsion. Second, since the percentage of students expelled under zero-tolerance policies is high and continuing to rise, zero-tolerance policies are discussed. The rationale for zero-tolerance policies, emergence and expansion of zero-tolerance, scope of the zero-tolerance debate, effectiveness of zero-tolerance, conflicts between zero-tolerance and inclusive education, and alternatives to zero-tolerance are presented. Third, issues of educational equity and the academic achievement gap are discussed, since a relationship may exist between the achievement gap and exclusionary discipline. Data on the under-achievement of racial minorities, males, and students with special needs is presented. Fourth, the relationship between the discipline gap and the achievement gap is discussed, and data on the overrepresentation of racial minorities, males, students with special needs, and low-income students are presented. Fifth, recognizing that expulsion occurs in a social context, adolescent peer relationships are discussed. Sixth, the negative consequences students experience as a result of school exclusion are presented, including decreased

academic achievement, increased risk of poor academic performance, dropping out, social exclusion, mental, physical, and emotional problems, increased involvement in illegal activity, and a lack of educational opportunities. The small body of existing literature on students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline is presented, as well as experts' call for additional research in the field. Finally, fostering resilience in adolescence is explored as a possibility for mitigating the negative consequences of expulsion.

Students' Rights and Legal Foundations of Suspension and Expulsion

Students' right to a public education.

Excluding students from school through expulsion is in conflict with the trend over the past century of the expansion of students' rights to a free public education. Through the federal courts, students have challenged the authority of public schools to deny students the same educational opportunities as their peers. The best known of these cases is *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), in which the Supreme Court guaranteed Black students the same educational opportunities as White students (Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, 2011). A plethora of court cases, both before and after the landmark *Brown* ruling, have protected and expanded the educational rights of all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, language, gender, or disability (Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, 2011; *Davis v. Monroe County School District*, 1999; *Gebser v. Lago Vista Independent School District*, 1998; *Guey Heung Lee v. Johnson*, 1971; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974; *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*, 1950; *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 1923; *Sweatt v. Painter*, 1950).

An individual citizen's right to a free and appropriate public education has also been expanded through federal legislation. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA) established the right to a free and appropriate education for all students. Through these cases a student's right to a free public education has been clearly established and protected in the United States. Exclusionary disciplinary procedures, such as suspension and expulsion, revoke a student's right to a free public education making school exclusion especially contentious.

Students' rights within the schools have also expanded. Before 1969, the authority of school officials to discipline and to educate children as they saw fit was rarely questioned. From 1960 to 1968, an average of only nine relevant cases per year, was heard by the courts (Arnum, 2003). However, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, students and parents appealed to the courts with increased frequency and success. Between 1969 and 1975, the number of cases heard by the courts rose to an average of 76 cases per year (Arnum, 2003). After 1975 the number of cases heard by the courts decreased dramatically, and cases focused on establishing a balance between the rights of individual students and school officials' need to promote an effective learning environment for all students (Arnum, 2003).

The courts have heard students' rights cases on issues of freedom of speech in *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969) and *Bethel School v. Fraser* (1986), freedom of expression in *Cohen v. California* (1971), *New Rider v. Board* (1973), and *Morse v. Frederick* (2007), and search and seizure in *New Jersey v. TLO* (1985) (Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, 2011). The courts have reiterated the principle established in *Tinker v.*

Des Moines (1969) that students “do not shed their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse door” (Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, 2011). Most applicable to suspension and expulsion are the due process rights of students. Students’ due process rights were addressed in *Ingraham v. Wright* (1977), *Goss v. Lopez* (1975), and *Horowitz v. Board of Curators* (1978) (Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, 2011). Most importantly, *Goss v. Lopez* (1975) held that a public school must conduct a hearing before subjecting a student to suspension. The Supreme Court held that a suspension without a hearing violated the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

The right to a free public education is not directly established in the United States Constitution but is, instead, found in the various state constitutions due to the 9th and 10th Amendments of the Bill of Rights, which give all powers not expressly granted to the federal government to the people and the states. Every state has a provision in its constitution, commonly called the “education article,” that guarantees some form of free public education, usually through the twelfth grade. However, the way in which states provide public education to citizens must be consistent with other federally guaranteed constitutional rights, such as the 14th-Amendment right to equal protection under the law.

School exclusion statutes.

Since each state has the authority to pass its own legislation regarding suspension and expulsion from school, expulsion statutes differ somewhat from state to state. Since this study takes place in Colorado, understanding the state’s statutes is relevant since the statutes are material in determining which students are expelled from school, how

expulsions are handled by the schools, and students' educational options while expelled. The statutes are useful in understanding how students are expelled, and who is expelled, as a context for understanding students' expulsion experiences.

Colorado suspension and expulsion legislation was last updated in 2008 in Colorado statutes 22-33-105 and 22-33-106. Colorado statute 22-33-105 provides schools and districts with specific guidelines for suspension, expulsion, and denial of school admission. The statute also provides protections to students' educational rights. Students' due process rights are guaranteed. Specifically, the statute limits the suspension term to 10 days and the expulsion term to one calendar year. It guarantees students the right to a hearing before an unbiased third party before expulsion. It also guarantees students the right to appeal an expulsion to a higher authority.

Colorado statute 22-33-106 describes grounds for suspension, expulsion, and denial of admission. It is under this statute that students in this study have been excluded from school. The following offenses are grounds for suspension or expulsion:

- Continued willful disobedience or open and persistent defiance of proper authority;
- Being deemed habitually disruptive;
- Willful destruction or defacing of school property;
- Behavior on or off school property that is detrimental to the welfare or safety of other pupils or of school personnel;
- Repeated interference with a school's ability to provide educational opportunities to other students;

- Making a false accusation of criminal activity against a district employee to law enforcement or to the district;
- Having been expelled from any school district during the preceding twelve months;
- Behavior in another school district during the preceding twelve months that is detrimental to the welfare or safety of other pupils or of school personnel.

According to Colorado statute 22-33-106, expulsions are mandatory for:

- The sale of a drug or controlled substance;
- The commission of an act which, if committed by an adult, would be robbery or assault;
- Carrying, bringing, using, or possessing a dangerous weapon without the authorization of the school or the school district, including:
 - A firearm, whether loaded or unloaded, or a firearm facsimile that could reasonably be mistaken for an actual firearm;
 - Any pellet or BB gun, or other device, whether operational or not, designed to propel projectiles by spring action or compressed air; A fixed blade knife with a blade that measures longer than three inches in length or a spring-loaded knife or a pocket knife with a blade longer than three and one-half inches; or
 - Any object, device, instrument, material, or substance, whether animate or inanimate, used or intended to be used to inflict death or serious bodily injury.

Mandatory expulsion is not required if the student in possession of a dangerous weapon notifies school personnel and delivers the weapons to them, as soon as possible. Statutes and policies that require mandatory expulsion are also characterized as zero-tolerance policies. As these statutes have gained popularity they have also become increasingly contentious, due to equity issues and concerns regarding interpretation and enforcement of these policies (Casella, 2001).

Concerns regarding students' and parents' knowledge and understanding of suspension and expulsion policies have been raised. Soto Carrillo (2004) studied parents' and students' perceptions of suspension and expulsion policies in Puerto Rico. He found that both students and parents lacked knowledge of expulsion policies and suggested that students and parents be given more information about suspension and expulsion policies.

Suspension and expulsion defined.

Suspension and expulsion are consequences for disciplinary infractions that involve removing a student from school for a specific amount of time. Exclusionary discipline is a term that refers to both suspension and expulsion. Suspension is a mandatory leave that can last from one day to ten days, during which time the student cannot attend regular school. Suspension is one of the most commonly-used disciplinary procedures currently utilized in schools (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). In Colorado ten days is considered to be the division between suspension and expulsion. This distinction is common throughout the country.

Expulsion is an involuntary withdrawal from school for a period of 10 days to over a year. Although some states allow for permanent expulsions or expulsions longer

than a year in Colorado students may be expelled from school for no longer than one calendar year. Expulsion is much less commonly used than suspension. Suspension and expulsion are utilized more at the secondary level than at the elementary level and are utilized more often in urban schools than in suburban and rural schools (Skiba & Sprague, 2008).

Although students who are suspended and expelled aren't one and the same, suspension and expulsion will often be discussed in combination in this literature review, due to a lack of data on expulsion alone. There is sparse data available on the characteristics of students who get expelled, but much more information is available on students who are suspended (Morrison & D'Incau, 2000). Suspension data is useful in the context of studying expulsion, since suspension data includes students who are suspended after an expulsion, students who get recommended for expulsion but are suspended instead of expelled, and students who are suspended prior to expulsion.

School Safety and Zero-Tolerance Policies

One of the highest-profile school safety incidents occurred in 1999 at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Two students murdered 13 people and wounded 24 others before committing suicide. This incident increased concerns over school safety across the country and especially in Colorado. More recent shootings at Platte Canyon High School in 2006 and at Deer Creek Middle School in 2010 renewed safety concerns in Colorado. Dozens of school shootings in communities of all types have caused increased focus on keeping weapons out of schools (Gold & Chamberlin, 1996). Since the 1990s, school safety has become a prominent issue in the media, lawmaking, policy-

making, and the courts (Gonzales, 2002). A heated debate has emerged regarding how schools can best maintain a safe environment for both students and staff (Christensen, 2003).

Although the media has portrayed schools as being overwrought with violence, research has indicated that school is one of the safest places for students to be. In 1998 the Justice Policy Institute published “School House Hype: School Shootings and the Real Risks Kids Face,” a report that examined the issue of school safety and concluded that schools are the safest places for children to be. This report, inspired in part by recent school shootings, attempts to place the question of school violence and its accompanying reactions in a larger statistical and legal context. Data from several government agencies were analyzed to compare the real risks children face in school to the distorted image reported by the media.

The intense media coverage of these tragedies galvanized public opinion in favor of zero-tolerance policies that call for strict mandatory consequences for school-policy violations related to student safety (Casella, 2001). In an effort to prevent future tragedies, state and federal legislatures passed zero-tolerance legislation (Ashford, 2000). Increased attention on the prevalence of drugs in schools also received a great deal of media attention and legislative action (Gonzales, 2002). Concerns regarding the prevalence of drugs in public schools were addressed at the federal level when the National Panel on Goals declared that, by the year 2000, every school in the nation would be free of drugs, alcohol, violence, and the presence of firearms and would provide a disciplined environment conducive to learning (Gold & Chamberlin, 1996).

Rationale for zero-tolerance policies.

One increasingly common method of regulating weapons and drugs in school are zero-tolerance policies (Casella, 2001). Zero-tolerance policies are policies that name specific behaviors that are unacceptable and outline mandatory consequences for those behaviors. Often the mandatory consequence is school exclusion through suspension or expulsion (James & Freeze, 2006). Rice (2009, p. 556) explains:

Zero-tolerance policies specify which conduct is unacceptable at school and the consequences that will follow for those who engage in the proscribed conduct; as suggested by their name, the zero-tolerance policies allow for no exceptions, compromise, or discretion.

Proponents of zero-tolerance policies argue that strict policies are necessary in creating an appropriate school environment that is conducive to learning (Noguera, 1995; Scaringi, 2008). Supporters also argue that, in the past, authority figures have contributed to the breakdown of order and discipline in schools by using lax disciplinary procedures (Wittman, 2007). They also argue that zero-tolerance policies prevent insufficient disciplinary actions and the negative consequences of those actions (Scaringi, 2001). Wittman (online) states that the best way to stop violence in schools is to “institute in every school, starting with pre-school, a policy of zero-tolerance for teasing, taunting, ridicule, and bullying.”

Emergence and expansion of zero-tolerance.

The concept of zero-tolerance was first used in 1980 by the United States Customs Service in an attempt to curb transportation of illicit drugs into the country as part of the War on Drugs under the Reagan and Bush administrations. It later emerged as a disciplinary tool in public schools in Kentucky and California in 1989 (Gonzales,

2002). The first attempt at enacting national legislation to create gun-free school zones was part of the Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990 and was enacted as part of the Crime Control Act of 1990. However, the act was declared unconstitutional under the Commerce Clause of the Constitution in *United States v. Lopez* (1995). Congress made minor changes to the law and re-authorized it as the Gun-Free Schools Zones Act of 1995. This legislation expanded zero-tolerance to all fifty states requiring that all educational entities receiving funding under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) expel from school, for at least one year, any student found bringing a firearm to school. This does not apply to students with disabilities protected under federal IDEA legislation (GFSA, 2004).

Since the 1990s zero-tolerance policies have become an increasingly popular method of regulating weapons and drugs in schools (Casella, 2001). Today zero-tolerance suspensions account for a high, and growing, percentage of suspensions and expulsions (Rice, 2009). Since the emergence of zero-tolerance, school personnel, district leaders, state legislators and the judicial system have all participated in defining policies through both policy-making and policy implementation. Historical analysis suggests that, over time, zero-tolerance policies have become less flexible and more inclusive of punishable acts (Adams, 2009). In 1997 drugs were added to the policy (Casella, 2003). Beginning in 1999, some schools included disrespect, swearing, truancy, insubordination, and dress-code violation in their policies (Skiba, 2000).

Zero-tolerance policies were more broadly interpreted, including more items under the category of weapons and drugs. In 1995 terminology in the law was changed

from firearm to weapon (Casella, 2003). One specific example is the decision of the courts in the case *Picone v. Bangor Area School District* (2007). In this case the court determined that a pellet gun is a weapon under Act 26, the zero-tolerance law in Pennsylvania, and possession of this item requires mandatory expulsion (Adams, 2009).

Scope of the zero-tolerance debate.

Zero-tolerance policies and their consequences have attracted the attention of the national media (Casella, 2001). A great deal of controversy regarding the appropriateness of these policies has ensued in local and national media (Adams, 2009; Harris, 2000). Many cases have been publicized, in which critics argue that schools have disproportionately punished students for rules violations. Several examples of extreme applications of include:

- A 5-year-old student wears a firefighter Halloween costume that includes a plastic axe (Skiba, 2000);
- A 6-year-old male student kisses a female classmate (Skiba & Peterson, 1999);
- A student uses a plastic knife to cut a piece of chicken at lunch (Wald, 2001);
- The classification of a snowball and kicking as deadly weapons (Wald, 2001); and
- A sixth-grade student threatens another student with a nail file (Martinez, 2009).

Legal battles over the appropriateness of zero-tolerance policies have also ensued across the nation (Adams, 2009; Harris, 2000). Legal scholars have examined how zero-tolerance legislation has been interpreted by the courts. The proper interpretation of legislation has even been debated in federal district court in *Richland School District v. Thomas P.* (2000), (Zirkel, 2001). A number of other high profile zero-tolerance cases

have been heard by the courts (Zirkel, 2006). Zero-tolerance policies have received enough attention in the courts for the American Bar Association to provide attorneys with recommendations for advocacy for students in school-discipline hearings. An important statement was made in 2001 when the American Bar Association issued the recommendation that zero-tolerance policies should be discontinued in schools (Henault, 2001).

Practicing zero-tolerance in inclusive schools.

Educators have brought into focus the contradiction of practicing zero-tolerance in inclusive schools citing concerns regarding racial inequity in how zero-tolerance policies are executed. Gonzales (2002) conducted a historical study of zero-tolerance policies throughout the United States and identified five important trends that impacted student discipline policies between 1980 and 2001, including historical events, the judiciary, the legislature, the media, and race. The researcher noted that although none of the mass killings in the 1990s were committed by minority children, zero-tolerance policies were more often instituted in minority neighborhoods and were applied against minorities more than against their White peers.

Rice (2009) and James and Freeze (2006) have also raised concerns regarding the contradiction of practicing zero-tolerance in inclusive schools. Rice (2009, p. 557) states:

In short, we in U.S. society find ourselves at a historical juncture where schools are implementing policies and – at the same time – also trying to promote tolerance, typically across differences such as race, class, culture, ability, and religion. Both these efforts respond to deeply held and serious concerns. But depending on the particulars of the schools and policies involved, these efforts are often in tension, if not conflict.

James and Freeze (2006) discuss this contradiction using the method of Skrtic's immanent critique. The authors conclude that inclusion and zero-tolerance are not complementary, but actually mutually exclusive; both in terms of rhetoric and implementation, especially in cases of suspension, expulsion, and segregation. James and Freeze (2006, p.581) state:

The policy of inclusive schools for all is contradicted and undermined by the practice of zero-tolerance policies, especially suspensions, expulsions, and segregation. Thus, inclusion and zero-tolerance are not complementary, but rather, mutually exclusive, both in terms of rhetoric and implementation.

Effectiveness of zero-tolerance.

Regardless of the increasing use of zero-tolerance policies, little research exists on the effectiveness of these policies. Martinez (2009) explains that, although zero-tolerance policies have been part of school policy for more than 16 years, little data exists on the effectiveness of these policies in removing drugs and violence from schools. Skiba and Peterson (1999) argue that virtually no data suggest that zero-tolerance policies are successful in preventing violence in schools. They state (p. 381), "Indeed, the popularity of zero-tolerance may have less to do with its actual effects than with the image it portrays."

Alternatives to exclusionary discipline.

By and large, researchers who have examined suspension and expulsion advocate for school leaders to explore alternatives to suspension and expulsion before resorting to exclusionary discipline. James and Freeze (2006) suggest that schools pursue inclusive solutions, such as teaching appropriate behaviors involving prevention, reinforcement, and restitution when students engage in inappropriate behaviors. Marrison, Anthony,

Storino, Cheng, Furlong and Morrison (2001) present policy recommendations which include: replacing zero-tolerance policies with a reasoned approach to discipline, supporting and implementing comprehensive prevention programs to enhance the protective nature of schools, developing alternative discipline strategies to replace school expulsion, offering educational options when expulsion may be necessary, developing clear policies and procedures for school expulsion, and supporting accurate reporting procedures. Skiba and Sprague (2008) advocate the use of school-wide Positive Behavior Support (PBS) and cite data that it can be effective in preventing disciplinary problems and providing multi-tiered support for students who would traditionally be disciplined through school exclusion. Martinez (2009) argues that prevention can replace zero-tolerance solutions through increased use of student support personnel, such as school social workers, psychologists, and resource officers, as well as socio-emotional curricula and behavioral interventions which can be utilized by classroom teachers.

Educational Equity and Academic Achievement

Since the passing of the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2002, policymakers and educators have worked toward the goal of every student in the United States demonstrating proficiency in English and math by the year 2014 (Williams, 2011). Reforms have focused on improving educational outcomes of student groups who have historically low performance, including Black, Latino, and Native American students, low-income students, students with limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities (Hoff, 2006; Seed, 2008). Educational policies and practices across the

nation have been overhauled with the goal of closing this academic achievement gap (Seed, 2008). Promoting high achievement and equity among all student groups has become paramount in education.

Race and academic achievement.

The academic achievement gap between White students and their Black peers has been well documented over time and across a variety of locations (Lucas, 2000; Olszewski-Kubilius, Lee, Ngoi, M. & Ngoi, D., 2004). Although the achievement gap between Black and White students is most well known, an achievement gap also exists between White students and students of most other minority groups. This gap has been present on almost every measure of achievement, including standardized test scores, grade-point average, dropout rates, and college-enrollment and completion rates (Olszewski-Kubilius, Lee, M. Ngoi, & D. Ngoi, 2004). Research has shown that the gap in achievement between White students and minority students exists over a student's academic career. The achievement gap is already present before students enter kindergarten (Chapin, 2006) and continues into adulthood (Jencks & Phillips, 1998).

The achievement gap persists, as it has not decreased since 1999. NAEP test data demonstrates that the gap between Black and White students narrowed between 1978 and 1999 but has remained statistically unchanged since this time (Cavanagh, 2009). Although a plethora of research and reform initiatives have targeted closing the achievement gap, educators have made little headway in reducing the gap (Kulm, 2007). As of 2010, the gap still exists on a national scale (Williams, 2011).

Gender and academic achievement.

Over the past half-century, males and females have excelled in different measures of academic achievement at different times. However, in the past 20 years, girls have outperformed boys in most measures of achievement, including literacy scores, school engagement, discipline referrals, dropout rates, and college admittance rates (Kafir, 2007). On average girls have higher grade-point averages (GPAs) than boys, as well as higher grades in all the core subjects (The Nation's Report Card, 2005). Between 1992 and 2005 girls outperformed boys in reading in both grades 4 and 8 on the NAEP assessment. Girls outperformed boys in math at the 4th-grade level from 1996 to 2005 (The Nation's Report Card, 2005). Nationally, in 2000, 88.1 % of female young adults had completed high school, in comparison to 84.9% of males. The Colorado Department of Education reports that the dropout rate for males was higher than for females from 1998 to 2009 (Colorado Department of Education, 2009). The National Center for Education Statistics reports that 57% of undergraduates were female in 2005 and projects that, by the year 2016, 60% of college students will be female. However, not all measures of achievement demonstrate higher achievement for females than for males. For example, girls typically have better grades in math classes, but tend to score lower on standardized math tests (Dee, 2007).

Students with disabilities and academic achievement.

Students with a variety of special needs consistently perform lower on measures of academic achievement than do their peers. Children with emotional behavioral disabilities consistently show moderate to severe academic achievement deficits

compared to their peers, have lower graduation rates and are less likely to attend postsecondary school (Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004). Of the 14% of students who do not complete high school, about 36% are students with learning disabilities and 59% are students with emotional or behavioral disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Although academic achievement is improving for special education students in Colorado, students still lag behind their peers in reading, writing, and math (Colorado Department of Education CSAP Summary, 2009). Discrepancies in academic achievement follow special education students into adulthood. High school graduates with learning disabilities are significantly less likely to have attended any form of postsecondary school and are less likely to have graduated from postsecondary programs throughout the first 10 years following high school (Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, & Edgar, 2000).

The relationship between discipline and student achievement.

Just as the achievement gap refers to the difference in academic performance between high-performing demographic student groups and low-performing student groups, the discipline gap refers to the difference in rates of disciplinary sanctions between demographic groups that traditionally have high rates of disciplinary sanctions and other demographic groups. A strong relationship between the discipline gap and the achievement gap has been documented. Demographic groups that have traditionally performed worse than their peers on various measures of academic achievement also face more disciplinary sanctions (Arcia, 2006; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Arcia (2006) found that low achievement impacts disciplinary problems, and disciplinary problems impact low achievement. The researcher found that increased suspension led to

considerably smaller academic gains in the three years after suspension. Suspended students were also considerably less likely to remain enrolled in school and were more likely to drop out. Low-achieving students were suspended more often, and increased suspension led to lower achievement, which in turn, led to increased suspension (Arcia, 2006). Since a strong link exists between suspension and low achievement, closing the discipline gap may be critical in closing the academic achievement gap.

Preventing school exclusion is critical in closing the achievement gap because research has indicated that school exclusion is linked to low student achievement. Marrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong and Morrison (2001) found that students who were expelled from school dropped out at significantly higher rates than did their peers and that students became more likely to drop out, the longer the term of their expulsion. Furthermore, the amount of time engaged in an academic setting is one of the strongest predictors of student achievement (Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002). Therefore, keeping students in school through fewer expulsions and shorter expulsion terms is a prerequisite for increasing student achievement and closing the achievement gap.

Disproportionate Discipline

Student discipline continues to be a major concern of the American public and, specifically, of parents with children in public schools (Rose & Gallup, 2005). Skiba and Sprague (2008, p. 38) state, “Disruptive behavior consistently tops the list of teachers’ and parents’ concerns about education.” The problem of student discipline is especially pertinent in an age of accountability and No Child Left Behind (Brown & Beckett, 2006;

Raffaele, Mendez, & Knoff, 2003). Discipline is also critical for school leaders. Magone (2007) surveyed principals, superintendents, and education law attorneys about which areas of school law were most important for principals to know. Three of the four areas deemed as most essential were related to student discipline: exceptional children, student harassment, suspension and expulsion. Finally, it is important that all stakeholders have a strong understanding of disciplinary policies. Over the past 35 years, research has consistently shown that lower levels of student disruption occur when disciplinary policies are understood and accepted by teachers, students, and parents (Brown & Beckett, 2006).

Disproportionate discipline in Colorado, the state in which this study takes place, has recently gained the attention of lawmakers and the media. State senators, Evie Hudak and Linda Newell, authored a bill asking the Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice to study fair discipline in schools. *The Denver Post* has published a series of articles discussing this issue (Auge, 2010; Hubbard, 2010). In Colorado, students of color and male students are also overrepresented in exclusionary discipline (Colorado Department of Education Educational Statistics Department, 2010). Hubbard (2010, para. 3) wrote:

While Black students make up just 5.9% of the student population, they were the subject of 12.7% of the discipline cases, up from 11.7% five years ago. White students, who were about 61% of the population, were the subject of 46.8% of discipline cases. Latino students make up 28.4% of the population and were involved in 37% of discipline cases, another persistent gap. Expressed as a rate, 18 of every 100 black students and 11 of 100 Latino students faced serious discipline, compared with 6.5 out of 100 White students and 8.5 of 100 students overall.

Overrepresentation of racial minorities.

One of largest bodies of literature on expulsion examines the relationship between race and exclusionary discipline (Arcia, 2007; Auge, 2010; Brown & Beckett, 2006; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2006; Gregory, Fenning & Rose 2007; Hubbard, 2010; Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Townsend, 2000; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). The prevalence of studies on this topic reflects the controversial nature of these expulsions.

The problem of student discipline disproportionately impacts urban schools with high levels of ethnic minorities and high levels of low-income students (Brown & Beckett, 2006). Black and Latino students are punished more often and more severely than other students (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Black males are most often cited as being overrepresented in disciplinary sanctions. For example, although only 17% of the nation's school population consists of Black males, they represent 34% of students who receive out-of-school suspensions (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Mendez and Knoff (2003) studied what types of infractions result in suspensions for students in various demographic groups and how suspension rates change over school levels for students of different races and genders. They found that the over-representation of Black males began at the elementary level and continued through high school, that Black males were overrepresented in all infraction categories, and that Black females were suspended at much higher rates than White or Latina females at all levels. Drake (1999) found that high school students were 1.59 times more likely than junior high students to be expelled,

males were 4.0 times more likely to be expelled than females, and Black males were 3.72 times more likely to be expelled than White students. Mendez, Knoff and Ferron (2002) found that student demographic variables, including percentage of White students, percentage of Black students, and percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, were strongly related to a school's suspension rate. However, the school comparisons showed that not all schools with higher percentages of at-risk students have high-suspension rates.

Existing research on the discipline gap does suggest that no single causal factor can fully explain racial inequality in discipline statistics. Gregory, Skiba and Noguera (2010) found that low-income economic status, living in high-crime neighborhoods, low-academic achievement, high rates of misconduct, and high levels of violent behavior contribute to the reason minority students are overrepresented in disciplinary sanctions, but that the preceding student characteristics are not adequate to explain the immensity of disparities in disciplinary actions. They have suggested that school and teacher variables are major factors in contributing to disciplinary disparities (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).

Fenning and Rose (2007) found that teachers' perceived loss of classroom control and accompanying fear likely contributes to who is removed from the classroom for disciplinary reasons. Classroom removal leads to suspension and expulsion that, in turn, contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Arcia (2007) found that suspension rates of Black students were strongly correlated with suspension rates of White students. Black suspension rates were also moderately negatively correlated with achievement and

weakly correlated with teachers' average teaching experience. Black suspension rates were also weakly significantly positively correlated with free and reduced lunch participation. Suspension rates were not significantly correlated to Black enrollment, percentage of male teaching staff, or percentage of Black teaching staff. Arcia argued that since years of experience was also significantly correlated with student achievement, it is possible that more experienced teachers lead to higher achievement levels; and, in turn, higher achievement levels lead to lower suspension rates.

A clash between Black students' culture and the White, middle-class culture of schools may contribute to overrepresentation in discipline. Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2006) state that Black males experience disproportionately high disciplinary referral rates, suspensions, and expulsions due to a number of ecological factors, primarily the conflict between the students' culture and the predominantly White, middle class culture of the school. Townsend (2000) argues that suspension and expulsion occur in a context of cultural conflict in which the culture of Black students clashes with the culture of White, middle, and upper class school staff. Miscommunication due to students' use of African American Vernacular English, instead of Standard English, and differences in non-verbal communication styles lead to conflict. Furthermore, Black students may see conforming to behavioral expectations as a loss of their own culture and identity. Culturally appropriate discipline strategies may mitigate school suspension and expulsion for Black youth (Townsend, 2000).

Overrepresentation of males.

Males are excluded from school at significantly higher rates than females when suspension and expulsion rates of students are compared by race, ethnicity, and gender. Boys were excluded from school at much higher rates than girls, usually about twice as often (Wallace, J., Goodkind, Wallace, C., & Bachman, 2008). In the general population, boys are reported by their parents to have been suspended or expelled at some point during their school careers at higher rates than girls. Of boys in the general school population, 28% have been suspended or expelled at some point during their school career (NCES, 1999). In comparison, only 15% of girls have been suspended or expelled (NCES, 1999). Although boys have consistently been involved in the juvenile justice system at much higher rates than girls, since 1994 there has been an exponential increase of girls in the justice system (American Bar Association and the National Bar Association, 2001).

Kane (2006) suggested that working-class boys may be overrepresented in suspension and expulsion as a result of negotiating their masculine identities. In a study meant to understand personal factors that lead to disciplinary action, he found that the processes by which working-class boys actively negotiate their masculinities are the same processes that lead to their exclusion from school. Traits that working class boys identified as masculine were usually marginalized in school. Carilile (2009) argues teachers' and administrators' assumptions about gender identity and sexuality may have an effect on which young people are excluded from school. She says that gender

normativity is a factor in effective support planning for “silly boys” and “bitchy girls” to face permanent exclusion from school.

Overrepresentation of students with special needs.

Overrepresentation of students with disabilities has been documented on the state and national levels. At the national level, 38% of boys with disabilities were suspended or expelled at some point during their K-12 schooling, in comparison to 28% of boys without disabilities. Of girls with disabilities, 22% were suspended or expelled, in comparison to 15% of girls without disabilities (NCES, 1999). Overrepresentation of special-needs students in Texas received a great deal of media attention because, although special-education students make up just 10% of student enrollment, special-education students account for 21% of expulsions (Stiles & Thevenot, 2010). Although federal legislation has been passed to try to remedy high rates of exclusion of special-needs students, it has not been completely effective.

Lawmakers continue to make provisions to protect special education students from overrepresentation. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA) and The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) added new provisions for disciplining students with disabilities through suspension and expulsion (Hartwig & Ruesch, 2000). The purpose of the laws was to provide appropriate services to eligible students, based on their individualized needs. The IDEA amendments and regulations provide specific criteria to be used in determining if the student's behavior is a manifestation of his or her disability. Davis (1999) conducted a study to determine the status of policies, procedures, and accepted practices in suspension,

expulsion, and manifestation of determination of children with disabilities. The researcher found that changes in federal law had not resulted in any major difference in how IEP teams conducted their manifestation determinations, but they were in accordance with the law. However, the school districts were not in compliance with the mandate to have written policies and procedures.

While more than ten years have passed since the IDEA compliance policy, and increased compliance with the law is likely, concerns still exist regarding the implementation of IDEA and equity issues surrounding students with special needs. Court cases related to proper interpretation of manifest determination have even been heard in federal district court. Zirkel (2001) conducted an analysis of the case, *Richland School District v. Thomas P.* (2000), and discussed its implications, specifically that the court's decision adversely affects schools' ability to expel students with disabilities for serious offenses.

Some groups of special education students are especially overrepresented in exclusionary discipline. Achilles, McLaughlin, and Croninger (2007) identified factors associated with higher likelihood of special needs students' disciplinary exclusion from school and found that a high likelihood of exclusion was more common among students with ADHD or an emotional or behavioral disorder compared to learning disabled students. High likelihood of exclusion was also associated with Black ethnicity, older age, male gender, low-socioeconomic status, multiple-school changes, urban schooling, and having parents who expressed low school satisfaction. Morrison and D'Incau (2000) examined the individual special education service development trajectories for special

education students who were recommended for school expulsion. They found that students who have co-existing individual and environmental complications may experience intensified behavioral problems that put them at increased risk of expulsion. Furthermore, students' special education status often protected them from expulsion and instead, led to unchanged or increased educational services.

The interaction between race and special education status deserves special consideration. It is consistently documented that minority children are overrepresented in special education. Minority representation has been cited as an issue of concern as early as 1960s (Dunn, 1968). For example, Oswald, Coutinho, Best and Singh (1999) found that Black students were about 2.4 times more likely to be identified as mildly mentally retarded and about 1.5 times more likely to be identified as seriously emotionally disturbed than their peers. The authors cite economic and demographic variables as significant predictors of disproportionate discipline. More recent studies show that minority over-representation in special education has not diminished (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Ladner & Hammons, 2001). This adds another layer of complexity to the issue of overrepresentation of minorities and special needs students in exclusionary discipline.

Overrepresentation of low-income students.

Low-income students are also overrepresented in disciplinary sanctions. According to the year 2000 United States Census, children growing up in homes near or below the poverty line are more likely to be expelled than their peers. Low-income students are punished more often and more severely than other students (Skiba, Michael,

Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). High poverty is also correlated with high levels of suspension and expulsion (University of Missouri, 2005). Children with single parents are also two to four times more likely to be excluded from school than their peers from two-parent families (Dawson, 1991).

Expulsion is the most serious, the most life altering disciplinary consequence a student can face. Suspension, although less serious, is a more commonly utilized disciplinary consequence. Both suspension and expulsion cause students to miss out on educational opportunity. Black and Latino students, special-needs students, males, and low-income students are overrepresented in disciplinary actions that dictate removal from school. Barring these demographic groups from educational opportunity at higher rates than their peers, is especially concerning since it is these same groups which underperform academically (Lucas, 2000; Olszewski-Kubilius, Lee, Ngoi, M., & Ngoi, D., 2004). Understanding why these populations are overrepresented may assist educators in targeting interventions for these populations, potentially preventing suspension and expulsion, keeping students in school, and increasing academic achievement of underperforming students.

Peer Relationships

As peer relationships grow in importance as adolescents mature, social acceptance and approval from peers become an increasingly important factor in teens' lives. Peer groups become increasingly influential on young people as they move from childhood into adolescence. Expulsion segregates students from their peers. Segregation from students' peers is especially significant in adolescence, when most students are expelled,

due to the significance of peer relationship in students' lives and the roles peers play in adolescent development. "At no other state of the lifespan is peer socialization as fraught with tension, ambiguity and strain as during adolescence," state Allen, Porter, McFarland, Marsh, and McElhaney (2005). Due to the importance of peer relationships in adolescents' lives, or lack thereof, understanding peer relationships is critical in understanding students' experiences of expulsion.

Adolescents interact with their peers in the context of social groups. Distinctions must be made between two types of social groups: crowds and cliques. In early adolescence crowds emerge. Crowds are defined by reputation and stereotypes (Brown, Mory, & Kinney, 1994). Common crowds include "jocks," "nerds," "brains," "populars," and "druggies" (Brown, Mory, & Kinney, 1994). Crowds influence adolescents' behavior by establishing norms for their members (Susman, Dent, McAdams, Stacy, Burton & Flay, 1994). Crowds affect adolescents' self-esteem as well, as they feel better about themselves when they are part of a high-status crowd (Brown & Lohr, 1987). As teens move out of early adolescence and into middle and late adolescence, crowds become more permeable and less hierarchical (Gavin & Furman, 1989). Crowd membership also becomes less important as teens age (Gavin & Furman, 1989). Cliques, on the other hand, consist of smaller groups of peers. Clique membership is based on friendship and shared activities (Brown, Mory, & Kinney, 1994). In cliques members tend to have similar behaviors and attitudes, as well as sharing similar age, race, and socioeconomic status (Brown, Mory, & Kinney, 1994).

“Many adolescents agonize extensively over how well they are liked and accepted by their peers – a fact that is both well-known and at times bemoaned by the adults who live and work with them,” state McElhaney, Antonishak and Allen (2008, p. 727). The degree to which teens agonize over acceptance and approval from peers may have an impact on teens’ social development. McElhaney, Antonishak and Allen (2008) examined adolescents’ perceptions of social acceptance and socio-metric popularity in predicting relative changes in social functioning over time:

Adolescents who felt positively about their own social standing fared well over time, regardless of their level of socio-metric popularity. Further, low popularity was particularly problematic for adolescents who failed to see themselves as fitting in. Results suggest that during adolescence, when it becomes increasingly possible for teens to choose their own social niches, it is possible to be socially successful without being broadly popular. (p. 720)

Furthermore, the importance teens place on their popularity may impact the negative impact of hurtful or difficult interactions with peers. The degree to which adolescents valued being accepted by their peers had is one mitigating factor of the negative effects of peer rejection and membership in a low status social group (Prinstein & Aikins, 2004).

Adolescents’ perception of past success in social situations may have an impact on their actual social success in the future. Assessments of a person’s relationships with others are critical in shaping emotional and behavioral outcomes (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Young people who perceive themselves as struggling to be accepted by their peers are likely to experience social difficulties in the future. Their social interactions with peers may be unskilled, causing them to be unsuccessful in foraging friendships (Caldwell, Rudolph, Troop-Gordon, & Kim, 2004; Cillessen & Bellmore, 1999). Conversely, adolescents who see themselves as being accepted by their peers may be

more confident in foraging friendships, a trait that might make them more desirable companions to their peers (Nelson & Crick, 1999).

Interactions with peers play an important role in teens' decision-making. Adolescents' affiliation with friends is a strong predictor of adolescents' own health-risk behavior. Friends' alcohol use has been associated with adolescents' own alcohol use (Hawkings, Catalan, & Miller, 1992; Urberg & Pilgrim, 1997). Friends' drug use has been related to adolescents' own drug use (Lynskey, Fergusson & Horwood, 1998; Urberg & Pilgrim, 1997). Deviant behavior of friends has also been related to adolescents' illegal activities and aggression (Dahlberg, 1998). Prinstein, Boergers and Spirito (2001) examined these behaviors in conjunction and found that substance use (cigarette, marijuana, and alcohol use), violent behavior (weapon carrying and fighting), and suicidality (suicidal ideation and attempts) were related to friends' substance use, deviance, and suicidal behaviors. This is especially relevant in the exploration of expulsion, since substance use and distribution, violence, fighting, and weapon carrying are all expellable offenses.

The relationship between teens' risk-taking and the risk-taking of their friends likely stems from selection effects and social-learning effect (Willis & Cleary, 1999). Selection effects refer to the idea that individuals choose friends who engage in similar behaviors. Social-learning effect refers to the idea that individuals implicitly or explicitly influence each other to engage in certain behaviors (Willis & Cleary, 1999). Although peer pressure can be a factor in teens' risk-taking behavior, coercive pressure is not the main force through which they are influenced by others; instead, most adolescents are

influenced by peers because they admire them and respect their opinions (Susman, Dent, McAdams, Stacy, Burton, & Flay, 1994). Affiliation with peers who engage in risky behaviors is related to increases in teens' risk taking behavior over time (Keenen, Loeber, Zhang, Stouthjamer-Loeber, & Van Kammen, 1995).

All adolescents are not equally susceptible to peer influence. Adolescents' age, personality, socialization history, and perceptions of peers are factors that determine adolescents' susceptibility to peer influence. Individuals are also more influenced by peers in middle adolescence as compared to early or late adolescence (Brown, 1990). The impact of social learning effect on teens' risk-taking behavior may be increased when teens experience distress. Prinstein, Boergers and Spirito (2001) state, "Adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to a social learning effect from risky peers when experiencing high levels of social or psychological distress" (p. 295). Expulsion has been classified as a stressful, life-altering event by the American Academy of Pediatrics (2003). This suggests that expelled students may be at an increased risk of engaging in risky behaviors.

Adolescents' perception of their acceptance by peers is linked to concerning behaviors. Perception of social acceptance contributes to teens' psychological adjustment and risk taking. Teens' perceived rejection by peers has been linked to suicidality, depression, and substance use (Prinstein, Boergers, Spirito, Little, & Grapentine, 2000). Depression, in turn, has been linked to cigarette, marijuana, and alcohol use (Stice, Barrera, & Chassin, 1998), aggression (Capaldi, 1991), and suicidality (Lewinsohn, Rohde, & Seeley, 1996).

Being accepted and liked by peers is an important factor in adolescents' success in school. During adolescence, students' friends play an important role in facilitating adjustment in school (Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). Peers have been found to influence academic achievement and pro-social behaviors (Mounts & Steinberg, 1995). Students tend to excel in school when they are well liked by their peers (Guay, Boivin, & Hodges, 1999). Social acceptance by one's peer group may also increase students' interest in school and motivation (Wentzel, 1991) as well as engagement in the classroom (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

As well as having great importance to teenagers in their day-to-day lives, peer relationships also serve an important function in developing healthy adult relationships. Missing out on opportunities to interact with peers during expulsion may lead to fewer opportunities to develop personal relationships. Developing personal relationships with peers in adolescence is necessary for success in building romantic relationships and friendships later in life (Connolly, Furman, & Konarshi, 2000; Furman & Wehner, 1994). Long-term social functioning is also impacted by adolescents' perception of their success in building relationships with peers. According to McElhaney, Antonishak and Allen (2008), adolescents' perceptions of their own social success may be a critical predictor of long-term social functioning. Furthermore, adolescents who are popular with their peers may show positive adjustment over time if they maintain a positive internal sense of their social acceptance. Social exclusion through expulsion may provide students with fewer opportunities to experience social success.

The Impact of School Exclusion

Decreased academic achievement.

Students who are excluded from school are at increased risk for low academic achievement. Morrison and D’Incau (2000) found that all of the expelled students studied over a two-year period performed well below average in terms of both grades and academic achievement scores, in comparison to their peers. Poor performance in school was a very strong predictor of expulsion. High rates of suspension and expulsion may be harmful to all students, not only those who experience these disciplinary sanctions. Schools with higher suspension and expulsion rates have lower scores on standardized achievement tests, regardless of demographics (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Schools with high suspension rates tend to score lower on measures of academic quality than do schools with low suspension rates (American Psychological Association, 2006).

Increased risk of dropping out.

Students who are excluded from school are at increased risk for dropping out of school. High school students who are expelled from school are at an increased risk of dropping out, due to being behind on credits. Students often lose credits as a consequence of their expulsion and may be able to earn fewer credits in alternative programs than in traditional high school programs after their expulsions (Marrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong, & Morrison, 2001). Skiba and Peterson (1999) found that suspension and expulsion are strong predictors in identifying students who will drop out of school. Schwartz (2000) found that more than 30% of students who had been suspended or

expelled from school dropped out, in comparison to 10% of their peers who had not been suspended or expelled. Being suspended from school was actually identified as one of the top three reasons for dropping out of school (DeRidder, 1991).

Increased social exclusion.

School exclusion can contribute toward long-term social exclusion. Macrae, Maguire and Milbourne (2003, p. 89) discuss social exclusion in respect to students expelled from school stating, “Our point is if children are formally excluded from school, this can have implications that extend beyond schooling, to the capacity for these young people to participate fully in society later in life.” Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) cite similar concerns regarding young adults who have been excluded from school. Young adults who were excluded have shared characteristics that cause concern including: having few or no academic qualifications, not participating in education, training or employment, surviving on state benefits, holding only sporadic work in the informal sector, and involvement in petty crime. These characteristics, especially when compounded together, make it difficult for young adults to be productive members of society.

Increased mental, physical, and emotional problems.

Social exclusion may also lead to mental, physical, and emotional problems for teenagers. Suicidal ideation and behavior is more likely to occur when youth experience social exclusion and isolation (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003). Lack of professional assistance from school-based mental health support from psychologists, counselors, and social workers may also increase the risk of mental health problems for

students who are out of school for extended periods of time (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000). In fact, the lack of professional assistance is most necessary after the trauma caused by a stressful, life-altering event, such as exclusion from school (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003). The American Academy of Pediatrics (2003) goes as far as to recommend a full assessment for social, mental, and medical health problems by a pediatrician for all children and adolescents recommended for suspension or expulsion to ascertain factors which may underlie problematic behaviors and to manage future risks.

Increased involvement in illegal activity.

Exclusion from school may contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Skiba and Peterson (1999) present concerns that excluding increasing numbers of students from school, due to their inability to meet rigid behavioral standards, will inevitably end with these teens on the streets. The authors state (p. 381):

In choosing control and exclusion as our preferred methods of dealing with school disruption, even as we refrain from positive interventions, we increase the likelihood that the corrections system will become the primary agency responsible for troubled youths.

Students' increased involvement in illegal behavior may be related to their lack of supervision while out of school. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (1994) found that when young people are not in school, they are more likely to engage in a variety of dangerous activities, including using alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine, smoking cigarettes, fighting, carrying a weapon, and engaging in sexual intercourse. Lack of supervision of excluded students may be especially prevalent, since children with single parents are two to four times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than

their peers with two parents at home, even after controlling for other demographic factors (Dawson, 1991).

Lack of access to educational alternatives.

The Massachusetts Department of Education (1998) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (2003) raised concerns about the lack of alternative educational services for students who are excluded from school. Some states do not require alternative educational programs to be provided to students who are suspended or expelled from school. For example, in 1996-1997 in Massachusetts, 37% of expelled students did not receive educational services of any type during their expulsion term. In about three-quarters of those cases, students were not offered any services by their school district, while only about one-fourth of students chose not to take advantage of educational opportunities offered to them (Massachusetts Department of Education, 1998). In states which do require that school districts provide some type of alternative educational services to expelled students, students may be out of school for weeks or even months before the expulsion process is completed and an alternative placement is made (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003).

While wealthier families may be able to afford additional tutoring, online coursework, extracurricular activities, or private school for their children, low-income families may not be able to afford additional educational services if they are dissatisfied with the educational options offered to their children through the public schools. This causes another equity concern. A lack of access to educational opportunity becomes especially relevant in promoting equity, since students of low socio-economic

backgrounds are excluded from school at higher levels than their peers. Equity concerns also move beyond academic achievement since low-income students are not able to receive social services through the schools, such as counseling, before-and-after school supervision and enrichment, and free-or-reduced-price breakfast and lunch. This may exacerbate students' socio-emotional and academic problems, potentially increasing the discipline and achievement gaps.

Equity issues also arise regarding alternative services for special education students, another demographic group which is overrepresented in school exclusion. While alternative services may be sufficient for students without special needs, special-needs students may be more impacted by the lack of services they receive over the course of their expulsion. As a result of exclusion from school, special-education students are likely to lose access to psychological evaluation and monitoring, counseling, tutoring, speech therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy. This may exacerbate students' socio-emotional and academic problems.

Lack of program participation.

Burns (1996), Marrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong and Morrison (2001), and Christensen (2003) have raised concerns about students who are provided alternative educational services but choose not to attend educational programs for expelled students. Burns (1996) expressed concerns regarding a high attrition rate in alternative program participation, since students who dropped out of the program during their expulsion term receive no educational services. Many expelled students lose access to free transportation making it impossible to attend alternative programs, which are often much further from

students' homes than the public school in their attendance area (Marrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong, & Morrison, 2001). This is especially problematic for low-income children.

Christensen (2003) studied parents' perceptions of the expulsion process. He explored educational options that governing boards gave to students in their jurisdiction, whether parents agreed with the placement options offered to their child, and what educational options they saw as appropriate for their child. The researcher found that many parents were dissatisfied by the placement options offered to their child. They were also dissatisfied with the services in place to support their children in returning successfully to the traditional school environment. For this reason, many parents chose not to take advantage of the educational services offered to their children.

Kratochvil (2008) examined current expulsion laws and their consequences in Wisconsin. She raised concerns about students' access to educational services and the social, emotional, and academic consequences of being out of school. The researcher states (p. 1230):

Expulsion is a life-altering consequence. Expulsion decisions are often made when the expelled student did not have the assistance of counsel, and they result in the loss of an opportunity for a free public education for an extended period of time. The effects of losing that opportunity are significant for both the individual student and the entire community.

As the life-altering nature of expulsion and the effects of losing the opportunity for a free public education, are significant both to the student and to society, further research into students' expulsion experiences are warranted.

Expulsion program effectiveness.

Since individual states set requirements for servicing excluded students, individual school districts have a great deal of flexibility in providing alternatives. The extent of services and program design varies greatly from program to program making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of this programming on the academic achievement of this population. Burns (1996) examined students' functioning one year after school readmission after having attended a program designed for academic and behavioral remediation. The program was effective for a small population of students with parental involvement, motivation to graduate, good attendance, and responsiveness to academic programming. However, all students continued to demonstrate persisting profiles of academic risk after re-entry. Lachman-Fitzgerald (1999) compared traditional out-of-school programs with alternative-to-suspension programs that kept students in school, with mixed results. Students who participated in a Saturday work detail program experienced the greatest decrease in minor disciplinary incidents, while students who participated in a Parent-Teen Talk Program experienced a slight increase in disciplinary incidents.

Students' expulsion experiences and perceptions.

Gordon (2001) studied children's views of suspension and expulsion policies in the British Isles, as related to a government initiative that aimed to cut exclusions by one third by 2002. Through interviews with excluded students and their mothers, he found that students reported poor communication between school and home, perceived or actual unfair treatment by the schools, increased criminality after exclusion, and deprivation of

educational options after exclusion. Overall, he found that expulsion puts students at greater disadvantage in the future. Gordon recommends that the government plan for exclusion reduction be re-evaluated after considering student input on the proposal. Gordon (p. 69) argues that, “More attention should be given to the opinions and ideas of young people themselves in the search for a solution to young people’s disaffection with education and England’s high rates of exclusion.” Likewise, understanding the views of excluded children in the United States would also be useful in understanding low student achievement and high rates of school exclusion.

Moses (2001) interviewed parents and students to study students’ and parents’ expulsion experiences in North Carolina. The focus of the research was on the impact of expulsion on the students’ family. The author found that zero-tolerance policies, in particular, had negatively impacted families. Moses found that students and parents felt that suspensions and expulsions were unfair, did not understand school policies, disagreed with the values of exclusionary discipline, and believed that zero-tolerance policies caused the punishment to be more severe than the offenses. Families also reported high levels of emotional stress, which were sometimes life changing for students and parents.

In Northern Ireland, Knipe, Reynolds and Milner (2007) reported the views of a random sample of 114 children regarding the nation’s proposed changes in suspending and expelling pupils from school, including dealing with misbehavior, setting rules, the decision making process, appropriate exclusion periods, modes of supporting excluded pupils, ways in which behavior can be improved, and involving parents in decision-

making. The majority of children agreed on suspending a student for violent behavior and felt that schoolwork should be sent home for the student to complete during the suspension term. Most participants believed that alternative educational services should be provided to expelled students. There was no consensus regarding who should be involved in the decision to suspend or expel a student.

Marrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong and Morrison (2001) state that little is known about students' experiences after expulsion. A review of the scholarly research on this topic validates this statement. Researchers who have conducted research most similar to this study have highlighted the importance of continuing research on expelled students and their experiences. As indicated in the research, there exists a deep rift in our understanding of how students experience and perceive school exclusion. While school exclusion policies, and their implications, have been heavily debated by legislators, policy-makers and school leaders, student voices have been absent from the discussion. With the goal of increasing educational equity and improving educational outcomes for all students, a better understanding of expelled students' experiences and perceptions is a necessary step toward achieving this goal. Although educational policy makers widely agree that it is best practice to take into consideration the viewpoints and experiences of all stakeholders; unfortunately, this has not occurred in the debate surrounding school exclusion. Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand the expulsion experience from the point of view of the student, in order to represent this critical stakeholder group and to aid in future deliberation and decision-making.

Resilience and the Development of the Adolescent Self

Adolescence is a stage in life in which one's sense of self undergoes profound changes. There is no single unified definition of self (Strawson, 2000). Instead, the self is the combination of many dimensions, including self-concept, self-efficacy, and locus of control. Considering the plethora of negative physical, psychological, emotional, social, and academic consequences that have been documented to result from expulsion (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Ball, Maguire, & Macrae, 2000; Marrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong, & Morrison, 2001; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; American Psychological Association, 2006), it follows that a student's development would be impacted by his or her experiences and reaction to those experiences. Experiencing a life-changing experience, such as expulsion, would impact a young person's sense of self and developing identity.

However, outcomes for expelled students vary from student to student. Some young people experience traumatic, stressful situations such as expulsion, yet move through adolescence and into adulthood with great success. Others are less resilient to the negative effects of stress and experience undesirable outcomes for themselves as well as for society, including substance abuse, criminal activities, failed relationships, school failure, unemployment and even early death (Howard, Dryfen, & Johnson, 1999). Resilience, the ability to thrive in the face of significant adversity, can change the trajectory of a person's life (Werner & Smith, 1992). Facets of the self, including self-concept, self-efficacy, and locus of control, impact an individual's level of resilience, and, in turn, are impacted by his or her ability to thrive in the face of adversity. A

discussion of the significance of and relationship between self-concept, self-efficacy, locus of control, and resilience follows.

Self-concept.

Self-concept is one dimension of the self. Self-concept is the construct of how one perceives himself or herself. It is the sum of a person's knowledge and understanding of himself or herself. Self-concept rapidly changes in adolescence as young people take on new social roles (Brown, 2004). Self-concept is a multidimensional construct as it includes one's perception of himself or herself in a variety of dimensions. Foundational dimensions include social, family, academic, physical, affect, and competence (Bracken, 1992; Bracken, Bunch, Keith, & Keither, 2000).

There are two main sources of information that individuals use in building their self-concept: direct appraisal and reflected appraisal (Gallagher, 2000). Direct appraisal results from our own evaluations of what we are like based on our own reactions to past life experiences. Reflected appraisal, sometimes termed 'the looking glass self,' results from our perceptions of how we are seen by others. During puberty young people's own mental states become increasingly connected to the mental states of others'. Young people become increasingly aware of and concerned about others' opinions, and the looking glass self plays an increasingly important role in one's self concept (Sebastian, Burnett, & Blakemore, 2008).

Adolescents tend to overestimate the extent to which others evaluate them (Lapsely, 1985). An increased focus on others' opinions may be related to the 'imaginary audience' in which people believe that others are constantly observing and evaluating

them, even if this isn't reality. Although perception of the imaginary audience is present into adulthood, it peaks in adolescence (Frankenburger, 2000). A higher incidence of mental health problems occurs in individuals who are more sensitive to criticism of others, more dependent on others' approval, and more accepting of negative feedback (Campbell, 1990).

Existing literature indicates that a positive self-concept is desirable. Individuals with positive self-concept experience lower levels of psychological stress and are more capable of dealing with stressful events (Matto & Realo, 2001; Nadler & Leiberman, 1986). Ybrandt (2008) found that having a negative self-concept in adolescence is associated with depression, anxiety, delinquency, and aggression.

Self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy refers to people's "Assessment of their effectiveness, competence and causal agency" (Gecas, 1989). Within self-efficacy literature a distinction exists between motivational theories and cognitive theories. Cognitive theories emphasize one's *beliefs and perceptions* of his or her self-agency (Pittman & Heller, 1987). Motivational theories focus on the *experience* of self-agency and control (Gecas, 1989). DeCharms (1979, p. 31) made a distinction between two types of control stating, "Personal causation attempts to tap the experience of controlling and being controlled. Locus of control is more in the 'perceived control' tradition."

Self-efficacy develops as a result of the responsiveness of a person's environment over time. Self-efficacy typically increases through childhood and adolescence and into adulthood. Clausen (1986) found that strong self-efficacy in adolescence is related to

indicators of success in adulthood. After reviewing the body of existing research on self-efficacy, Gecas concluded that high self-efficacy “Leads to favorable or beneficial consequences for the individual and even for society” (1980, p. 311). According to the author, benefits include better physical and psychological health, creativity, cognitive flexibility, better problem-solving and coping skills, higher self-esteem, and greater involvement in political processes. Gecas also points out that “The direction of causality is not always clear and is probably reciprocal in most situations” (1980, p. 311). Self-efficacy may improve students’ academic functioning, since students utilize more autonomous learning behaviors when self-efficacy is high (Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2006). Self-efficacy also impacts the goals an individual will work toward, since individuals are attracted to goals they have strong confidence they can attain (Olson, Roese, & Zanna, 1996).

Locus of control.

Locus of control refers to the extent to which individuals believe that they can control events that affect them. Also called attribution style, locus of control refers to an individual’s tendency to attribute life circumstances to internal or external causes (Kaslow, Rehm, Pollack, & Siegel, 1984). Individuals with an internal locus of control perceive that the outcomes of their behavior result from conditions he or she is able to control. Individuals with an external locus of control perceive that the outcomes of their behavior result from conditions outside his or her control, such as luck, chance, other persons, or the situation. Individuals with eternal locus of control attribute outcomes to circumstances or other people (Rotter, 1996; P. Gurin, G. Gurin, and Morrison, 1978)

made a distinction between personal control, a person's perceived sense of control over his or her circumstances, and control ideology, a person's beliefs about how much control people in general have over their lives.

Bailer (1961) found that locus of control shifts to be more internal as individuals age. Findings also suggested that the process of developing an internal locus of control increased favorable educational outcomes, including school achievement and retention (Bailer, 1961; Strickland, 1989). Students' motivation may be linked to locus of control, since whether students believe they have control over their learning outcomes affects how much effort they expend in learning and how long they will persist to persevere (Oxford, 1994). Students with an internal locus of control may also be more successful learners because they are better at planning how to complete academic tasks (Hall, 2001). Locus of control also has been documented to impact socio-emotional functioning. Internal locus of control has been linked to favorable social outcomes such as increased social maturity and increased leader versus follower behaviors (Lefcourt, 1981).

External locus of control has been linked to negative outcomes such as aggression (Halloran, Dumas, John, & Margolin, 1999), depression (Rotheram-Borus, Trautman, Dopkins, & Shrout, 1990), and sexual offending (Parton & Day, 2002). Individuals who learn that their actions have no effect on their environment experience negative consequences. Seligman (1975) referred to this as learned helplessness.

Resilience.

While many negative physical, psychological, emotional, social, and academic consequences of expulsion have been documented (American Academy of Pediatrics,

2003; American Psychological Association, 2006; Ball, Maguire, & Macrae, 2000; Marrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong, & Morrison, 2001; Skiba & Peterson, 1999), outcomes for expelled students vary from student to student. Although some previously expelled students struggle in one or many facets of life later in adolescence or as adults, others thrive and experience great success. Researchers studying resilience attempt to explain why some individuals have far more success than others in similar situations in overcoming obstacles and recovering from trauma.

Researchers haven't yet settled on a common definition of resilience, causing the construct to be somewhat nebulous (Davis, 1999). Gordon-Rouse (2001, p. 461) states, "Resilience is the ability to thrive, mature, and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances or obstacles." Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000, p. 543) define resilience as "A dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity." (Howard, Dryfen and Johnson (1999) define resilience as "A set of protective mechanisms that give rise to successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances." Although discrepancies exist in definitions of resilience, most recent constructs of resilience define resilience as a process versus a personal trait. Two conditions are inherent in the construct of resilience: exposure to significant adversity, stress, or trauma, and positive adaptation despite this adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Since researchers' constructs of resilience vary, operationalization of resilience varies from study to study, leading to mixed findings in this body of knowledge (Davis, 1999).

Resilience may manifest in several forms. Resilience may refer to a person who is especially capable of withstanding adversity, coping with acute and sustained difficult circumstances, or recovering from trauma (Howard, Dryfen, & Johnson, 1999). Resilience is a multifaceted phenomenon that requires individuals to draw on biological, psychological, and environmental resources (Gordon-Rouse, 2001). Individuals' resilience varies across time, circumstances, and context (Freitas & Downey, 1998; Howard, Dryfen, & Johnson, 1999). To respond to this reality, researchers are increasingly developing context-specific constructs of resilience, such as educational resilience, emotional resilience, and behavioral resilience (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000).

A person's level of resilience is impacted by the risk factors and the protective factors that they experience. Protective factors protect individuals from harmful effects, decreasing the likelihood of negative outcomes, while risk factors put individuals at increased risk of experiencing harmful effects, increasing the likelihood of negative outcomes. Jordan (1992) perceived resilience as a transformational process in which a person is able to navigate adversity by developing connections and relationships with others. Exploring resilience as a transformational process has become increasingly common in recent research.

Risk factors.

Risk factors may predict a variety of negative life outcomes including substance abuse, criminal activity, failed relationships, school failure and early death (Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999). Rak and Patterson (1996) identified poverty, violence, hostile

family climates, illness, parental psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, marital discord, and traumatic life events as risk factors children face. Garmenzy (1993) added large family size, overcrowded housing, parental criminality, stressful events, inadequate physical care of the child, little family support, and few positive interactions between the child and the caretaker as additional risk factors. Some researchers have moved away from identifying risk factors to focus on *how* these factors impact resilience. For example, Rutter (1987) discussed the process and mechanism of risk as variable based on situation and context.

Presence of a risk variable does not necessarily lead to negative outcomes (Cowan, P., Cowan, C., & Schulz, 1996). Furthermore, individual risk factors also rarely exist in isolation, instead existing in clusters (Cowan, P., Cowan, C., & Schulz, 1996). Grouping of interrelated risks may create developmental pathways that are predictive of later functioning (Doll & Lyon, 1998). Children who experienced greater numbers of stressors and more intense stressors are likely to have more socio-emotional problems than their peers (Garmenzy, 1993). Cumulative risks exponentially increase the likelihood of a child develops emotional or behavioral problems (Garmenzy, 1993). Increases in the number of risk factors are multiplicative, not additive (Doll & Lyon, 1998). Assessing students' cumulative risk factor can be utilized in identifying children most in need of interventions.

Protective factors.

In addition to assessing risk factors, resilience research focuses on assessing protective factors that protect individuals from negative outcomes. Protective

mechanisms can change children's life trajectories for the better. Protective factors can mitigate risk factors and promote resilience. Protective factors may facilitate the recovery of troubled children as they move into adulthood (Werner & Smith, 1992). Four types of protective factors are: factors that reduce exposure to and impact of risk diminish negative events which follow a traumatic event, nurture self-efficacy and self-esteem through accomplishments, and those which foster positive relationships and experiences that provide new resources or directions in life (Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999). Some researchers have moved away from identifying protective factors to dissecting how protective factors impact individuals. More recently, researchers have begun understanding *how* protective factors facilitate desirable outcomes, instead of simply identifying protective factors (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000).

After reviewing existing literature on resilience, Feyl-Chavkin & Gonzalez (2000) identified five key categories of protective factors:

1. Supportive relationships, particularly encouragement from school personnel and other adults,
2. student characteristics, such as self-esteem, motivation, and accepting responsibility,
3. family factors, such as parental support/concern and school improvement,
4. community factors, such as community youth programs,
5. school factors, such as academic success and pro-social skills training (p. 2).

While educators have no control of family and community factors, and only limited impact on students' personal traits, educators have control over school factors and development of supportive relationships between students and school staff.

Resilient individuals share many common personal traits. High self-esteem (Brooks, 1994; Masten & Garmezy, 1985) self-efficacy (Brooks, 1994), high intelligence

and cognitive ability (Gordon, 1996; Matsen & Coatsworth, 1998), excellent social skills (Gordon, 1996; Gordon-Rouse, 2001), positive self-concept (Werner, 1993), internal locus of control (Gordon, 1996; Werner, 1993) and autonomy (Gordon, 1996; Masten & Garmezy, 1985) are characteristics common in resilient children. Although some personal traits such as IQ are fixed, educators can facilitate development of other personal traits, such as strong social skills, positive self-concept, internal locus of control, high self-esteem, self-efficacy, and autonomy.

Students' thinking is another area in which educators have the opportunity to develop traits that will protect students from the negative impact of stress and trauma. A strong relationship has been documented between individuals' thinking and resilience.

Brooks (1994, p. 547) found that resilience was impacted by:

The feelings and thoughts that individuals have about their competence and worth, about their abilities to make a difference, to confront rather than retreat from challenges, to learn from both successes and failure, and to treat themselves and others with respect." Brooks also identified an optimistic outlook, hope, and investment in the future as characteristics that facilitated resilience through adversity.

Werner (1993, p. 512) stated, "The central component in the lives of the resilient individuals in this study that contributed to their effective coping in adulthood appear to be a feeling of confidence that the odds can be surmounted." Having a hopeful outlook may also contribute to individuals' likelihood to set and achieve lofty goals, since individuals are attracted to goals they have strong confidence they can attain (Olson, Roese, & Zanna, 1996).

A large body of literature documents that positive relationships with caring adults facilitate resilience in children and adolescents. These relationships may be with parents,

but relationships with adults other than parents also facilitate resilience in children and adolescents (Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999). Rak and Patterson (1996) found that enduring relationships with adults, such as teachers, school counselors, coaches, neighbors, clergy, supervisors of extra-curricular activities, and mental health professionals, mitigated negative effects of adversity. Often, the enduring relationships resilient children have are with teachers (Garmezy, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1992; (Howard, Dryfen, & Johnson, 1999). Discussing results of the Kauai Longitudinal Study Werner (1993, p. 512) wrote:

Most of all, self-esteem and self-efficacy were promoted through supportive relationships. The resilient youngsters in our study *all* had at least one person in their lives who accepted them unconditionally, regardless of temperamental idiosyncrasies, physical attractiveness, or intelligence.

Some research has explored why relationships with adults promote resilience in children. Higgins (1994) found that meaningful relationships with adults could instill in children the sense that they are special for being who they are. In a study by Howard, Dryfen and Johnson (1999), children who recovered from adversity believed that their teachers took a personal interest in their wellbeing both within and outside of school. This highlights the importance of hiring caring, supportive adults to work closely with expelled students.

School belongingness has also been identified as a protective factor. School belongingness refers to the extent to which a student feels personally included, accepted, respected, and supported by others at school (Goodenow, 1993). Bernard (1993, p. 45) states that for many children school “Has become a vital refuge for a growing number of children.” Bernard found that providing a school environment that is caring, supportive, positive, and provides many opportunities for participation facilitates resilience in

children. Resilience was also fostered by schools that set high expectations for all learners, and provided support for all learners in reaching high expectations. Schools also facilitated resilience by providing children opportunities to participate in a wide variety of pursuits, facilitating opportunities for developing strengths, as well as communicating that all students' strengths are valued (Bernard, 1993). Specifically, extracurricular involvement may serve as a protective force (Braddock, Royster, Winfield, & Hawkins, 1991). Assessments that measure various types of intelligence also promoted resilience, as did heterogeneous grouping and cooperative learning opportunities (Bernard, 1993). Bernard also argues that schools are the most important vehicle in promoting students motivation.

Resilience research can be a useful tool in assisting educators in developing effective interventions at the school and at the individual level. Matsen and Coatsworth (1998) stated, "The full potential of intervention will not be realized until there is a better investigation of what we know about the normal development of competence, the development of psychopathology, and resilience." Interventions developed through resilience research may have several uses in improving educational outcomes for expelled students through implementation prior to expulsion as a preventive measure during the expulsion term to mitigate some of the negative impact of expulsion, or after expulsion to help students to recover from the trauma and stress of the experience.

Conclusion

This literature review has provided context for understanding the issues that surround the phenomenon of expulsion from school, particularly in the state of Colorado. Expulsion not only has a profound personal impact on students, but it is also a highly politicized practice related to several high profile issues in education. This chapter has established students' legal right to a public education and the legal foundations which allow for exclusionary discipline, the state statutes which determine expellable offenses, expulsion protocols within the state where this study was conducted, and the legal definitions of suspension and expulsion. The rationale for zero-tolerance policies, emergence and expansion of these policies, scope of the zero-tolerance debate, effectiveness of zero-tolerance, conflicts between zero-tolerance and inclusive education, and alternatives to zero-tolerance are presented, since a high and growing number of expulsions are caused by zero-tolerance policies. Educational equity and the academic achievement gap are discussed, since a relationship may exist between the achievement gap and exclusionary discipline. Since promoting the achievement of all students is in conflict with the practice of excluding students from school, this paradox is explored. Data on the under-achievement of racial minorities, males, and students with special needs is presented, and possible links are explored between academic underachieving and overrepresentation in exclusionary discipline. The relationship between the discipline gap and the achievement gap is discussed, and data on the overrepresentation of racial minorities, males, students with special needs, and low income students is presented. Since students engage in expellable behavior in a social setting, and since expulsion leads

to social exclusion, students' relationships with peers are impacted significantly by expulsion, deeming this a relevant relationship to explore. The negative consequences students experience as a result of school exclusion are detailed, including decreased academic achievement, increased risk of poor academic performance, dropping out, social exclusion, mental, physical, and emotional problems, increased involvement in illegal activity, and a lack of educational opportunities. Finally, fostering resilience in adolescents is discussed as a possibility for mitigating the potential negative impact of expulsion. The complex relationship between these issues serves as the context for understanding the larger implications of the expulsion experience.

Chapter 3: Method

This chapter outlines the method utilized in this study. Selection of specific methodology, research design, site and participant selection, the role of the researcher, and data analysis procedures are discussed.

Overview

The goal of this narrative case study was to explore the lived experiences of eight students who had experienced expulsion from school. A further goal of this research was to provide educators and policy-makers with a better understanding of the impact of the expulsion experience. Because the voices of adults (including educators, researchers, parents, community members, lawmakers, justices, and members of the media) have guided the discourse surrounding school exclusion, this research aimed to provide an opportunity for students to contribute to this debate. With these ends in mind, two research questions were developed. First, what is the expulsion experience from the perspective of expelled students? Second, what are the contextual, organizational, and personal issues emerging from the voices of expelled students? The reality that expulsion has a significant effect on a student's day-to-day life (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Moses, 2001) made it an experience worth investigation.

As it was a goal of the study to understand the expulsion experience from a student's perspective, a qualitative narrative case study methodology was utilized.

Students shared their stories verbally, as well as through art and writing. Data collection consisted of in-depth, non-directive narrative interviews conducted with previously expelled students. Data also consisted of students' creative representations of the expulsion experience in the form of poetry, song lyrics, rap, cartoons, and drawings. Data included descriptions of *what* individuals experienced and *how* they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas' (1994) data analysis procedure was used in understanding the essential invariant experience of expulsion from school through their narratives.

Research Design

Qualitative narrative case study method.

This research employed a qualitative narrative case study methodology. Qualitative research is exploratory in nature (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative inquiry was employed due to the necessity for a rich exploration of the subject being studied. While quantitative data allow for generalization from large samples, qualitative methods allow researchers to dig deeply into the experiences of a smaller group of participants. Qualitative research was appropriate for this study since the purpose of the research was to develop a deep understanding of students' experiences.

This case study focused on the narratives of eight students who were previously expelled from school. The stories of these eight students served as a single case as all participants were expelled from the same school district and attended the same alternative educational program for expelled students. Yin (1995) argued that people's experiences were best uncovered through case studies that allow researchers to make connections too

complex for experiments or surveys. Since the researcher already had a deep understanding of the context of participants' experiences from several years of immersion in this setting, this particular case was ideal for making complex connections.

Participants' experiences and perceptions were captured through narrative inquiry. Clandinin (2006) states, "Narrative inquiry gives us a research methodology for engaging in the study of people's experiences" (p. 51). Narrative inquiry is the study of how humans experience the world. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) state, "Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon" (p. 479). They also write, "To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study" (p. 479). In this case study narrative inquiry was employed to develop insight into the experience of students who have gone through the phenomenon of expulsion from school. Narrative research seeks to uncover how people make meaning of their experience and recognizes that meanings are context dependent (Anderson & Gehart, 2007). This study seeks to understand how eight previously expelled students, attending one alternative educational program, made meaning of their experiences.

Narrative inquiry is complex due to the duality of the role narrative plays in people's lives. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) state, "Humans are all at once engaged in living, telling and retelling stories. Therefore, narrative is both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation" (p. 2). According to Richardson (1990), "People can apprehend the world narratively and people can tell about the world narratively" (1990, p. 21).

Narrative inquiry, or inquiry into narrative, is both phenomenon and method. In the context of this study, students' narratives were a means for students to understand their experiences, a means for students to share their experiences and perceptions with others, as well as a means for members of the educational community to access students' experiences and perceptions in order to understand the impact of expulsion on students' lives.

Methods and Instrumentation

Narrative interviewing.

Unstructured interviewing is a popular and useful data-collection tool in narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 2006). The primary method of data collection in this study was in-depth, unstructured narrative interviews with students who experienced expulsion from school. In-depth unstructured interviews were appropriate both for obtaining thick textural descriptions of the expulsion experience and for capturing participants' psychological perceptions.

Heath (2009) states that, although the semi-structured interview format is still the most widely used form of qualitative interviewing used in research with teens, less structured formats in which the researcher directs the interview as little as possible are becoming increasingly popular in research with young people. This allows for utilizing strategies that focus attention on young people's own stories, primarily through the use of narrative interview techniques (Heath, 2009; Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe, & Thomas, 2006).

Narrative techniques are techniques in which participants are invited to reflect on particular events or particular periods in their lives through telling stories, often in relation to a specified theme or themes (Wengraf, 2001). Heath (2009) argues that the narrative form is especially well suited to research with young people because so much research in this area is concerned with process and transition. Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe and Thomas (2006) provide a strong example of how narrative techniques can be used effectively with teens. The narrative technique used in this study was modeled after the techniques used by Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe and Thomas (2006).

Non-directive questioning.

Non-directive questioning strategies were utilized to authentically capture students' voices. Heath (2009) stresses the importance of utilizing non-directive questioning strategies with young people. It is necessary to avoid the typical question-answer style dialogue teenagers generally use with adults in authority positions, both in school and outside school settings, since in this style of dialogue there is generally an expected "right" and "wrong" answer (Heath, 2009). Direct lines of questioning might have posed a threat to the authenticity of participants' responses, since participants might have attempted to give the researcher the response that he or she guessed was "right."

Avoiding direct lines of questioning was especially critical in this study due to the researcher's past relationship with participants. Since the researcher was, at one point, participants' teacher, and they were, at one time, her students, directive questioning was likely to reinforce these roles potentially limiting students' honesty and openness. A non-

directive, student-led, narrative interview style was employed to decrease the power imbalance between student and researcher. If students felt empowered and did not sense that they were being judged in their responses, their openness and honesty were likely to increase.

Use of creative representations.

Due to an increased focus on prioritizing teen's voices, researchers who work with adolescents have utilized visual material produced by participants themselves (Heath, 2009). Like narrative interviewing techniques, drawing-based methods of data elicitation are also becoming increasingly popular with youth. Heath (2009) states that one major weakness of the narrative approach is that some young people are simply more able to tell stories about their lives than others. To respond to this potential weakness, analysis of students' writing and artwork was also employed as a means for collecting participants' stories. This concern was especially relevant for this research because expelled students tend to struggle academically more than their peers (Morrison & D'Incau, 2000). Many of the potential participants from the study site struggled with oral expression and had limited vocabularies, making responding to interview questions potentially difficult. However, many potential participants were also gifted artists, rappers, poets, or writers, which allowed them an alternative means for self-expression.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) state that although interviews are of a verbal nature, presenting findings in a visual manner should not be overlooked. Visual images in qualitative research have often been used to illustrate issues and themes that are elicited through other methods of inquiry, such as interviews. This was the second purpose in

collecting students' writing and drawings. Presenting students' own depictions of their experiences was especially relevant to this study since its purpose was to focus on the experiences and perceptions of the students through their own expression.

Students' creative representations also acted as a conversation starter for the interviews. When the interviews were scheduled, participants were asked to make or to find a creative representation of expulsion or what expulsion meant to them. Students were asked to bring with them to the interview any artwork, drawings, sketches, music, rap, poems, journal entries, stories, or other creations that were representative of their expulsion experience, and which they were willing to share for use in the study. Prior notice allowed students a chance to think about their expulsion experience in advance. It also afforded students who were more comfortable in visual or written expression, rather than linguistic expression, an opportunity to share their experiences in a format in which they were most comfortable. Participants who did not bring a creative representation were offered a chance to create one before the start of the interview. Interviews began by asking students to share any creative representations they brought with them. This open-ended format aimed to balance the power dynamic between the interviewer and interviewee. Students' descriptions of their creative work are presented in the findings.

Participant recruitment.

Invitations to participate in the study were mailed to the homes of a random sample of students who attended the expulsion program during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years (Appendix B). Invitations were mailed to 38 potential participants over the course of four weeks. The population was highly transient and 13 invitations were

deemed undeliverable and returned to the expulsion program. The recruitment letter was addressed both to the student and to the parents or parent. Names and addresses of potential participants were obtained from the program's master logs of students who attended the program during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. The invitation included consent and assent paperwork (Appendix C and D) that informed participants and parents about the purpose of the study and explained that participation was voluntary, as well as the interview protocol (Appendix E). After consenting to participate, participants and their parents received a phone call from the researcher to answer questions or concerns they had regarding the study. When interviews were scheduled, participants were asked to choose the setting in which they would be most comfortable being interviewed. They were given two options: the student's current school of attendance or the expulsion program.

Since the purpose of this study was to identify core common experiences of students who had experienced expulsion from school, a larger sample of participants was necessary than is typical in a traditional narrative study. According to Moustakas (1994), strong analyses in which common elements of an experience are identified can be based on as few as five or six strong interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, initially only five participants were interviewed. Since data saturation was not achieved after the first set of five interviews, a second round of three participants was recruited and interviewed. In total, eight students participated. After the second round of interviews, data saturation was achieved, so no new participants were recruited. Data saturation was achieved when

common themes were easily identified from the interviews and creative pieces and no new themes emerged.

Interview protocol.

Most interviews were approximately an hour in length. Interview length was dependent on how much information the participant wanted to share. Interviews ended when the participant had nothing more to add or when the participant began repeating himself or herself. Additional interviews were scheduled if participants felt that they hadn't thoroughly explained their experiences and perceptions in the first interview.

A discussion of any creative representations students brought to their interviews was the first topic of discussion during the interview session. The researcher asked students to share any writings or drawings they brought to the interview session. If participants struggled in starting to discuss their creative work, they were encouraged to start in any way they liked and to respond in any way they wished. If participants asked what they should talk about, they were instructed to explain whatever they thought was important to know to understand the expulsion experience and what was most meaningful to them. This open-ended format was used to allow participants to describe their lived expulsion experiences in language that was as free and unaffected by the researcher as possible, increasing the authenticity of responses.

After discussing students' creative representations, open-ended, informal, non-directive, student-led discussion continued. Non-directive conversation starters were used to help stimulate participants' thinking without giving students any pre-conceived topics or subjects to address. Discussion prompts were utilized to assist the participants in

returning to the expulsion experience and talking about their memories and feelings about the experience. Prompts were developed to facilitate informal conversation, so a long list of scripted questions on previously selected topics were not utilized. Conversation starters included the following:

- “Tell me about yourself.”
- “Tell me about your experiences in school.”
- “Could you describe what got you expelled?”
- “What would you like to share about your experiences in school?”
- “What would you like to share about being expelled?”
- “What are your thoughts on expulsion?”
- “I am really interested in what it’s like to be expelled. Can you tell me about it?”
- “Please describe the experience of being expelled.”
- “I would like to hear the story of your expulsion. Would you please tell me your story?”
- “What do you remember most vividly about your expulsion? What has stuck in your mind the most?”
- “Can you remember what you were thinking at the time of your expulsion?”
- “Do you remember what you were feeling?”

Follow-up questions to each of these open-ended conversation starters were based on students’ responses in order to facilitate as natural a conversation as possible. Follow-up questions were crafted on the spot using the recommendations of Kvale and Brinkman

(2009) and Schostak (2006) regarding effective follow-up questioning. Interviews ended when participants stopped sharing new ideas and reported having discussed everything they wanted to share.

Participant involvement in data analysis.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stress the importance of actively involving participants in the narrative research process, including data analysis. Holland, Bell, Henderson, McGrellis, Sharpe and Thomson (2001) argue that, of all the phases of the research process, involving youth in the analysis and interpretation of findings is most important. They state that the potential power differential between participants and researchers is the greatest at this stage, because that is when data is used to produce knowledge about young people which will be distributed to other adults in authority positions, potentially affecting even a larger population of young people. Given that the purpose of conducting this research was aimed at offering students the opportunity to share their stories with the educational community, involving students in analysis and interpretation was especially relevant in this study.

In order to involve teens in the analysis and interpretation of findings, a second interview was scheduled after preliminary data analysis. Confirmation interviews with the original participants were conducted. The purpose of these follow-up interviews was to ask participants clarifying questions which arose from the first interview, to ask questions related to the themes identified in preliminary analysis, and to allow participants to confirm or to question preliminary data analysis.

Site and Participant Selection

Site selection.

Gaining access to participants is a major consideration in all types of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). First, getting names of expelled students was difficult. It was unlikely that school districts other than the district with which the researcher was affiliated would allow the researcher access to student expulsion records, since expulsion records are private information. Names of expelled students are also confidential, so it would be impossible to identify expelled students without the assistance of a school district. Due to the ability to access data that would otherwise likely be confidential, the school district in which the researcher was employed was selected as the study site.

Recruiting students and parents to participate, as well as obtaining names of expelled students, presented difficulties. Since expulsion is a sensitive topic with possible legal, social, and psychological implications, it would be difficult for a researcher with no prior relationship with expelled students and their families to gain access to this population. Expelled students within the district's expulsion program were selected since former expulsion program students and their families had the opportunity to develop a relationship with the program staff over the course of students' expulsions.

A strong collaborative relationship between researcher and participant is imperative in conducting strong narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Participants in this case had time to develop a level of comfort and trust with the researcher since they had worked with the researcher while attending an alternative program for expelled teenagers. The role of the researcher was primarily the

role of a mentor and coach, as opposed to a traditional classroom teacher. It was hoped that increased comfort and trust would lead to a more comprehensive and authentic description of the expulsion experience. The knowledge gained from working with students and their families was also useful in contextualizing students' experiences. Having worked in the setting of this particular case was also helpful in contextualizing students' experiences.

This narrative case study was bounded by one alternative educational program for expelled students in a metropolitan school district in Colorado. A large district was selected for this research to protect the identities of participants. A district with a large, diverse population was selected to aid in recruiting a sample of participants with a wide variety of backgrounds and expulsion. The demographics of expelled students in this district were similar to the demographics of expelled students in the state. Since participants all attended one specific expulsion program during their expulsion term, their experiences and perceptions are reflective of the experiences of students who attended this specific program. Their experiences may not be reflective of students who attended other alternative educational programs, or opted out of receiving educational services during expulsion. Program staff hoped to utilize students' expulsions as an opportunity for fostering growth and change. A primary purpose of the program was to help students identify and correct thinking and behavior that led to commission of an expellable act. Another primary purpose of the program was to support students in meeting academic and behavioral requirements set forth by the district's superintendent,

to earn the opportunity to re-enroll in a traditional school before one's official expulsion end date.

Participants.

Recruiting a wide array of participants from a variety of backgrounds was difficult due to accessibility issues. Due to confidentiality issues regarding the identities of expelled students and the sensitive nature of expulsion, obtaining participants from diverse school districts from around the country, or even from the state of Colorado, was problematic. Due to these factors, participants in this study were a convenience sample of former students from one alternative program for expelled students in Colorado. Since less than one-half of one percent of students are expelled from the district at any time, random sampling was not viable. While it was impossible to have real diversity with all participants originating from the same school district and the same expulsion program, gaining as much diversity in participants' gender, age, race, and expulsion incident was attempted.

Participants were expelled from school and were unable to receive educational services anywhere other than through the students' school district expulsion program. Participants were expelled under the same district and state policies, constituting a single case. Participants consisted of formerly expelled students, because formerly expelled students might have been less likely to feel stress and anxiety during the interview than currently expelled students might, since the experiences they were discussing would be in the past.

In order to decrease the power differential between the researcher and the participants, students who were currently enrolled in the program were not eligible to participate in the study. To avoid a potential conflict of interest, only students who had exited the program and returned to the traditional school setting were eligible to participate in the study. This safeguard was set in place to decrease potential ethical concerns, since students would no longer be enrolled in the program, and the researcher would no longer be their teacher. The researcher did know all of the participants from working at the expulsion program, but did not keep in touch with students after their expulsions ended and they returned to traditional school.

Eight students volunteered to participate in this study. Participants were between the ages of 13 and 19. Participants were expelled in the 7th through 12th grades. Two of the participants had graduated high school at the time of the interviews. Six students were attending high school. Students were expelled from six schools within the district. Three participants were female and five were male. Three Black, three White, and two Latino students participated. Three students were expelled for violation of the district's drug and alcohol policy. Two students were expelled for assault. One student was expelled for possession of a deadly weapon. One student was expelled for endangering the welfare of a teacher. One student was expelled for committing a crime that would be considered a felony, had the minor been an adult. Three participants received special education services. Participants' demographics were roughly representative of the diversity of the population of the program students attended.

Role of the Researcher

This study was born out of the researcher's passion for improving educational outcomes for expelled students on a larger scale than in a single classroom. As an educator who worked with expelled students, the researcher was in a unique position to interact with these students – an experience that many educators and policy-makers who make decisions that impact the lives of expelled students, have not had. Students had shared their frustration in being “forgotten” and “discarded” by the educational system. Students often reported feeling negatively stereotyped and misunderstood not only by educators, but also by society. They often reported that their stories were never heard by school-leaders, before their expulsion, during their expulsion term, or upon re-entry to school. After reviewing the existing scholarly literature on expulsion, it became evident that the experiences and concerns of students were not represented in this body of knowledge. It was the goal of the researcher that this study would provide an avenue for students' experiences and perceptions to be available to the educational community.

While qualitative researchers do have opposing viewpoints regarding the role of the researcher's own thoughts and feelings as related to the research, a commonality among qualitative researchers is an acknowledgement of the importance of the researcher's relationship with the subject of interest. Moustakas (1994) states that, while it is difficult for researchers to fully remove their own experiences and views from the research process, researchers can look at others' experiences and views anew after identifying their own relationship with the phenomenon being explored. Moustakas calls this practice bracketing (Moustakas, 1994).

Conversely, Clandinin (2006, p. 47) states:

Narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry but rather need to find ways to inquire into participants' experiences, their own experiences as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process.

Since the purpose of this experience was to give students a voice in the debate surrounding expulsion, which has been monopolized by adults, it was important for the researcher to look critically into issues that might obscure or mute students' voices and stories. As an educator who was experienced in working with expelled students, it was important for the researcher to inquire into existing experiences and to recognize perceptions and attitudes. Although it was impossible to look at a topic of inquiry completely anew, the researcher worked to separate personal experiences and perceptions from data collections and analysis in order to be true to students' experiences and perceptions.

Before beginning data collection, the researcher used Moustakas' (1994) method of bracketing to explore personal experiences, perceptions, and attitudes. The intention was not to bracket the researcher out of the inquiry but to use bracketing as a tool for delving into existing experiences, probing into personal perception, and scrutinizing pre-existing attitudes. Being forthcoming regarding personal ideas and beliefs was beneficial in recognizing when preconceived ideas threatened to bias findings. Bracketing was used as a means for developing the *inter-subjective attitude* professed by Giorgi. When a researcher has adopted an inter-subjective attitude, other researchers could look at the same data and come to the same findings (Giorgi, 2010).

Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis in narrative and case study research take many forms dependent on the subject being examined and the goals of the researcher. Descriptive methods utilized in data collection, and the data that comes out of the method dictate analysis procedures. In describing how procedures of analysis should be employed, Colaizzi wrote, "...both the listed procedures and their sequences should be viewed flexibly and freely by each researcher, so that, depending upon his approach and his phenomenon, he can modify them in whatever ways seem appropriate" (1978, p. 58). Modification and blending of data analysis procedures were implemented in this study in order to maintain fidelity to the true nature of students' experiences of expulsion from school. Since the goal of this study was to identify the essential, invariant structure of students' experiences of expulsion, a method of data analysis was needed which would facilitate separating the essential, invariant structure of the experience from the large body of data collected.

Data-analysis procedures employed in narrative and phenomenological research were blended to facilitate the end goals of this study. Empirical phenomenological research obtains comprehensive descriptions of an experience. The original data is comprised of 'naïve' descriptions obtained through open-ended questioning and dialogue. These descriptions provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis to portray the essence of the experience. The researcher describes the structure of the experience based on reflection and interpretation of the participant's story. The aim is to determine what the experience means for the people who have the experience.

Analysis procedures developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) served as a general guide to narrative analysis. The authors provide an overview of analysis procedures but stress flexibility, instead of a prescribed formula of specific, ordered steps for analysis. Moustakas' (1994) procedures provided detailed, specific, systematic steps for distilling the essence of the experience. Moustakas' procedure is based on extracting significant statements describing an experience from interview transcripts and then identifying fundamental, universal elements of the experience. Moustakas' analysis procedures were employed because they were well suited to answer the two questions that drive this study.

Moustakas' (1994) method of analyzing interview protocols consists of the following steps:

- *Horizontalization* - Identify all of the participant's statements which are relevant to the phenomenon of interest
- *Reduction and Elimination* - Eliminate any statements which are vague, abstract, insufficient to categorize, or irrelevant to the phenomenon to determine *Invariant Constituents*
- *Thermalize and Cluster*- Categorize the *Invariant Constituents*, also called *Meaning Units*, into clusters of themes
- *Develop Individual Textural Descriptions* - Use the *Invariant Constituents* to write a description of what each participant experienced

- Develop *Individual Structural Descriptions* - Contextualize each participant's experiences by describing the setting and conditions which effected the participant's experiences
- Create *Individual Textural/Structural Descriptions* - Combine *Structural Descriptions* and *Textural Descriptions* to create an all-encompassing description of each participant's experience
- Construct a *Composite Description* - Integrate all the participants' experiences into one description which represents the experiences of the group as a whole
- Define the *Essence* - Present the unifying experiences and views of the participants that form *essential, invariant structure, or essence*, of the experience.

After the researcher became immersed in the data, it became apparent that Moustakas' method alone would not fully take advantage of the diversity and breadth of data participants had provided. Moustakas' procedure worked well for deriving meaning from interview protocols, and following his step-by-step directions allowed for a systematic analysis of interviews. However, the specific steps outlined were difficult to apply to students' creative works. During the planning of this study, interview protocols were expected to be the primary data source, and students' creative representations were expected to serve the purpose of illustrating findings. The researcher hoped students would provide creative representations of their experiences but did not expect the wealth of poetry, rap, song lyrics, drawings, cartoons and collages which participants shared.

The researcher also did not anticipate the richness and depth of meaning expressed in students' creative works. Flooded with descriptive data of the expulsion experience that was not from interview protocols, Moustakas' method was modified and applied to the creative works from the students.

Upon completion of data collection, the researcher plunged into the extensive description participants shared. Over eight hours of interviews were transcribed. Seven of the eight participants shared either writings or drawings. Three of the students shared a notebook or folder of writing or drawing from their expulsion term with the researcher. The vast amount of data and the depth of students' descriptions, especially in their creative representations, appeared overwhelming. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Interview protocols were re-read and audio recordings were listened-to about a dozen times. The researcher ruminated on the transcripts and recordings until the nuances of each conversation were understood. The researcher reviewed students' explanations of their creative works and pondered the relationship between students' art and writing and their comments during the conversations. Experience in literary analysis became useful, as this knowledge was applied to analyze each piece of writing when dissecting a poem in search of its meaning, as a literary critic would.

After a cursory review of all data sources, Moustakas' systematic analysis procedures were applied to each protocol. First, any data that was vague, abstract, or insufficient to categorize was eliminated. Significant statements that were relevant in describing students' experiences and perceptions of being expelled from school were identified. Each sentence or phrase that directly pertained to students' experiences and

perceptions was extracted and each non-repetitive statement was listed. Each significant statement constituted an *invariant horizon*, also called a *meaning unit*, of the experience (Moustakas, 1978). Moustakas called this process *horizontalization*.

Since no specific suggestions for analyzing writing samples were provided in the literature that had been reviewed, Moustakas' protocol was applied to students' writing. Horizontalization techniques were applied to students' song lyrics, rap, and poetry to include participants' creative representations in the analysis. As well as extracting meaning units from interview transcripts, meaning units were identified and extracted from students' poems, rap, and song lyrics. Since participants had included some written explanations about the significance of their artwork, meaning statements were extracted from their explanations.

Next, patterns and relationships between meaning units were identified. Related meaning units were grouped and into themes and sub-themes. This consisted of indexing, highlighting, and color-coding meaning units that shared common ideas and making connections between themes. Moustakas referred to this step as *clustering and thematizing*. As discussed by Connelly and Clandinin (2006), narrative explanation derives from the whole, as opposed to small parts. So, in order to ensure that themes were derived from the entirety of the interviews, themes were checked against the entirety of participants' stories. Themes were also compared to participants' creative representations to ensure that their art and writing supported the themes that emerged from the transcriptions. Clusters of themes were checked against the original protocols in order to validate them using lines of questioning suggested by Colaizzi (1978). First, were themes

expressed explicitly in the transcription? Second, if not, were they implicit in the transcription? Any themes that were not validated in the protocol were re-examined for bias or misunderstanding. Common threads that wove together participants' stories were defined.

After that, validated meaning units and themes were synthesized into a *textural description* of the experience. The textural description of the experience was *what* a participant experienced. Next the contextual and situational variables unique to each specific case were used in combination with the textural description in developing a *structural description* of the experience. The structural description of the experience described the context and setting that influenced *how* participants experienced expulsion. Finally, the textural and structural descriptions were integrated into a comprehensive description of each participant's experience. Significant verbatim quotes were selected directly from interview transcripts to incorporate participants' own voices into the comprehensive description of the experience.

After each individual's experience was examined independently, the participants' experiences were examined as a whole. Core commonalities that were constant throughout participants' accounts were identified. Moustakas refers to this as the *essential, invariant structure*, or *essence* of the experience. This was the underlying structure of the experience focusing on the common experiences of the participants. Elements unique to individual participants' experiences were noted but not included in the invariant structure of the experience. Participants' quotes, excerpts of writing, and

artwork were selected for use in the composite description of the invariant structure of the experience if they were representative of students' experiences as a whole.

Once the core commonalities of the experience of being expelled from school were identified, the researcher returned to the literature to make connections and to obtain additional insights that might facilitate the development of recommendations for educators. Core commonalities of the expulsion experience centered on participants' shift from being motivated by external forces, specifically peers, to becoming increasingly self-driven. Participants experienced improved self-concept, increased self-efficacy, development of an internal locus of control, and high levels of resilience, which was not anticipated in the planning of this study. Literature on peer relationships, self-concept, self-efficacy, locus of control, and resilience were not studied in the original literature review, so a review of literature in these areas was subsequently conducted. After reviewing this body of knowledge, recommendations for educators were developed based on students' suggestions for helping expelled students as well as the researcher's own insights.

Chapter 4: Findings

Overview

While school-exclusion policies and their implications have been heavily debated by legislators, policy-makers, and school leaders, student voices have been absent from the discussion. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the expulsion experience from the point of view of the student in order to represent this critical stakeholder group and to aid in future decision-making. The questions directing this study were: 1. What is the expulsion experience from expelled students' perspectives? 2. What are the contextual, organizational, and personal issues that emerge from the voices of expelled students? Because the views of adult stakeholders, parents, teachers, and administrators have already defined the school-exclusion debate, this study focused only on students' reports of their own experiences.

Students shared their stories verbally and through writing and drawing. Data were collected from verbatim interview transcripts and participants' writings and drawings. Moustakas' (1999) transcendental/psychological phenomenology method was used in data analysis. Data was analyzed according to Moustakas' six-step process to understand the invariant structure of the experience of expulsion from school (Moustakas, 1994). From the categorizations and analysis of the data, the invariant structure of the experience emerged from the voices of the eight participants. Students' voices, behaviors, and

images provided a rich and consistent response to the expulsion experience. Core commonalities that united participants' accounts were identified. All students revealed aspects of:

1. A search for social acceptance and approval as a precursor to expulsion;
2. The emotional impact of expulsion;
3. The educational impact of expulsion; and
4. Personal growth and self-discovery as a result of expulsion.

Results are reported according to these categories. Global themes that were persistent throughout all the categories are also discussed.

Interactions with Participants

Three participants called to schedule an interview the same day or the day after they received their invitation to participate. Three participants dropped by the expulsion program on their way home from school. They asked to be interviewed then and there. They expressed disappointment when they were told that they couldn't be interviewed until their parents had signed a consent form. Most of the interviews were scheduled for only a few days after participants initiated contact.

After consenting to participate, participants and their parents received a phone call from the researcher to answer questions or concerns they had regarding the study. Students were asked to bring any art-work or writing representative of the expulsion experience to the interview. Students had an opportunity to think about their experiences in advance of the interview, since the invitation mailed to students included the interview

protocol. Interviews were approximately an hour in length and ended when participants began repeating themselves and had nothing else they wanted to share. Participants started talking about their experiences as soon as they arrived. It was necessary to ask them to hold their thoughts until the recording device was set up. Two participants brought notes with them highlighting aspects of the experience that they hoped would be addressed in this study.

Participants sometimes articulated frustration while speaking because they had not acquired the vocabulary they needed to describe their experiences as comprehensively as they desired. For example, Devin said, “I just can’t tell it right.” Gabriela lamented, “I don’t know the right words.” They would frequently begin a sentence, but stop, unable to complete the thought. They would also explain the same thing in several ways to circumvent vocabulary they lacked. Two of the participants were especially limited in their verbal abilities and had received support for speech and language disabilities in the past.

Students’ creative representations of the expulsion experience provided another avenue for understanding the expulsion experience. Only two of the participants brought art-work, poetry, or some creative work to their initial interview. However, after finding out that others had provided art and writing, students asked if they could bring in their own work as well. After the initial interview, they sent work through inter-district mail as well as dropping it off in person. Seven of the eight students shared either writing or drawings. Several of the drawings were presented with written explanations of the significance of the piece. Several participants articulated that they felt honored to have

the privilege of sharing their rap, poetry, song lyrics, cartoons and drawings with a wider audience.

Presentation of Study Findings

The personal accounts of the students consistently focused on students' search for social acceptance and approval as a precursor to expulsion, the emotional impact of expulsion, the educational impact of expulsion, imagery of expulsion, and personal growth and discovery as a result of expulsion. Findings were organized by grouping together similar statements addressing similar aspects of the experience. All statements related to the expulsion experience address one of these aspects. All of the creative representations students shared shed light on at least one of these five aspects of the experience.

Protecting participants' identities was a major consideration in presenting study findings. The small number of expelled students who attended the district's expulsion program and the specifics around students' expulsion made concealing participants' identities a challenge. Participants' experiences were presented by theme, instead of by individual participants' narratives, to protect participants' identities. Individual narratives are not presented because narratives could compile a body of information about specific participants that would make them easily identifiable. Finally, since participants shared sensitive information that could harm their reputations, it was especially important to protect participants' identities. All names were changed. Pseudonyms were assigned to people and locations to preserve participants' anonymity. Pseudonyms assigned to participants were: Jasmine, Carlos, Aisha, Jordan, Devin, Gabriela, Seth, and Jerome.

The Rocky Mountain School District was the pseudonym assigned to the school district in which the study was conducted. Pseudonyms were also used to reference all other places and people participants referenced.

Participants' writing, poetry, song lyrics, and rap are presented as originally written. Changes were not made to correct participants' spelling, grammar, punctuation, or capitalization. Fidelity to students' writing was maintained in order to present students' actual words in their own voices. Quotes are also presented as stated without any elimination of slang or revision of non-standard English. Students' quotes were presented exactly as verbalized to allow the reader to hear students' authentic voices as if they were present at the time of the interviews.

Study findings are presented chronologically in order to walk the reader through participants' experiences in order: beginning prior to expulsion, through the expulsion term, and concluding after students' expulsions ended and they returned to the traditional school environment. First, the thoughts and actions, which led to students' participation in expellable acts, are discussed. Searching for acceptance and approval from peers was a powerful driving force that compelled all participants to commit expellable acts. Second, the range of participants' emotional experiences during the expulsion hearing and the expulsion term are discussed. Participants' emotional experiences took a variety of forms including: trauma and confusion, sadness and depression, shame and embarrassment, and isolation. Third, the impact of expulsion on students' education is presented. Although students had limited educational opportunities, they perceived that they became better students during their expulsion term. Finally, students' perception of the long-term

impact of expulsion on students' lives is presented. Overall, students' experiences were primarily positive, since expulsion served as a catalyst for growth and rebuilding of a more positive self.

Searching for social acceptance and social approval.

The story of participants' expulsion experience began with the commission of an expellable act. Violation of the district's student conduct code was the catalyst that set in motion the chain of events which served as the context of participants' expulsion experience. All participants discussed the incidents that led to their expulsion and their motivation in engaging in behaviors that violated the district's conduct code. All participants reported searching for acceptance and approval from peers as a driving force that compelled them to engage in expellable behaviors. Every participant discussed the importance they placed on how their peers viewed them. All participants elaborated on the role of their peers in the commission of their expulsion incidents. Many participants stressed the importance they placed on "being cool" before their expulsion incidents. They explained that after their expulsions, they were less concerned about how others viewed them.

Students in this study discussed the importance of "being cool." Participants' comments revealed that they believed that engaging in rebellious behavior would increase their "coolness." Rebellious behaviors students mentioned included distributing drugs and alcohol, using drugs and alcohol at school, fighting, taking dares, carrying knives, guns and other weapons, and defying authority figures, such as teachers, administrators, parents, and police officers.

Participants who were expelled for drug and alcohol policy violations explained that they presumed that they would be seen as “cool” if they provided illicit substances or used these substances with peers at school. They desired to be recognized by a greater number of their classmates and sought out the notoriety that they perceived they could acquire through distribution of forbidden substances. Seth explained how obtaining more attention from students at his new school compelled him to sell and use marijuana at school:

I was trying to be cool, trying to be like, ‘Hey, this guy always has it.’ Like, ‘Hang out with him, he’s the cool kid.’ A lot of people would see me in the hall and they’re like, ‘What Up! Hey, did you bring me anything? You got a match?’ ‘Sure. All right.’

Seth explained the attention he felt for providing marijuana. Although he had already been disciplined for getting caught with drugs twice at school, he saw an opportunity that he anticipated would help him make friends at his new school. He elaborated on the motivation that resulted in a third drug strike and in his expulsion:

I found a crawlspace or basement entrance and a janitor’s closet. Well, all you had to do was open the door and slide your ID in it and pull. Well, I open it up, go down there, and brought a couple of other people with me. Just like, ‘Hey, cool! I’m the cool kid. I can smoke inside the school. You know, I’ll be a cool, a big shot.’

Seth explained that his behavior was motivated by the perception that facilitating students’ drug use at school would make him “a big shot.” Similarly, Gabriela acknowledged a deep desire to be recognized by the girls she perceived to be popular at her school. She took note of what the popular girls were doing and did it too:

I used to be a bad person in school. I used to do whatever. I used to be like: ‘Eh.’ You know, one of those bad girls. And I wanted to fit in with everyone.

Since she perceived that her friends thought it was cool and funny to be under the influence at school, Gabriela brought alcohol to school. She felt that she was able to become “cool” too after providing alcohol to the group:

I was like, ‘Okay, what are they doing? I wanna go with them. Let’s go.’ So I was trying to fit in with everybody. Everybody thought it was funny [to get drunk at school]. I brought it [alcohol] and they were like, ‘You’re so cool to hang around with.’ I was like, ‘Thank you.’

She explained the role others played in her commission of her expulsion incident:

You’re doing THAT because you don’t care about anything, because people are pressuring you and telling you and saying these things to YOU to make you do the things.

Students’ comments revealed that the need to be accepted by peers overwhelmed their concern of potential consequences. Two participants, Seth and Gabriela, were expelled a second time for distribution of a prohibited substance. The students cited gaining approval and recognition from their peer group as a motivating force in both expulsions. Seth explained how administrators had warned him of the ramifications of further violations of the school’s drug and alcohol policies, but he continued to violate the policies anyway:

I brought drugs to school: marijuana on three different occasions. Well, more than three different occasions, but I only got caught three different times. And they have the three-strike system. They told me from day one, first strike: ‘If you get three strikes, you’re expelled.’ So I knew [the consequences] the whole damn time, from each and every encounter, every time I brought it.

Jasmine shared that her concerns for the consequences of getting in a fight were overridden by peer pressure. She said, “I had plenty of warning to stop what I was doing, but all I was worried about was friends. I wasn’t thinking about the consequences but, instead, I was trying to show off in front of my friends.” Although she knew she would

get suspended, at a minimum, she fought another student because she anticipated that stepping down from a challenge to fight would harm her reputation. This was an example of her internal locus of control being overridden by external sources before expulsion.

Gabriela also knew about the ramifications of violating her school's rules but continued to violate them anyway. Two years after getting expelled for distribution of alcohol, Gabriela was expelled for distribution of marijuana. Although she had experienced the fallout of distribution first hand, her desire to fit in was a greater motivator than the possibility of expulsion. She explained how she planned to distribute marijuana to gain admission into a clique she desired to be part of:

I had noticed that everybody was talking about it [marijuana] every time I passed by 'em. Especially the skaters. I was like: 'The skaters seem so cool. I want to be like that.' So then I heard them talking, 'Yeah, we need some weed, you got any?' Then they used to go up to me, and I went: 'Nope.' So ever since I was like: 'Okay, I wanna try that.' So I stole some from my brother, and I was like, 'I'm gonna sell that at school.' And I brought it, and then they almost had it, but then I got caught. So that's what made me bring it to school. Because all I wanted was just to be cool. I never smoked it, 'cause that's bad for you. I just wanted to sell just to be cool.

Participants discussed the conflict of their own morals and their desire to be accepted by their peer group. Their participation in their expulsion incidents indicated that their sense of right and wrong was often overridden by the need to be accepted by their peer group. For example, although Gabriela deemed smoking marijuana to be dangerous and did not engage in any drug use, herself, she still attempted to gain acceptance into the skateboarding crowd by providing the marijuana they desired. The contradiction between her own morals and the desire to be accepted was evident in her

statement, “I never smoked it, ‘cause that’s bad for you. I just wanted to sell just to be cool.”

Similarly, Aisha explained that her conscience and notion of right and wrong were overridden by the desire to appear more attractive to a boy she liked. She was expelled after she gave in to peer pressure to do a dare. Although she was uncomfortable doing the dare, she went through with it to gain approval from the person who dared her to do it – a boy she liked from “the popular crowd.” She recognized that she shouldn’t have taken the dare, yet she accepted the challenge anyway. She tried to do the dare in a way that she anticipated would be less harmful to others. Aisha described how she was dared to put hand sanitizer *in* her teacher’s coffee cup, but instead she put it *on* the teacher’s cup to bridge the gap between her own morals and gaining recognition for taking the dare. She explained:

Well, my friend, no names, he dared me to put hand sanitizer IN the substitute teacher’s coffee cup, but I was like: ‘Uh-uh.’ So, I put hand sanitizer on my hands. I rubbed them together, and I touched the lid of her coffee cup. And another friend put like dry erase marker and stuff in it. And when she came back to class, it was a substitute, and she drank it. And I did not think she was going to drink it. We were just really shocked when she drank it, and I felt really bad after the fact, but it was a dare and I was acting really childish.

Aisha explained that, after the fact, she realized that her actions were immature and childish, rather than “cool”.

Jordan felt that an affiliation with “the wrong crowd” had a devastating effect on his life. Recalling the extreme peer pressure associated with his expulsion incident seemed to physically impact him. He was visibly distraught, slumping in his seat with his

eyes averted, as he talked about the pressure that drove him to participate in his expulsion incident:

I was under a lot of peer pressure. I didn't want to be hurt by the people I was with. I didn't want it to, uh, I didn't [long pause] I just didn't want to, you know, be hurt or killed that day because of what happened. I was afraid that if I had left and said, 'I don't want to be part of this thing,' that something could happen to me, possibly fatal. That's more than peer pressure. That's fear for my life.

Jordan also identified peer pressure as the driving force behind his actions in his expulsion incident. He explained, "I know that I was under a lot of peer pressure in my incident. That is why what happened to me was because of peer pressure. I was hanging out with the wrong people." His view of what happened "to him" indicated a strong external locus of control. His conclusion that it happened "because of peer pressure" also indicated the large role external forces had on Jordan's decision-making and thought processes.

Jasmine identified fear and peer pressure as factors that compelled her to engage in her expulsion incident. She was expelled for assaulting another student during a fight:

When I got home, I saw I missed calls from her friends threatening me that they were going to jump me. That's what escalated my anger. I talked to my mom about it, and she said we would go talk to my dean the next morning. This is where the fight could have been interrupted, but I got to the point where the things my mom was telling me was going in one ear and right out the other. I gave in to peer pressure because all I could think about is what people would say about me if I said I didn't want to fight her.

In this statement Jasmine did not mention wanting to fight the girl for any internal personal reasons. Instead she noted that her motivation to fight was based on external factors. Her motivation was preventing others from saying things that might tarnish her image.

Some participants reported engaging in defiant behavior to impress their peers. They reported disrespecting teachers, refusing to follow directions, and getting many behavior referrals in school. Before her expulsion, Aisha felt that she had “an attitude problem and a dominance problem.” Jasmine said, “I just wouldn’t listen ‘cause I didn’t want my friends to know adults could control me.” Carlos said, “My attitude and behavior I couldn’t explain when adults or teachers asked me about it. I didn’t care what they thought. I was only interested in what me and my friends thought was cool.”

Looking for validation, approval, and recognition from peers was not new for students in this study. Most participants reported a history of trying hard to be accepted by others. They shared that their expulsion incidents were a single event in an established pattern of acceptance-seeking behaviors. Aisha recognized how her affiliation with “the wrong crowd” was detrimental throughout her school career:

A lot of teachers had told my Mom this since the sixth grade: I have a lot of potential and that I am very BOOK smart. It’s the people I hang around with who get me in trouble. So, obviously, I ran around with the wrong crowd.

Jasmine also attributed her poor decision making to her choice of friends. She said:

My intentions weren’t to be bad or rude. It’s just that I got with the wrong group of people to hang out with, so I started fighting and mouthing off and doing all the disrespectful things I was doing to impress my girls.

These statements reflect participants’ struggle to separate their decision-making from their peers’ acceptance.

Gaining validation from peers was a driving force that motivated students to engage in expellable behavior. Students believed that engaging in behaviors such as drug and alcohol use and distribution, fights, weapon carrying, threatening others, dare taking

and disrespecting and disobeying authority figures, would make their peers see them as “cool.” Before expulsion, being cool was a priority for these students and they fixated on their peers’ perceptions of them. Often their own morals and concern for consequences were overridden by an overwhelming desire for validation.

Emotional impact.

All participants shared vivid details about the emotional impact of their expulsions. While being interviewed, participants who had previously been energetic and animated in talking to the researcher spoke quietly and more tentatively than while discussing other topics. Some participants looked nervous, squirming in their chairs, looking away from the researcher, and hanging their heads. Tears began to well up in two participants’ eyes as they recalled the emotional impact of their expulsion.

Participants reported that, at the time of their expulsion, they saw this event as life-ending. Participants shared that the expulsion proceedings and their expulsion term were a difficult and confusing time. All participants revealed that they experienced intense sadness or depression following expulsion. Most participants shared that they felt alone and missed their friends after being barred from attending school. All participants discussed feeling embarrassed or ashamed when others found out about their expulsions. Participants all cited negative assumptions or judgments they believed others make about expelled students. However, all participants also stressed that making mistakes was a normal part of being a teenager or part of being human. All participants cited concerns about the potential negative impact of expulsion on their lives in the future. The range of

emotion students experienced is discussed below and supported by the imagery they utilized to represent these emotions.

A life-ending event.

At the time of their expulsion, participants conceptualized expulsion as a life-ending event. They remembered that when they first found out they were expelled they felt like their lives were over. They used images of death and guns as a symbol of their expulsion. They shared that they saw no future for themselves and viewed expulsion as impending death. Devin wrote that being expelled felt like he “had been shot for dope.” He explained that expulsion was “like taking a bullet to the head.” He also concluded his “entire life would end up in the trash.” “It was over for me,” Carlos stated. Jasmine said expulsion felt like a man standing on a bridge, just about to jump, pondering how badly it would hurt and how quickly death would come. At the time of his expulsion Devin worried of his impending demise, writing, “It feels like I’ve been put on death row.” He also said, “The few who made a mistake and paid for it with everything.” Gabriela stressed to other students the potentially life-ending power of expulsion. She had a strong desire to prevent her peers from making the same mistake she had made, warning, “Think twice. You’re *risking your life* to smoke weed!”

Devin drew a picture of expulsion as death (Figure 1). He drew a person hanging by a noose around his neck. The character had EXP written on his chest. Shackles hung from his wrists. He had no facial features. “CONDEMNED” was written above the picture. Around the figure Devin wrote the words: alone, damned, waste, and failure. “EXPELLED” was written in large letters at the bottom of the page.

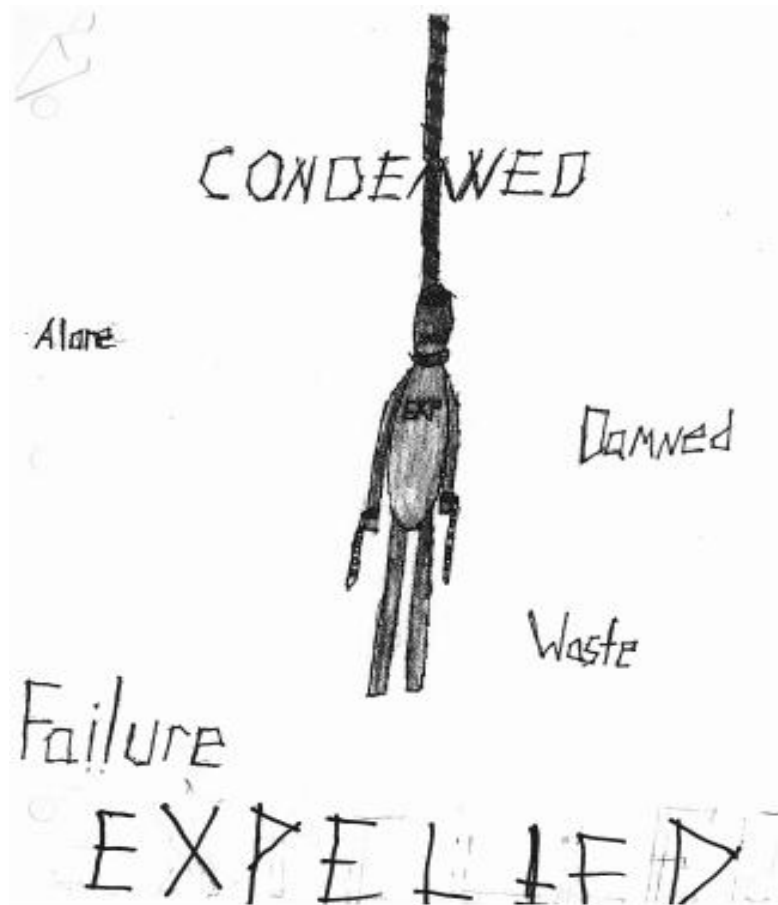


Figure 1: Devin's drawing of expulsion as being condemned

Trauma and confusion.

Participants stressed the difficulty of being expelled. Jerome classified the experience as “devastating” and “horrible.” Carlos said it was “shocking” and a “very, very bad thing.” Gabriela said it was “scary” and explained, “Your life is going to get harder.” Jordan said, “I know that it’s hard to be expelled because I experienced it. I went through it. It was incredibly upsetting more than a few times.” “Hard” and “upset” were

common terms used to summarize their experience. Gabriela stated, “I went through so much, and it was so hard for me. I never expected so much trouble.” Jasmine stated that expulsion is something you must “survive.” Aisha said she was “in shock” and compared the trauma of being expelled to being in a bad car crash. Devin also spoke of himself as a survivor. Explaining expulsion, he said, “It’s like exile or death. I choose exile over death to show that I will survive.”

Participants had either vivid memories or no memories of the trauma they experienced at the time of their expulsion. Anthony couldn’t remember the exact events that occurred at the time of his expulsion. “It’s been erased from my memory,” he stated. Recalling the day he found out he was expelled, Carlos commented, “My life flashed in front of me.” Although almost two years had passed since her expulsion, Aisha still remembered finding out that she had been expelled “just like it happened yesterday.” She recalled the conversation with her mother:

‘Aisha,’ my mom calls from downstairs. As I’m walking towards her, I’m thinking of everything I did wrong, but nothing was there, just blank.

‘Yes, Mom?’

‘Why did your principal call saying you’re expelled?’

BOOM. My heart dropped straight to my stomach. I had nothing to say, so I walked upstairs.

Remembering this time in his life, Jordan recounted:

When I was at the expulsion hearing for the incident that happened to me, I was very scared and upset. I had no idea of what would come out of it. I was expelled at that hearing. I don’t remember very much from that hearing, because it was a pretty traumatic time.



Figure 2: Jasmine's drawing of insanity

Jasmine captured the trauma and confusion she experienced in a piece of artwork. She sketched a picture of a teenager with a look of shock and horror on her face (Figure 2). Her bloodshot eyes bulged out of dark sockets. A liquid, either tears or blood, flowed down her cheeks from her eye sockets. Her mouth was open in shock. Her tongue was hanging out of her mouth. The teenager's hands were by her face, in the same position as in Edvard Munch's renowned painting, "The Scream." The inscription at the bottom of the drawing read, "Sometimes we have to go a bit insane and go through something we never imagined before we can learn from our mistakes and find out who we are." She

captured the confusion and shock students experienced as they “go through something we never imagined.” Carlos also noted that, “Expulsion isn’t for everybody because some people would lose their minds.” Comparing expulsion to insanity indicates the intensity of the trauma and confusion participants experienced.

Participants reported experiencing confusion during expulsion proceedings and throughout the expulsion term. They became flustered trying to explain what actually occurred following their expulsion. They displayed confusion in trying to articulate how the expulsion proceedings took place, who was involved, what occurred, and when. They were not familiar with the specialized language that educators use in discussing expulsion. For example, Jerome referred to his expulsion hearing as “that one thing like court, but not really, just like the court of the school.” Gabriela described her hearing as, “the meeting in the big building at the district, with the old lady who asked a lot of questions.”

Unfamiliar language was only one disorienting element of the expulsion proceedings. Students described this period as being a whirlwind of undecipherable information, mixed messages, peculiar events, unfamiliar places, and new people. Jerome summarized the consequences of his expulsion incident as “chaotic”:

Well, they suspended us first for five days. And then they extended the suspension, and then they said that they were going to hold a meeting. No, no, we had a ticket at the school, like right away when they heard the story. And then, it had a court date on it.

And then at court they said that we were going to be expelled. No, they said we won’t be expelled and that we’d have to go to JPS [the central offices of another school district] to meet with an expulsion officer or something, and he said that we had to be expelled. And then at the office of the school district, the expulsion officer, the counselor and the assistant principal were there, and they

brought up the grades and all that. But I was passing all my classes, so I didn't necessarily care about that.

At the expulsion hearing they just said what would happen. We'll give you a call back about how we feel and he'll give us a letter. He gave us a letter in the mail saying that we would serve a sentence of a whole semester.

We were out of school a couple of months by then. Then we went to, uh, what was it? Achieve. The Achieve program, JPS's expulsion school, and we came there. We were there for like three months, and school was over.

So then we went to North in Rocky Mountain Schools, and they found out about the expulsion and said that we didn't finish it, so we'd have to come to expulsion program. The assistant principal did it. He went to look into our files, I guess. And he called my Mom. They had a talk. My Mom was like: 'No, they served their term.' And then he called JPS, the school we were expelled from. He called the expulsion officer and he was like, 'It would be better if you just, uh, if you just expelled them for now. They haven't finished their sentence. And then we'll make you come back before CSAP's and all that.'

Other participants' explanations of what happened after their expulsion incidents were equally complex and unclear.

Sadness and depression.

Participants reported experiencing intense sadness and even depression. Jordan said his expulsion, “put me in a slump.” “I felt like shit all the time,” he explained. He expressed never wanting to experience such a painful period again. He stated, “I hope I never feel like that again because it sucked!”

Participants symbolized their negative feelings about the event of expulsion itself with images of darkness. Jordan viewed expulsion as a dark cloud. Carlos referred to his expulsion as “a dark situation.” Carlos also alluded to impending doom in his poem “Darkness” stating:

Darkness closes in
Like a beast about to kill
Claws bare
Fangs naked

Carlos spoke of falling into a deep depression following his expulsion. Although he had minor struggles with depression before his expulsion, the event catapulted him into a depression that was more severe than anything else that he had ever experienced. His primary goal during his expulsion term was to overcome his depression through a combination of bi-weekly meetings with a therapist, weekly family counseling, music therapy, group therapy with other teens, reflective writing, and medication. He wrote a poem entitled, “Darkness,” about his experience:

Darkness

Darkness dances in ghostly silence
With shadows that float like Death’s wraith in endless night
Waiting to slash at my soul
As happiness nears

With evil sneers
Darkness burns like black fire
Flowing over feelings like water
Destroying sweet emotions of life
Like leaving hollow husks and empty shells
Saving only Hate and Anger
Darkness lives with breathless air
Living of my soul
Destroying it slow
Cutting with precise motions
Leaving a hollow shell
Where lives a voiceless Hell
Darkness in my mind
Cutting off light
Leaving me alone in endless cold
When happiness reaches out
Darkness stands in its way
Darkness speaks to me
It whispers endless lies
Never giving in
Slowly weakening me
Waiting with ageless patience
Darkness closes in
Like a beast about to kill
Claws bare
Fangs naked
Wailing for me to grow weaker
Darkness dances in ghostly silence
With shadows that float like Deaths' wraiths in endless night
Waiting to slash at my soul
As happiness nears
With evil sneers

Carlos described the elusive nature of happiness during this difficult period in his life. Darkness, a proxy for sadness and depression, repeatedly prevents the arrival of happiness. He stated:

When happiness reaches out
Darkness stands in its way

His depression tormented him “waiting to slash at my soul.” He personified his sadness in his writing:

Darkness closes in
Like a beast about to kill
Claws bare
Fangs naked
Wailing for me to grow weaker

He described how negative emotions overwhelmed the positive emotions in life stating:

Darkness burns like black fire
Flowing over feelings like water
Destroying sweet emotions of life

Similarly, Devin wrote a rap about the struggles and adversity he struggled to overcome during his expulsion term. Although he eventually felt successful, the expulsion experience itself made him depressed and suicidal. He wrote:

BEING EXPELLED

Being expelled gave me no hope
It feels like I’ve been shot for dope

I feel abandoned, stranded
I lost all my homies, but I’m a changed man
Expulsion school is ghetto,
It feels like I’ve been put on death row

I’m trying hard to maintain,
but they keep putting me down like I’m some clown

I started making changes,
but one day I woke up and asked,
"Should I blast myself?"

I tried to explain myself to two strangers,
but still got no changes.

I came real far, I know what it takes
Hey, everybody makes mistakes

In his rap Devin described becoming hopeless after his expulsion, but eventually learning and growing from the experience. Devin described the difficulty of “trying to maintain” through adversity but being discouraged as he was stigmatized and “put down” by others. He experienced intense feelings of despair, comparing them to being “shot for dope” or “put on death row.” Devin alluded to Tupac Shakur’s iconic rap, “That’s Just the Way it Is,” a commentary on the plight of the Black and poor. He used the phrase, “I started making changes, but one day I woke up and asked myself, ‘Should I blast myself?’” His suicidal ideations were an indication of the intensity of his depression and the immensity of his struggle.

Students also spoke of emptiness and hollowness. They referenced “being nowhere.” In his song “Expelled,” Devin confronted the idea that expelled students are identity-less beings with “no names, no faces.” He characterized expelled students as “nowhere kids,” lost in the world, lacking hope and opportunity. He explained that expelled students are often perceived to be nameless, faceless shells, whose identities have been lost and replaced by one “8 letter word” – expelled. Carlos stated, “We are treated like we don’t exist.” Devin explained, “To them we are nothing.” In his poem Carlos used imagery of emptiness and nothingness. He referenced hollow husks, hollow shells, and empty shells. He wrote:

Darkness burns like black fire
Flowing over feelings like water
Destroying sweet emotions of life
Like leaving hollow husks and empty shells
Saving only Hate and Anger
Darkness lives with breathless air
Living of my soul

Destroying it slow
Cutting with precise motions
Leaving a hollow shell

Embarrassment and shame.

All participants reported experiencing embarrassment and shame as a result of their expulsion. The enduring embarrassment and shame participants continued to feel was evident in the interviews. When sharing the details of their expulsion incidents and others' reactions to their incidents, they appeared physically uncomfortable. They often spoke quietly, hung their heads, and avoided making eye contact with the researcher. When asked about their most vivid memories of the expulsion experience, many of the stories students shared were of feeling ashamed and embarrassed. Seth remembered the embarrassment he experienced being escorted off school grounds by police officers following the incident:

It's like: 'You got expelled. Bye. Get out now. Or we'll have an escort waiting for you.' I've literally been escorted out of the building, full handcuffs and everything. I got expelled: 'Okay, we need to escort you out in handcuffs. We're sorry.' Oh, man, talk about embarrassment!

Seth's statement revealed that his focus was on how others viewed him, instead of on the possible consequences or his own well-being. This indicated the importance he placed on the opinions of others in building his self-concept before expulsion.

Jerome's most vivid memory of this time period was feeling ashamed while at court:

Seeing the accuser laughing at me, smiling as they're walking down the hall. When we got out of the courtroom, we couldn't be anywhere near her but we were watching. She was walking past us and she smiled and laughed like it was a joke.

Jerome and Seth's statements highlighted the importance students put on others' perceptions of them. Like Jerome and Seth, many participants reported that their primary concern at the time of expulsion was others' perceptions of them.

Participants felt shame for disappointing their families. "It's the worst feeling in the world to disappoint your parents," Carlos said. Remembering his interactions with his family, Seth said: "They were very unhappy and disappointed. They pretty much made me feel like I was a retard. They put me down." Participants also disclosed that they felt ashamed for disappointing adults at school. This statement illustrates the negative impact that others' disappointment had on Seth's emotional state and sense of self-worth.

Carlos recounted:

Lots of my old teachers liked me, or dare I say, even loved me. They really cared about me. Like Mrs. Lee. She would let me come to her class during my electives and help me with homework and just talk. I really was terrified about what would happen when she heard about me. She would be so disappointed!

Participants identified one of the worst consequences of expulsion to be losing the trust of adults they cared about. Jordan said, "The hardest thing about being expelled was losing the trust of people I knew." Jasmine wrote, "Everyone is disappointed in you and you know you let people down. They lose respect for you too." As she observed, "I think what really motivated me to change was hurting my family and the rest of the people who care about me." Aisha said, "No one has any trust in me, so I feel bad for everything I've done." Jordan explained, "The hardest thing about being expelled, honestly, was losing the trust of people I knew. I was such an idiot for doing that, because it put me in a slump." When asked how adults reacted to her expulsion Gabriela said, "They were so disappointed in me they couldn't even talk."

Isolation.

All participants shared that they felt alone and isolated after being barred from school. All participants spoke at length about missing their friends. In his rap Devin noted that he “felt abandoned, stranded” after he lost his “homies.” In Carlos’ poem the phrase “leaving me alone in endless cold” evoked imagery of isolation. Jasmine wrote, “I have absolutely nobody here.” Seth explained how his relationships with his friends and his peers in school were severed:

I lost all contact. Never spoke to them again. Like ‘Bye!’ It’s how it happened. Being expelled, being kicked out of school. I mean I changed school districts. I had to change schools. It’s not like I’m being expelled and you have time to say ‘Bye!’ No, it’s like: ‘You got expelled. Bye. Get out now. Or we’ll have an escort waiting for you!’

Students in this study reported that they lost friendships in the wake of their expulsion. Jordan recalled:

At school, a lot of my friends were understanding once I got to explain to them what happened. My true friends actually understood what happened and they went: ‘Well, that was an idiot thing for you to do, but I’m still going to stick with you as a friend.’ So I know who my true friends are now. Um, yeah, and people that didn’t understand. Well, they’re not in my life any more. I can’t blame them. I did a really stupid thing, but it’s their choice to cut me out of their lives, and I have to respect that.

Students surmised that being inaccurately stereotyped by others contributed to social isolation. Gabriela described the judgments her friends made about her and how those judgments impacted her friendships. She explained what she believed others thought of her:

Me? A bad person. They thought I was a bad person. They’re like, ‘I can’t hang around you. You’re so bad. You’re not a good friend.’ I was just like, ‘Oh, Gosh!’ After I was free, everybody was like, ‘Can I hang out with you guys?’ ‘Um? No.’

They'd say, 'Say what? Why not?' 'Because you're a bad person.' It kind of hurt me. I was like, 'Gosh!'

Gabriela distributed drugs and alcohol to try to get to hang out with specific cliques to which she had not gained membership. Ironically, Gabriela's statements indicate that distributing drugs and alcohol caused her to be excluded from the clique she was already part of.

Jasmine compared students' experiences of being forced to leave their old schools and old lives to dandelion seeds being blown away from the plant they came from. "We are all dandelions and our expulsion is the wind that blows us to a new place and time," she wrote. She explained that expelled students are transient, like dandelion seeds, being blown across place and time. Their expulsion is the wind that takes them away from their old school and old life to a new place and time.

Perceived stigmatization.

All participants elaborated on their perceptions of how they believed others view expelled students. They presumed that others made a plethora of upsetting assumptions about them. Students perceived that others viewed them as trouble-makers, drug-users, gang members, thugs, monsters, violent people, thieves, criminals, losers, idiots, dropouts, burnouts, nobodies, pariahs, sinners, delinquents and social rejects. They shared that they were hurt by the judgments that others, especially school officials, had made about them. All of the participants asked educators to refrain from judging expelled students.

Devin wrote the following song lyrics about the stigmatization he felt during his expulsion term:

Expelled

We are nowhere kids,
No names, no faces, no prayers, no hope.
Society has thrown us away, spit in our faces,
Labeled us sinners, pariahs, criminal nobodies.
We see them stare,
Stare in fear and disdain,
Fear of what they don't know-
What they don't want to know.
But there's more to us than just that
8 letter word.
We are people
But they don't see that.
When they look at us they see only
Our demons,
Not the angels in our hearts.
Maybe it's their blindness
Or maybe it's the masks we wear,
The walls we put up,
To protect us from who we really are?
We are people too, but only kids,
Kids with hopes and dreams.
This is our story.

In his song lyrics Devin expressed concerns common among participants regarding stigmatization and mischaracterization. He felt that others did not understand expelled students and didn't want to understand them. Devin suggested that once students were labeled as "expelled," students were also labeled as "sinners, pariahs, criminal nobodies." As Devin put it, "Society has thrown us away, spit in our faces." Carlos said others saw expelled students as "society's rejects." Jordan presumed that others viewed him as "a terrorist and a monster." Gabriela surmised others thought she was a "bad person" and "a nobody."

Jerome drew a picture depicting stereotypes of expelled students whom he thought were especially common. He drew a diagram of a teenager and labeled each

common stereotype. A marijuana leaf on the boy's t-shirt was labeled "druggee stereotype." The boy's hand was held up in a "C" shape (for Crips) and labeled "gang-banger stereotype." His other hand held a hand gun and was labeled "weapon stereotype." A pool of blood and brass knuckles were at the boy's feet labeled "violence stereotype." A capital "L" was written on the boy's forehead and labeled "loser stereotype." Next to it in parentheses he wrote: (the worst stereotype). Jerome seemed ashamed of sharing his diagram and did not want to explain it in further detail.

Seth described the judgments he believed school officials make about expelled students: "They're idiots, thugs. They don't even, shouldn't be there. They should be dropouts. They aren't going to go anywhere in life. Things like that." On being judged by others Jerome said, "I know everybody does that – A LOT." He felt he was judged by "The assistant principal, the whole school, the principal, everything. Because they thought I, we, were making them look bad. 'Cause they had to deal with expelled students."

When asked what it means to be expelled, Jerome shook his head and repeated over and over, "It's not what you think." He explained:

Most educators think that being expelled you did something horrible wrong. It was your fault, and you're just a trouble-maker, but most kids that come to the expulsion school, they actually grow, become better. They try to stay out of trouble. They try to do everything in the right way.

When asked to describe expelled students Jordan said:

Expelled students aren't always monsters. In my case, I think I was a pretty good person. I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time doing the wrong thing. I was afraid of what would happen to me if I told on the other people who were involved in the incident, so I made a mistake in going along with them. Most expelled students are good people too, who just did the wrong thing. Most

expelled students, well, at least the ones that I got to know, were good-hearted people. It doesn't seem like it should be that way, but it is.

Participants shared that they were hurt by the stigmatization they perceived. They reported feeling shame and embarrassment as a result of stigmatization. Devin said, "Some of my teachers saw me as a bad kid and I didn't like that 'cause am truly a good person with good intentions. I just did some really stupid stuff." Devin's statement indicated the difference between his direct appraisal of his behavior and the reflected appraisal of others.

Most participants told stories about upsetting interactions with adults. Jordan relayed an interaction he still remembered with a school district employee at his expulsion hearing:

One of the assistant superintendents was at my meeting, and she didn't want anything to do with me. I said, 'Thank you for your time.' I attempted to shake her hand, and she was like 'No,' walking away. I told myself, 'Okay, that's cool' and I tried not to get upset. But, you know, would it be possible to maybe be a little nicer? I mean I would understand you probably think I'm a monster, but you don't have to turn away from me like that, you know. Just maybe be a little more considerate of how kids feel during the whole process.

Jasmine said:

Sometimes I feel down because people mistake me for something I'm not. Like just the other day this lady called me a delinquent. I don't want to be considered a delinquent. I'm a good kid who made a stupid mistake.

Carlos explained, "I only say people misunderstand me because they act like I'm going to kill someone or something." In his poem Devin described his sense of how others saw him and his expelled peers:

We are people
But they don't see that.
When they look at us they see only

Our demons,
Not the angels in our hearts.

Participants shared that they identified positive qualities about themselves, even if others did not share this perception. Seth explained how he perceived that people had judged him inaccurately:

My expulsion added to the bad things people already thought about me. People judged me because my sister is a criminal, felon, thief. People were like, 'Oh, God, it's her brother. Look out, he might steal from you.' If you ask any people that know me truly, to this day, they'll say I'm the nicest, helpful, friendliest non-thief person that probably was ever. I would drop whatever I am doing and help you. Like the other day, my neighbors, their heater don't work. Well, my work had a whole bunch of wood. Well, I bent my back over trying to get them that wood for their fireplace. Well, I got it to 'em. Now they're set for probably the rest of the winter.

Seth contrasted how his concern for others and kindness toward others ran counter to the assumptions made about him based on his sister's reputation and his expulsion.

Aisha remembered feeling judged by school personnel at the time of her expulsion:

Ms. Barrett didn't really judge me because she knew me. We went to the same church. But Mr. Adams, he didn't really know me. He was just going off of what happened, and he just like, he didn't really say anything mean, he just like, the way he looked at me, and had a vibe that was very negative. I understand I did wrong, but I don't think that I should be treated differently. I bet he made mistakes when he was younger. I think that most teachers did, but they forget that.

Most participants reported trying to keep their expulsions as private as possible. They shared that, because they worried that others would make unflattering assumptions about them based on their past behavior, participants preferred to keep the details of their expulsion incidents private. Although participants perceived some people to be understanding in regard to the mistakes expelled students made, others were not. Jordan

said, “I don’t want everyone to know what happened. At the expulsion program, I thought if people found out somehow, it was nice that they didn’t, that they would shun me, that they would think I was a monster or terrorist.” He added:

I think that public citizens were afraid of me for what happened. I’m sure it was on the news, what happened. I think if people, if they were to know what happened, besides a few of my few close friends who really understood what happened, they would be afraid of me and what I might be capable of.

Although participants preferred to keep their expulsions private, they reported that the news of their expulsions became very public. Even after students were removed from the school setting, they told stories of continuing to receive attention through social media networks. Some participants felt they were infamous in their schools and communities as “the expelled kid.” Aisha said:

Basically everybody knew my name. Either it was Aisha or ‘the girl who got expelled for the hand sanitizer.’ Yeah, they knew my name, and even when I was at expulsion school, people were on Facebook and My Space just messaging me about my situation and I was like, ‘Oh, leave me alone already.’

Jasmine had a similar experience:

Being expelled is dealing with all the drama on Facebook, and fighting with your friends, and hearing that your name pops out of everyone’s mouth. It just really pisses me off because I don’t wanna be everybody’s story when they don’t know even ONE fact!

Almost all the students perceived that they continued to receive attention for their expulsion upon returning to a traditional school. Jerome recalled, “When you go back to school, people ask, and they’re going to talk about it.” When asked what advice he would share with other expelled students he said, “Just know it will come. Their talk. Their conversation. Their smart remarks. Their ignorance.”

Normal people who learn from their mistakes.

Although participants felt that others saw them as bad people as a result of their expulsion, participants did not see themselves as bad people. All participants talked about being “human” or “normal people who make mistakes.” Devin described how he viewed himself and his expelled peers stating, “We are people too, but only kids.” The implication of his statement was that these students are still young and will make mistakes as is expected in youth. Carlos summed it up as, “Young IS reckless.” As Jasmine put it, “We’re teens. We’re still adjusting. I bet the people who kick you out of school have done bad before as kids too!”

Students shared that they perceived themselves to be good people who made mistakes. Jerome explained:

Being expelled doesn’t mean that you’re bad, because everybody makes mistakes. But just because they didn’t get expelled, and somebody else gets expelled, doesn’t mean that they’re bad, or they’re any less than you, or you’re any better than them.

Carlos said, “We are all only human and humans make mistakes all the time.” When asked “How do you describe yourself as a person?” Jerome replied, “Human, as a regular person, as a normal human being, ‘cause I make mistakes.”

Participants discussed both their positive qualities as well as their flaws. Several participants saw positive traits in themselves that they sensed others overlooked upon hearing they were expelled. Seth described himself this way:

Helpful. Talkative, very talkative. Restless, cannot sit still. Good listener. Good work attribute and hardworking, like I’m not afraid to do more than I gotta do. Really helpful, nice, kind. I mean, over-friendly. Really over-friendly. I’d do anything and everything to help you. Annoying because I like to come over, like I visit people a lot. I have basically a home away from home, my second family. I

call family, because I'm literally, if I'm not at my house, I'm basically there. I'm annoying because I'm like always coming over and always asking for things. But it's not like moochin' – like asking, like, more of a helpful asking like, 'Do you need anything?'

As well as speaking about themselves as fundamentally good people who make mistakes, participants spoke of their peers in this way as well. Jordan explained:

I can't speak for everybody as a whole, but the people, including myself, that I did know from the expulsion program while I was here; a lot of them are good-hearted people. They just got caught up in the wrong place at the wrong time doing the wrong thing. I had a few friends here. I'm not going to name any names. But they were doing some bad stuff, too, but I know that they're very good-hearted people, too, and I'm still friends with them to this day. I'm pretty close friends with one of them.

Concerns of limited opportunities.

Students shared worries that the stigmatization they felt would follow them into the future limiting future opportunities and the likelihood of success later in life. They perceived that they would have to work harder than their classmates to repair the damage caused by their expulsions. "Once you're expelled it's more work for you to get back on track," Carlos said. "Your record will make people doubt you. They keep a close eye on you and wait for you to mess up again. They don't have no trust in you, so you have to prove you're worthy. It's going to be hard to prove yourself," Jasmine explained. "Being expelled puts you ten steps behind when you were three steps ahead in your game," Carlos lamented.

Participants cited concerns of the potential negative repercussions expulsion could have on their reputations. Devin worried that his tarnished reputation would prevent future teachers from liking him and would impede his success in the future. He drew a comic strip labeled "My rep." The first scene was a frowning cartoon face, a gun next to

it, bullet discharged, moving toward the head. The second box was nothing but shards of the cartoon face broken apart and jumbled beyond recognition. He explained his cartoon:

When I was expelled it was like taking a bullet to the head. I felt so bad because I knew that all of my teachers that really liked me would be disappointed in me. I also thought that my entire life would end up in the trash. It was over for me. I thought that getting expelled would make all my future teachers have a very bad picture of me before they got to know me. That's why expulsion is a bullet to the head. Once you are shot in the face you'll never look the same. Your appearance to others will be forever altered.

Students in this study feared that their expulsions would continue to limit their opportunities as adults. After his expulsion Jordan was incredibly concerned that the criminal charges from his expulsion incident and having an expulsion on his school record would limit his opportunity to attend college and to secure a good job. After returning to his home school, Jordan was concerned enough about the potential negative impact of his future that he found a way to get the details of his expulsion incident removed from his school records in order to limit the potential negative impact on his future. He also was careful to fulfill all the requirements of his school probation and probation through the county court. He explained that it was critical to stay out of trouble so his juvenile criminal record would be sealed when he became an adult. Jordan stated he was successful in limiting the potential negative impact on his future since he hadn't been hindered in getting in to college or securing a job. He explained:

As for school, it hasn't affected me either, because I got it [the incident] removed from my school file. I was friends with one of the people at the Records Office at East, and I went down there one day and said, 'Hey, can you maybe erase this from my file? Not erase it, but like alter it a little bit so it just says 'Expelled.' I don't want the charge in there; I don't want anything like that in there?' And they said, 'Ok. Sure. I know you're a good kid so why not?' So I got that fixed up, too.

Jordan's attempt to have his school records amended indicated the large negative impact Jordan believed his past behavior could have on his future success.

Students felt that adults assumed that, because they had been expelled from school, they had no motivation and would be unsuccessful as adults. Therefore, it was very important for students to communicate the high expectations they have for the future. In his song lyrics Devin discredited the idea that expelled students have "no prayers, no hope," stating that these students are instead, "Kids with hopes and dreams."

Overall, expulsion was a time wrought with intense emotions. Once participants were expelled, they experienced a range of emotions as a result of this event. Their emotional experiences took a variety of forms including feelings of trauma and confusion, sadness and depression, shame and embarrassment, and isolation. They perceived that others stigmatized them due to their expulsion, and that judgment by others would lead to limited opportunities in the future. Participants used metaphors and imagery to illustrate the emotions that characterized the evolution of their thinking during their expulsion term.

Educational Impact

All students discussed the impact of expulsion on their education. All participants explained that they lost access to the traditional school environment and to the many opportunities afforded to them through a traditional school setting as a result of expulsion. All the participants also stated that expelled students need more educational opportunities. All the participants spoke on the importance of attending school. Most participants said that they valued their educational opportunities more, as a result of

expulsion. All participants spoke about the role school personnel played in their lives and recalled memories of specific interactions with teachers and administrators. They explained that the support and high expectations of these adults helped them to be successful. All participants elaborated on their goals and plans for the future, and some expressed concern that expulsion might limit their opportunities in the future. Finally, all participants perceived that their education had been negatively impacted by stigmatization by educators. They expressed concerns that stigmatization and stereotyping might limit their opportunities in the future. To respond to this concern, all participants appealed to educators to suspend judgment of expelled students and, instead, see them as normal people who make mistakes.

Loss of educational opportunity.

Students lost access to the traditional school environment and to the many opportunities afforded to them through a traditional school setting. Before being admitted to programs specifically for expelled students, all participants reported being completely out of school for at least a month, but up to four months, before enrolling in an alternative program. While attending alternative educational programs for expelled students, participants experienced shortened school days with few curricular offerings.

All participants desired more learning opportunities for themselves while expelled. All participants shared a conviction that expelled students should have access to more educational opportunities. Jasmine equated the lack of schooling to “a drought.” Anthony saw it as a “lack of options.” Seth felt he was “being left behind.” Gabriela described her disdain for a shortened school day:

We only had TWO classes. Two classes. And you get out at eleven. That's ridiculous! I'd rather be in school all day than half because there wasn't enough education, but at least I went to school and did something.

Jordan said:

Not only am I falling behind on credit in science and history, but I am also falling behind in intelligence. When I am allowed to go back to school I will resume my position as of the day I was expelled and it would be as if I had made absolutely no progress in the last year.

Having fewer curricular offerings available to them, high school students were able to take fewer classes and earn fewer credits than they could at a traditional school.

When asked how his expulsion affected him, Seth simply replied, "Credits... Big time.

Credits." Aisha described the destructive impact her expulsion had on her ability to earn graduation credits:

It kind of threw me off credit-wise for freshman year. But I'm catching back up, so you live and you learn. Expulsion school only has two classes: they have math and English. So, when I went there, I only had two credits. The norm for your first year is you're supposed to have at least six credits being done, if not seven or eight. So I now only have nine. You're supposed to have twelve by the end of this year. So I'm way behind. But I'm catching back up because I missed a whole bunch of electives from freshmen year that I could have taken if I wasn't expelled, but I can take them senior year, when other people have off periods. Then if I take online classes for my junior and senior summer, I'll be caught up just fine.

Aisha's statement indicates the extra effort needed to recover academically from expulsion.

Getting behind in credits as a result of his expulsion caused one participant not to graduate on time, and timely graduation was a concern that older participants shared. If students were already behind in school, expulsion caused them to be especially far behind.

When asked how to best help expelled students, Aisha explained:

[At the expulsion program] they only have two classes. Everybody else has a full schedule, so they can keep their credit. I think the district should put more classes in the expulsion program, so when kids get expelled they don't end up behind when they go back to high school classes.

Jasmine made a collage representing her loss of educational opportunity during her expulsion term. She cut out pictures of shoes from magazine advertisements and glued them into place under the appropriate labels. She labeled one side of the page "Expulsion." Underneath the label she glued a photo of one pair of cheap plastic shoes. She labeled the other side of the page "Normal School." Under this label she pasted pictures of seven pair of high-heeled dress shoes in of a variety of styles and colors. She described her collage this way:

Why have only two okay shoes that don't last long at all when you can have seven awesome pairs of shoes that last are really awesome and cool and last a long time? At the expulsion school you only have two classes, which aren't even that long – only an hour and fifteen minutes each, I think. And you don't get to pick them yourself. At a regular middle school or high school, you have seven or eight periods that last all day. At a regular school you can choose your classes and have a lot to pick from. At the expulsion school you are only offered the bare minimum. At a regular school there is just so much more to experience and help you later in life. It's such a shame to lose out.

All the students voiced concerns about the lack of resources allocated for expelled students. Jerome, Devin, and Gabriela described the facilities the expulsion programs they had attended as "ghetto." Jordan remembered arriving at the expulsion program for the first time: "I just remember shaking my head and thinking: 'Oh, come on, it's not even in a real building! We're in a trailer. This is lovely.'" Jordan explained why more resources should be allocated for educating expelled students:

'Underfunded' would be one term that comes to mind for the expulsion program. We need better computers here. I think computers that are remotely up-to-date, one or two years old, that are even donated by other schools would be nice, because we have machines here that do not run very well most of the time. I still remember how you got them... used, thrown away, by JPS. You had to go through some leg-work to get them, load them up in her car, and just drive here, and put them up. I donated the monitor cable because one of them was missing one.

Who knows, maybe someday there'll actually be a real building. Maybe in the far future. It would probably help in the sense that it would be a real building instead of trailers, mobiles, what-have-you, because it would actually have a working heating system and phones and internet that wouldn't go down randomly like they do here, unless the power went out.

Seth also expressed concerns about the lack of resources provided to students of the expulsion program. He described how poor students would struggle to get the supplies, books, and technology they needed to be successful, despite teachers' attempts to respond to students' needs. Seth explained what was needed to make expelled students more successful:

Better technology. Better books. Better school supplies. Just, better everything. I mean, you guys [program staff], we [staff and students] had to bring all this, and you guys can't support it. Well, what if some of these parents can't afford all these school supplies, then what? I mean, yeah, you guys can say, 'We can help you with this and this,' but mostly, 'It's tough, too bad.'

Students gleaned messages about their worth from the resources their educational programs lacked. Students discussed how a lack of educational opportunities and resources made them feel. Devin said, "We need new chairs because a lot of the ones we had were broken and cracked, basically trash. Is all we really deserve is trash?" Carlos felt "thrown away" by the school district. Devin stated:

They put us in run-down mobiles in the ghetto of Lawrence. They obviously don't care about us. We don't have textbooks and the buildings are falling apart. We have nothing. It's not a proper learning environment. But they don't care; to them, we're nothing.

He also lamented: “They’ve totally given up on us. To them we’re just worthless burnouts who have nothing to give to society.”

Participants used the physical setting of the program as evidence of their value to the school district and public education system as a whole. They perceived that a lack of resources and program funding was evidence that the educational system had given up on them. Interpreting a lack of resources as evidence that the district did not care about them may have served as evidence that they were negatively judged by the school system as a whole. However, the perception that the system had given up on them was in sharp contrast with their perception of their worth to the educators they worked with at the program. Students perceived that their teachers at the program worked to overcome the shortcomings of the physical setting and resources allocated to the program to improve conditions for students. Students perceived the staff’s efforts to obtain additional resources as evidence that their teachers valued them and believed that they could be successful if given the tools and opportunity.

Increased value of education.

Students experienced a shifting sense of risk and reward. Students shared that, during their expulsion term, they realized how much they risked in making a poor choice. They realized how costly their past decisions had been and how bad choices put their future in jeopardy. Carlos classified his expulsion as a “very costly bad decision.” Jasmine spoke about not receiving graduation credit after being expelled at the end of the semester. She said, “You put all that work into school for eight hours a day for months and then you throw it away like it’s nothing.” Devin analyzed the potential costs of his

lapse in judgment stating, “It was stupid and I felt stupid. It wasn’t worth putting my future in jeopardy.” Jasmine considered the potential long-term effects of expulsion stating, “Being expelled is the easy way out of achieving your dreams.” Students saw the realization of the high cost of their poor decisions was a first step in re-evaluating their priorities in life.

Participants recognized that sometimes it takes harsh consequences to learn from one’s mistakes and to grow. “You don’t know what you had until it’s gone,” Seth said. “It’s what I needed to know that nothing should be taken for granted,” Jasmine commented. Jerome said, “I learned what I should do in the future, which I probably wouldn’t have learned if I didn’t get expelled.”

All participants spoke about the importance of getting a good education. Even though some students did not always like school, they saw education as key in their future success. Jerome shared:

I like school. But sometimes I don’t, because I get lazy. But I know that I need to go to school to get my education, so I go to school. It’s going to be what I have to achieve, so I’m willing to achieve school to do my best to have a successful future.

Jasmine noted that her expulsion experience helped her to realize the value of the many opportunities afforded to her through a traditional school:

Would I value the opportunities I get at a traditional school as much as I do now, had I not been expelled? I don’t think so. Losing out on real school was a huge eye opener... Sometimes you have to get only the bare minimum to understand how good you’ve really got it.

Gabriela also realized the importance of her education. Before her expulsion she went to school to socialize. After her expulsion her priorities changed. “I realized that going to

school is *to learn*. If I don't learn, I have nothing," she stated. In reference to his expulsion, Jordan declared, "It's actually probably made me work a little harder, wanting to get on with my life. So that's a positive." Seth said, "School is more important than anything; unfortunately it took me two expulsions to realize that." Jasmine commented, "I wanted to come back to school more than anything, because it's something I really enjoy. I want to make something of my future and I know I won't be able to without an education." Carlos also attested to the importance of learning, "I realize school is the only way to be successful in life."

Adult support made overcoming adversity possible.

All participants stressed the importance of their relationships with teachers and other school personnel. Gabriela remembered a teacher becoming emotional and almost crying when she found out Gabriela had been expelled. She said, "You know my language arts teacher, Ms. Stevens, she was so mad, but she was like, "I'm scared for you Gabriela." Gabriela noted that this teacher's comment had a lasting effect on her perception of herself and her decision-making. Her teacher's fear for her future was a catalyst that affirmed Gabriela's worth and helped her to think about the repercussions of her actions.

Jordan felt supported when a teacher from his home school attended his expulsion hearing to support him and to lobby against his expulsion. He recalled:

I had a teacher come in and vouch for me, and he was afraid that he would lose his job because of that. And he was talked to about that. In a bad way. At least I would assume so. I called him up the next day at his office. I said, 'I really hope you don't lose your job. Thank you so much for what you did! Please don't get fired.' It was really nice of him to do what he did: vouch for me, how I was as a person and as a student. It's the least I could have done.

The gratitude Jordan felt indicated the importance of this positive adult support in his life.

Seth said he developed meaningful relationships with adults who were friendly, helpful, and concerned about his wellbeing. Although it had been almost three years since he had been expelled and had last seen his old teachers, he talked energetically about planning to see his old teachers again:

After my expulsion, I never have seen them since. I would like to, but I have to find the time to take the bus up there. But I don't really have the time and motivation to do it, 'cause it's about a two-hour bus ride there to go see them at Maplewood. Each way. Not to mention a walk. Because the bus don't go all the way up there. I'll go see them though, for sure. Teachers were friendly, and they helped me out, and they were concerned. When I got expelled, they always asked about me.

Seth's desire to reconnect with his old teachers was indicative of the importance they played in his life.

Jerome spoke about how he grew as a result of positive reinforcement from adults. He explained that receiving positive reinforcement from adults not only improved his expulsion experience but also changed how he felt about himself. Jerome described the evolution of his experience over the course of his expulsion term:

Humiliating. Devastating. Prideful at the same time. It's 'humiliating' because you have to walk around knowing that you're expelled, and then 'devastating' is because I know that I want to do good, and getting expelled sometimes makes me feel like I'm not good any more. And then 'prideful' is because expulsion program made me feel better about being expelled. Telling me that I can. Showing me the way. Helping me all the time.

Jerome said he struggled soon after his expulsion, but things got easier as time progressed. He explained that as the messages he received from the adults around him changed, his perception of himself changed as well. The teachers at the expulsion

program helped his confidence to grow by telling him he was capable as well as helping him to experience success. When asked what recommendations he had for how to best help expelled students Jerome replied, “Just teach. Care. Care about the kids.”

Students felt that they were able to be successful in their academic pursuits due to the support of caring adults who believed they were capable. Seth had always struggled in school and felt that he was not smart, since he had always been in special education. Once he was surrounded by adults who believed he was capable, he internalized these messages and believed he was capable too. Seth explained how he accomplished his academic goals when he received individualized attention from teachers who believed he was capable. When Seth was asked about his most vivid memory of being expelled, he remembered:

You two: You [the researcher] and Mr. Williamson. How you guys helped me through. All this (waves his hand, referring to the expulsion program). How you guys never gave up on me. You guys helped me as much as you guys could. Just how you guys sat down and worked with me. Sat down, just sat down with me, one on one, and made sure that I actually understood it. I had a horrible time writing a page. You sat there and said: ‘Well, you do this and this, and write it this and this way, put this there and there, with a capital this and that, all that.’ And Mr. Williamson was like, ‘You subtract this from that and put that over, and add that,’ or whatever you had to do.

When asked how educators can best help expelled students Seth asserted:

Don’t give up on them. Let them know you care about them. Help ‘em out. Ask them, ‘Do you get this?’ Have them show you that they understand it. ‘Cause that’s one of the things that I always liked: having teachers sit there and make sure that you know it. You’re like, ‘I know it.’ ‘Then show me, prove it. Teach me how to do it.’

They say if you can teach someone, that’s the best way to learn: by teaching somebody else. ‘Cause you teach them how to do it. Which, therefore, you’re teaching yourself.

Seth's comments suggest that proving his knowledge affirmed his ability as a student. He explained about how he gained confidence in demonstrating his knowledge to others.

Not all of the interactions participants had with educators were perceived as supportive and affirming. They shared vivid visceral memories of feeling stigmatized by educators. These memories were still upsetting to participants long after their expulsions ended. Participants all remembered and shared stories about adults who had hurt them and their self-esteem. In speaking about these interactions they were somber and their confidence waned. They looked as though they had suddenly taken a hit to the stomach. Their body language and hesitancy to talk about these interactions indicated that they had internalized these interactions.

Seth recalled several disheartening interactions with educators that continued to haunt him. Although he had not had contact with these individuals for several years, he shared that he was still bothered by the negative assumptions certain adults made about his future. He remembered these instances vividly and was visibly upset discussing them. He explained:

I've literally had a teacher say I'm going to fail in life. He told me I'd be living out the side of a cardboard box, digging out dumpsters for life. Living that way. That or I'll be in jail just looking out. Talk about a major let-down from a teacher! Like 'Gee, thanks. Thanks for my fortune.'

Ever since then, I've pretty much said I'm not going to be like that. I'm not going to be like that. I'm going to be the exact opposite.

Seth also described how he still ruminated on these negative experiences and how he hoped he would run into these individuals again in the future so he could prove to them that he was not a failure. If he saw them again, he would like to say, "Ha, ha, you said I

wouldn't make it. Well, here I am now!" He said that he hoped he would see them again so that these memories wouldn't haunt him anymore.

Desire for high expectations.

Participants stated that they desired to be held to high behavioral expectations and high academic standards. All of the students discussed the structure of the expulsion program they attended, and its impact on them. Most participants said that they learned discipline through the program. Devin explained that the expulsion program was effective in teaching him discipline because "There's no excuses. You have to be at school EVERYDAY with supplies, in dress code, with all your homework done. They don't let you get away with being lazy." Aisha said, "Being expelled changed me, and it taught me, like, discipline." Seth said, "You have to have discipline, because none of the two teachers at the expulsion school take any mess from any of the students, so I mean, they mean business, and if you give them trouble, then you get kicked out." She concluded that the discipline she learned through the expulsion program prevented her from getting into more trouble. She said, "I feel I have learned the discipline I so desperately needed. If not for this experience and getting discipline, I think I would have gotten into even bigger trouble than now." Jordan explained the purpose of earning privileges for meeting the expulsion program's high behavioral expectations, "It's to form discipline, more self-discipline. I understand that you need to work your way up to the top like I did, and you have to work hard to stay there."

Jerome contrasted the discipline of the Rocky Mountain Expulsion Program to the lack of discipline and low expectations he experienced attending an expulsion program in a different district. He spoke of his disdain for the program:

Ghetto. People always fighting. People always arguin'. People always talking about they're going to do something after school. Gang banging. We got out at nine, so we were never even around high schoolers, just middle schoolers. But even with only middle schoolers at Achieve, they had metal detectors, so they would take and check us, because that's how bad it was.

He elaborated on his perception of the low academic standards in that program:

Horrible. No grades, no nothin'. You just talk: do whatever you want. You didn't get graded: no tests. You just talked. Sat around in one class and talked. Didn't do no math, no science, no language arts, no nothin'. Just sat and talked for two hours.

Jerome recalled that when he changed school districts, he had low expectations for the new expulsion program he would attend. He shared that he was pleasantly surprised by the order and academic rigor in his new program. He explained that he learned so much and enjoyed the program so much that he wanted to continue attending the program even after his expulsion ended. He stated:

I just thought when I came to expulsion school, it would be just talkin', nothin' to do for two hours. I mean learned faster than I thought I would. It was fun. I liked it better than North. I wanted to stay here because I thought I learned more than I did in five classes at North.

His enthusiasm for the program and his desire to remain in expulsion school, despite his expulsion ending suggests the major positive impact that he felt the program had on his life.

Perception of increased success in school.

Participants reported that they became more successful in school after their expulsion. Students reported that they worked harder in school after expulsion. They cited increased discipline, improved attendance, decreased truancy, increased focus, better student skills, better relationships with teachers, increased willingness to seek out help, less rule-breaking, fewer discipline referrals, improved grades, and improved student skills.

Jerome surprised himself with the success he experienced after attending the expulsion program. He said, "I am doing a lot better than I thought I could do after coming to expulsion program." He shared that he was proud of his success finishing classes at a faster pace than others through his online school. He was also proud of his perfect attendance. His statement indicated a shift in his perception of himself as a more competent student than he had previously been and increased self-efficacy.

Gabriela reported that her grades improved from all F's before her expulsion to passing grades after expulsion. She shared that she stopped ditching classes and built stronger relationships with teachers. Carlos and Jasmine both reported taking college prep classes and doing well in them after recognizing the need to take harder classes and to do well in them in order to attend a four-year college or university. Aisha was proud that she had caught up on credits and was on track to graduate with her class. She also shared that she was selected for an advanced English class after producing a well-written apology letter to the dean of her school for her role in her expulsion incident.

Although students only took English and math through the expulsion program, they reported that they felt that they had learned much more than just math and English skills. They reported learning life lessons they would not have learned at a traditional school. They reported making changes to their thinking and decision making along with learning the curriculum. Jasmine said, “We learn our life lessons, which is a good thing about expulsion school. We don’t get that at a regular school.” “Expulsion program changed my ways of thinking,” Devin recalled. “Because of the expulsion program I think I am a better person than before I was expelled,” Jordan asserted.

Participants recalled that talking openly and honestly with expulsion program staff about their decision-making contributed to the socio-emotional growth they experienced. They shared that the socio-emotional support they received from the adults at the expulsion program assisted them in making fewer poor choices. Aisha explained what helped her to recover from and to learn from her expulsion. She said, “Just talking to people. And before I used to be afraid to talk to people about situations like this. But now, it’s best to talk it out instead, than to hold it in. That’s what I’ve learned.” Participants said that confiding both in the teachers and in the program psychologist was helpful.

Appeal to educators to suspend judgment.

The perception of educators seeing them as nothing more than “just an expelled kid” was prominent and several participants used this exact phrase to describe how they believed educators viewed them. Jerome said, “A lot of people at the school I’m at think I’m just an expelled student. That’s it.” He remembered one teacher in particular pointing

him out to his classmates almost every day saying, “That’s the kid who got expelled.” As Devin wrote, “There is more to us than just that 8-letter word.”

When asked what he wished educators knew about expelled students Seth said:

They have a history behind them. Don’t judge them for who they are. Get to know them before you judge them. Just because they might be Black, White, Mexican, they might be wearing gang clothes. Don’t just presume. I remember Mr. Williamson told me a while ago: we had the most gangster-type guys in here [the expulsion program] and they just came in here and they just did what they did, just what they were supposed to. They knew what they had to do and they got it done.

He stated that the most critical thing for educators to remember was, “Don’t judge. Don’t ever judge. It hurts. It hurts to be judged. I’ve been judged my whole life. It’s not fun.”

Aisha also advised educators to suspend their judgment of students. When asked what she wished educators knew about expelled students, she replied:

I think that deans, principals should get to know student and not, like, judge them. Not judge them too quick. Maybe talk to them instead of judge them. Most deans and principals feel like they are higher than you and so they judge you.

Jerome pleaded for educators to view expelled students, “As people, human beings, just like any other person.” Carlos asked that educators treat expelled students, “the way they would like to be treated.” Carlos asked that, “People cut us some slack.”

Participants requested that expelled students receive the same treatment as their classmates who had not been expelled. When asked what others should know about expelled students, Jordan stated:

That we’re just like normal students who don’t get expelled. You just make mistakes. It’s true that when you get expelled people treat you differently. We’re just like other normal students. We’ve just made mistakes and everyone makes mistakes. So, little ones or big ones, there are still consequences. Just treat us all the same.

Participants also presumed that educators did not want to understand them. When asked what advice he would impart to other expelled students, Jerome warned them of the ignorance of others. In his song lyrics, Devin explained that others “fear what they don’t know” about him and other expelled students so much that “they don’t want to know” this population. Instead of seeing expelled students as the complex people they truly are, he perceived that others see only expelled students’ “demons” and faults, not their strengths and the “angels in <their> hearts.” He attributed this inaccurate view of expelled students to the blindness of others, as well as to the “walls” or barriers expelled students build up around themselves, as protection from the hurtful interactions with others, which he presumed are born out of these negative stereotypes.

Speaking directly to educators Carlos said:

I honestly don’t know how to convince you with words that were not bad because there are so many stigmas. I guess the only way for you to find out is by coming to meet us. If you were to come down here, you would see that we aren’t bad people or dangerous.

Aisha summed it up stating, “We’re good kids; we’re worth it!”

Expulsion had a significant effect of students’ education during their expulsion term and afterward. Although the immediate consequence of expulsion was loss off educational opportunity in the form of class offerings, seat time, credits, and extracurricular activities, the long-term impact of expulsion on students’ education was primarily positive. Students perceived that, as a result of expulsion, they saw increased value in getting a good education and increased success in school. The experience and support of educators seemed to help them develop an internal locus of control. They attributed this change to the discipline they believed they developed through the

alternative program they attended. They believed that the support they received from caring, supportive educators made overcoming adversity possible. They asked that educators have high expectations for this population, since they felt competent after meeting teachers' high expectations. They appealed to educators to support future students in overcoming adversity by suspending judgment and treating all students as normal people who make mistakes.

Personal Growth and Self-Discovery

All participants spoke at length about experiencing personal growth and self-discovery as a result of their expulsion experience. All participants perceived positive outcomes as a result of their experience. All participants noted that resilience and perseverance were necessary for navigating through the consequences of their expulsion. Participants conceptualized the expulsion program as a second chance. Their comments revealed that they viewed their expulsion term as a time for re-building their lives and re-creating themselves. They viewed being successful in the expulsion program and upon returning to school as a form of redemption for their mistakes. All participants stipulated that learning from their mistakes was a critical step in improving themselves and their lives. The lesson all participants said they learned was to think for themselves and to be more independent from their peers. They also discussed increased autonomy and a conviction that they were the masters of their own destiny.

Resilience and perseverance.

Participants shared that, as time passed, they found that their lives continued despite their expulsion. At the time of their expulsion, participants conceptualized

expulsion as a life-ending event, but as they continued to live life in the wake of expulsion, they developed new ways of conceptualizing expulsion. Their paradigm that expulsion was life-ending dissipated and was replaced by a new schema. As they persevered through the consequences of their expulsion, the imagery they used transitioned away from death and darkness. In time, saw expulsion as an obstacle on their path to success. They utilized imagery of physical obstacles, like rocks and road-blocks to represent expulsion.

Seth's quote was an example of this shift. His quote incorporated imagery of death by expulsion and expulsion as an obstacle. He wrote:

I went from having good grades to all of a sudden being kicked out. I was an A+ student, went to class, and had good attendance, and then got expelled. It's just like my life just ended right there. Or it just got a lot harder. Now I had a big old rock in the road.

Seth utilized both types of imagery in explaining what it was like to be expelled from school. Seth first felt that his life as he knew it had ended. Then he expected that the expulsion would cause his life to be more difficult in the future and would increase the number of obstacles he would have to overcome to be successful.

Participants used imagery of rocks and road-blocks to talk about the struggles through which they persevered. Seth described expulsion as "a big old rock in the road" and "being stuck between a rock and a hard place." Aisha saw the fallout of her expulsion incident as "speed bumps on the road of life." Several participants referred to expulsion as something you have to "get through." Seth compared expulsion to a video game. He noted, "Expulsion is another level in the game of life. You must complete it to move on."

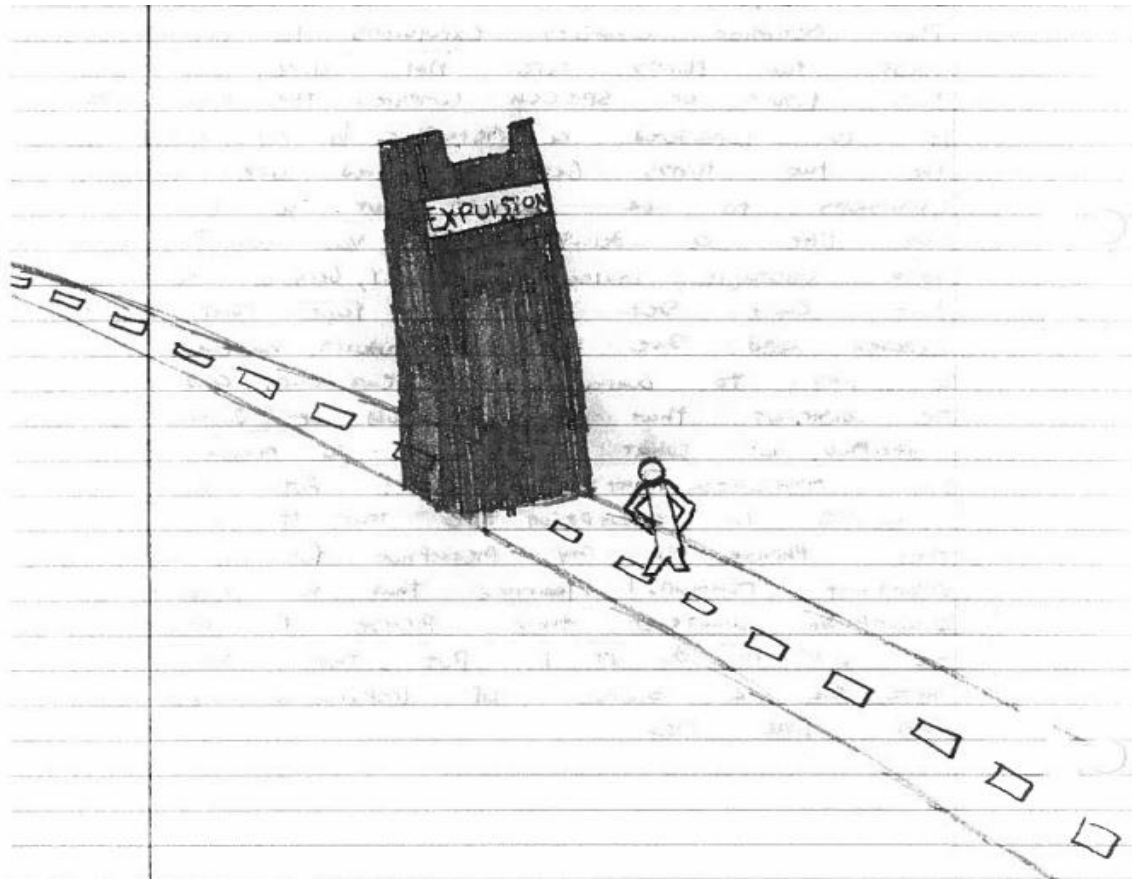


Figure 3: Carlos' drawing of expulsion as an obstacle

Carlos wrote, “Expulsion is nothing but an obstacle in a student’s path to success, waiting for redemption to tear it down.” In a pencil sketch he drew a long, narrow road extending across the page and disappearing into the horizon (Figure 3). A gigantic black block, similar to a concrete divider on a highway, but seven or eight stories high, spanned the width of the road, obtrusive and immovable. It was labeled “EXPULSION” in large, capital block lettering. A stick figure man stood before the obstacle, his hands on his hips, and his eyes to the ground.

Carlos explained his drawing this way:

This metaphor refers to all of the expelled children across the country, including myself. The metaphor compares expulsion to obstacles. I find expulsion to be nothing but a limit for students, sort of like a delay. I chose the word obstacle, instead of delay, because some students just can't get over the fact that they're expelled and give up. Most students, however, find a way to overcome their expulsion and prove to the district and to the public that no one should be judged on their mistakes, but on what they do to recover from their mistakes. That's why I added the phrase, 'Waiting for redemption to tear it down.' But there is a more important reason I used that phrase; I learned that a student can accomplish whatever they please if they find the will to do it. I added that phrase to be an inspiration for kids just like me.

Students' resilience was visible in their conceptualization of themselves as survivors. Several students specifically used the term "survivors" to refer to themselves. Explaining expulsion, Seth wrote, "It's like exile or death. I choose exile over death to show that I will survive." Aisha compared being expelled to recovering from a car accident:

Being expelled is like getting into a bad car crash. 'Cause, like, everything is like, it just hits and everything, just like in a moment, is just bad at the time. But, after that car crash, you can get your car repaired, you can get everything fixed. And that's what happens. You get everything fixed: everything bad that went down.

Jasmine compared the hardiness of expelled students to that of dandelions. She explained that expelled students display incredible levels of resilience through the adversity they experience. To compliment her metaphor she drew a portrait in pencil of an attractive young woman, similar to herself, smiling, her eyes closed, with a serene look on her face (Figure 4). A halo of small, light, white, feathery parachutes attached to the plants' seeds formed a halo around her head. The feathery parachutes attached to each

seed blew across her face in the same direction, as if by the wind. She explained that although students were deprived of educational and extracurricular opportunities during their expulsion term, this deprivation was not fatal to their educational outcomes. Jasmine wrote:

Dandelions can be kicked, stepped on, cut down and blown away, but they still continue to come right back, no matter what happens. A dandelion is the only plant that can survive through a drought. The roots grow deep enough so that it can survive through just about anything, just like humans.



Figure 4: Jasmine's illustration of an expelled student as a dandelion

All participants discussed persevering through their struggles. Jasmine spoke of perseverance, "I just had to keep on keeping on, my head held high." Carlos wrote, "A student can accomplish whatever they please if they find the will to do it." Jerome highlighted the significance of perseverance stating, "You have to push through it." Devin said, "I see my life as a journey to be accomplished at all costs. In other words, I will not go down without a fight!" When asked what advice he would impart upon other expelled students, he simply stated, "Don't give up."

Participants shared that they felt that they had the strength to persevere through the adversity they might encounter in the future. Seth explained how he would continue to pursue his high school diploma "no matter what it takes." Although his expulsion caused him to get further behind on the road to graduation, he would be persistent and press on toward graduation. He knew it would be difficult to support himself financially and to attend school, but was up for the challenge:

I'm still trying to graduate. My super senior year – 19. I'm going to graduate eventually. No matter what it takes. I still got another year approximately. If I go to summer school, I might be out by a couple of months into the beginning of the year. That's if I attend summer school. I'm still undecided whether I am. I've already given up a full eight-hour day of work to attend school when I could be working full time over the summer or continue working part time and finishing up my school. So it's kind of money versus education. I mean I'll still be getting my education. It's just not as quick.

Participants discussed the belief that, although expulsion would make their future more difficult, they had the drive and the tools to be successful. Devin recalled how he had successfully navigated through adversity in the past and felt confident that had

“learned what it takes.” Carlos shared that he was also confident in his ability to persevere through hard times:

It’s a long road ahead that will take a lot of work, but I feel expulsion school has set me right for that. I am ready and willing to take that road ahead. I don’t have many chances left and I don’t want to throw my future away, so I’ll do whatever it takes to turn my life around.

All of the participants discussed their plans, hopes, and dreams. All participants shared that they believed they were capable of achieving their dreams as long as they exhibited the same perseverance that they had exhibited during their expulsion experience. A large portion of all of the interviews consisted of discussion of participants’ goals and plans. Participants all disclosed that they cared deeply about achieving their goals and dreams. Participants anticipated personal success in the long term. From participants’ comments it was evident that they were confident in their ability to achieve their goals. Jordan stated:

From this point, I think I have a good life in comparison. I think all things happen for a reason. I think I have a much better life because of what happened in my life. I see a bright future ahead of me, whether it be at school or a job, or just one or both.

Participants also discussed making dreams into reality. As Seth asserted, “Reality is only what you make it.” He also quoted a book he’ had read: “Thoughts become things. If you can think it in your mind, you can hold it in your hands.” Carlos wrote about the role of dreams in creating reality in his poem:

We can all see
That reality
Comes from our dreams

Redemption.

Participants shared that they hoped to redeem themselves for their past mistakes. They explained that they saw success after expulsion as a means to redeeming themselves to others, as well as to themselves. Carlos believed in the power of redemption for all expelled students, writing, “Most students, however, find a way to overcome their expulsion and to prove to the district and to the public that no one should be judged on their mistakes, but on what they do to recover from their mistakes.” Jordan stated, “I made myself a better person. I redeemed myself.”

Students elaborated on working hard to correct their mistakes and to get back on track. Seth said, “I made a mistake and I am trying my hardest to correct it.” Aisha said, “I want my teachers to know now that I’m done messing up and that I’m willing to do whatever it takes to get back on track.” “I know I’m not the star student that teachers are looking for, but I’ll do my best and try my absolute hardest to be that student now,” said Jasmine. Carlos affirmed, “I take responsibility for my actions and am prepared to do whatever it takes to turn my life around.” “I try my hardest to not make mistakes, and if I do make a mistake, I try my hardest to correct it,” Devin stated. Carlos conceptualized expulsion as a road-block. He commented on how redemption could tear down barriers to success. Carlos explained his metaphor for his expulsion:

I added the phrase, “Waiting for redemption to tear it down.” But there is a more important reason I used that phrase; I learned that a student can accomplish whatever they please if they find the will to do it. I added that phrase to be an inspiration for kids just like me.

One form of redemption participants discussed was earning the right to return to school before one’s official expulsion end date. Participants explained that they

appreciated opportunities to earn the privilege to return to their home schools on early re-admit. If students were successful meeting the expulsion program's behavioral and academic standards, they earned the right to return to school on probationary status. If students did not meet the requirements set forth by the superintendent, they would remain at the expulsion program for their full expulsion term.

Remembering trying to earn the privilege of returning to school before her official expulsion end date, Aisha said, "I did all of things I needed to complete and finished the requirements I needed to get back in school. Really, I would have done *anything* they said and met *any* requirement they had to get back in school." Jordan considered the chance to earn early re-admit as part of the "silver lining" of being expelled. He stated that he would have been less motivated to excel during his expulsion term without the incentive of early re-admittance. "It's a great idea that should be explored by other districts," he said. "Everyone deserves a second chance," he added. Jordan recalled the pride he felt the day he returned to school after earning the opportunity to be re-admitted to school before his official expulsion end date:

That was a great day! I remember I had my suit on. I had both of my teachers from Expulsion come with me. Mr. Wright (the expulsion program psychologist) was there. It was a good day. I stood up and read my readmit plea. It was just a great day, and they said, 'Welcome back,' pretty much right after I read that. It was a great day!

Jordan's repetition of "It was a great day!" is an indication of what an important positive event this was in his life.

When Seth was expelled he was offered a chance to prove himself and to earn the opportunity to re-enroll in school before his official expulsion end date:

In Lakeview Public School district they had a no tolerance. So most people that have been caught got expelled, except for they really liked me. They were like, 'Since we like you, we're able to work this out. We're going to try something new. We're going to do this and this and this, and if you succeed in this, well you can come back.'

According to Seth, the primary requirement for earning the right to return to school was maintaining exemplary attendance. He became animated talking about the possibility of returning to school early. He shared that he felt successful, declaring, "I have been going there four months and I haven't missed a day!"

Students who didn't get the chance to earn the privilege for early re-admit shared that they wished they would have gotten it. Jerome commented, "I would have really appreciated a second chance, if I was given one, so I could of proved what I am capable of achieving in school." "Once I was expelled it woke me up. After that I was ready to do school, but I had to wait for months and months before I went back. I wish I could have gotten a chance to prove it sooner," Carlos lamented.

Rebuilding life and recreating the self.

Participants' comments revealed that they viewed attending the expulsion program as a second chance and saw their expulsion term as a period of rebuilding their lives and recreating themselves. Although participants conceptualized expulsion itself as something negative, like a dark storm cloud or a dark situation, they utilized positive imagery to represent the new opportunities and growth that were born out of their expulsion. They viewed attending expulsion school as a second chance. Carlos used imagery of death, resurrection, and rebirth to symbolize the life-ending nature of expulsion and the opportunity for a second chance that he was given. He wrote:

Being expelled is like being shot, then getting a second life. When I was expelled it was pretty shocking. I did get plenty of chances, but I ruined it. The expulsion was like a bullet because it killed me as soon as I heard it. Then I got a second life because going to the expulsion program is a second chance. It is going to help me get back into school again.

Aisha wrote about a dream she had near the end of her expulsion term:

‘Help!’ I’m in the forest and I don’t know where to go. It’s dark. I have absolutely nobody here. ‘Can someone come help me?’ As I walk through the forest this school type thing appears. Four people come out of nowhere and snatched me up and put me in a deep hole. As days and weeks passed they would come by every day for a couple of hours. They’d teach me what’s wrong and right. As I’m listening to what they’re saying I feel like I’m uplifting from the hole. After two months I had learned that being bad in school is not going to get you nowhere in life. Respect others ’cause one day you’re going to need them. Then waking up I start feeling this feeling. Every part of my dream I had to go through to be where I am today.

In this dream Aisha expressed feeling scared and lost when she was first expelled or first found herself “in the forest.” She felt stuck in a “deep hole.” She stated that she had “absolutely nobody here” describing the sense of isolation frequently discussed by participants. Four individuals, the expulsion program staff, responded to her call for help. She found a “school-type thing,” the non- traditional school she attended throughout her expulsion term. There she was taught right from wrong, the value of an education, and the importance of respecting others. At the end of two months, her expulsion term, she described being freed and “lifted from the hole.” Having this experience in the past, she explained that she needed every part of it to be “where she is today.”

Devin explained that expulsion was a horrifying event, but he also recognized an opportunity to rebuild his life and to transform himself into a better person. He wrote:

Being expelled is being damned. But from the ashes a phoenix will rise. Life suddenly has a new meaning and a new purpose. The phoenix will rise, but not yet. First it needs to die, to hit the bottom. The phoenix is all of us. The few who

made a mistake and paid for it with our everything. Some will fall into old habits, but the strong will rise from the ashes and change.

Participants utilized imagery with positive connotations to represent the opportunities provided to them through the expulsion program. For Jordan, having the opportunity to attend the expulsion program and to have adult support in attempting to earn early re-admittance represented “a silver lining.” Jordan conceptualized expulsion itself as a dark, gloomy storm cloud and the second chance he got as the silver lining. He said:

Expulsion overall is a cloud with a silver lining: a dark, gloomy cloud with a very small silver lining. It's still there, though. The dark gloomy cloud being your experience, what happened, anything bad. The silver lining being good things like getting to go to the expulsion program, having good teachers, and the chance to earn early readmit.

Carlos also used imagery of hope and light to represent the expulsion program. Carlos drew a pencil sketch of the hope he felt getting the chance to attend a school for expelled students during his expulsion term. He shaded most of a page of heavy drawing paper a deep, dark black. In the middle of the page, he left light and un-shaded one round circle. He explained his sketch this way:

The Expulsion Program was a light of hope in a dark, dark situation. When I was expelled, I was told that I could come back to regular school if I went to the Expulsion Program and did a good job. This I saw as the bright side of the expulsion. For a lot of kids who were expelled from their schools, the Expulsion Program was a way for them to get at least some schooling which, for those who really care about their academics, was ‘a light of hope.’ Even for those who didn’t or don’t care about their academics, Expulsion Program was a ‘light of hope’ in a way because they had short days and only a little school work to do and teachers there all the time to help them be successful. For me, though, it was a lot more than a chance to have an easy school day. It was a chance to prove that I wasn’t a bad kid after all. I used the ‘hope’ the Expulsion Program provided to do my best in the Expulsion Program and in my life outside school too. It was a chance to prove I wasn’t the bad person I had been made out to be. I proved it to myself too.

Participants shared that they also saw an opportunity to rebuild their lives after expulsion. They cited expulsion program staff as key players in helping students to rebuild themselves and their lives. Their images communicated the support they received from caring adults who believed they were capable. Devin explained that he saw expulsion as an opportunity to rebuild his life with the help of expulsion school staff. He compared expulsion teachers to architects stating:

Being expelled is a building crumbling down, and expulsion teachers are architects. When I was in school I was making a building that would let me climb to success, but then something bad happened and it crumbled down to little pieces. When something interferes with your plans and they crumble you're gonna need help building back up. Expulsion teachers are architects because they helped me design and rebuild from scratch what got destroyed.

Participants cited expulsion being an eye-opening experience, which served as a catalyst in helping them understand themselves. They noted that they had become more thoughtful in their decision-making. Seth said, "Life is like driving. If your eyes are closed you aren't going to go the way they should. My eyes were closed 'cause I wasn't thinking about the future." Participants discussed the life changing power of the expulsion experience. As Carlos put it, "Getting expelled helped me out. It changed me." Jordan declared, "It had changed me. I've become such a better person, bettered myself in so many ways." "I have changed as a person from a boy into a young man planning his future," Devin asserted. Jerome stated, "Things are very different now. Nine months ago I still had that thug life. Little by little I started to see how life worked and how you need to work hard for something you want."

Jasmine wrote about how expelled students re-developed their identities, but their core still remained. She wrote:

Even when the wind blows all the seeds off a dandelion, those seeds start a brand new dandelion. Expulsion may have blown our old life away, but part of us still remains inside and will start off new. We can be stepped on, crushed and blown away, but as long as we want to, we can get right back up and we will have that new lesson learned that makes us a brand new person, but at the same time, still a branch off of the old us.

Learning life lessons.

All of the participants reported learning significant lessons as a result of experiencing expulsion. All participants shared that they viewed making mistakes and learning from them as an important step in growing and building a better life. “You live and you learn,” Aisha said. “It’s what you do after you’ve made the mistake that counts. You take a mistake and make a positive outcome,” Seth wrote.

All students stipulated that learning lessons from their mistakes was critical in creating a better self and being successful in life. Carlos’ initiative in writing a poem specifically about learning from one’s mistakes indicated the importance of this topic:

Learning a Life Lesson

We’re bound to make mistakes
without a doubt about it
The lies from the honest
shall soon be regretted
The Gods of the godless
have shown us that
Wisdom walks without a weakness
The hearts of the heartless have shown us that
Love seems like a potion
but honestly, in reality
Love is just an emotion
that causes fatality
and infects us

like a poison
From the theme of the poem
We can all see
That reality
Comes from our dreams
Then we will.
But first,
Let's make mistakes

Carlos highlighted the inevitability of people making mistakes stating, “Were bound to make mistakes, without a doubt about it.” He explained that reality is built out of individuals’ dreams. However, on the path to making dreams reality, one will make many mistakes, which should be embraced as a learning experience. He focused his audience’s attention to this point:

From the theme of the poem
We can all see
That reality
Comes from our dreams
Then we will.
But first,
Lets make mistakes

Jasmine also discussed how expelled students learn from their mistakes and use these lessons to build a better life. She wrote, “As long as we want to we can get right back up and we will have that new lesson learned that makes us a brand new person, but at the same time still a branch off the old us.” Aisha explained the positive aspects of making mistakes stating, “It’s how you develop knowledge and wisdom.”

Increased autonomy.

All participants cited thinking for one’s self as a lesson learned as a result of expulsion. All participants’ comments suggested that they had developed increased autonomy through their experience. “I see myself as an individual now. I want anyone

who knows me to see me and remember me as me,” Carlos said. “I am okay with myself now instead of needing my friends and other kids to be cool with me,” Jasmine said.

Jordan explained how he had become more independent from his peers and, if faced with a similar situation to his expulsion incident, he would not participate. He explained how he developed the self-confidence to stand up to his peers:

Honestly, today I think I have a little bit more courage than I did back then now, and I would have walked away from it, the whole situation. I might even have notified the authorities, because it’s not cool what happened to all those people. They were scared. They were really scared, I’m sure. So I would have done a lot of things differently.

He explained that through his experience, he developed the self-confidence to stand up to his peers. Not only would he have risked losing the friendships he hoped to strengthen through his participation, he also would have risked being ostracized for reporting their illegal behavior to authorities. He stated that he was also able to step back from the situation to analyze the impact of his behavior on others.

Jordan also noted that, in time, he became less concerned about others perceptions of him. He added:

At first I told half-truths. I didn’t want people to know the whole story, and then I just kind of opened up after a few weeks saying, ‘You know, it’s behind me. The court thing is done. I don’t really care what you think of me.’

Participants expressed wanting to become more independent from their peers. Being distanced from their peer group provided an opportunity for students to look critically at their own behavior.

Participants developed awareness of how involvement with their peers had impacted their lives. Students determined that what their peers thought of them was not

as important as they had once believed. After her expulsion Aisha said that she re-evaluated the importance of gaining and maintaining extrinsic approval and recognition from her peers. She realized that the energy she put into “being cool” would have been better spent on academics. She determined that she would have been better served by looking inward for validation. She contrasted her perception of herself and her priorities before and after her expulsion:

I was kind of like the class clown. Like I tried to make people laugh, I was really loud. But I wasn't putting all that toward my school-work. I was putting it more to being around the cool kids and not putting it into my school-work. So that kind of got me off track, because I was trying to be the cool kid and I could have been the book-smart kid, and then been cool to myself.

Aisha's statement suggested that through her experience her need for external validation diminished as she developed and reinforced her own paradigm of what is “cool.” After expulsion her self-concept was based less on reflected appraisals of how others perceived her and was increasingly based on her own direct appraisals of herself.

Some students stated that they were able to preserve their friendships while becoming more independent. Devin explained how he had learned not only to maintain his friendships but also to make his own decisions instead of blindly following the crowd. He said, “Now days I've grown up and matured. I still kick it with my homies, but I don't do the things with them I used to.” Gabriela also felt confident in maintaining her friendships but not allowing them to negatively impact her decision-making. She stated:

I was like, ‘I'm going into high school. What if this happens again?’ But I was like, ‘No, because I make my own actions. Why would I do it again?’ I've met so many kids that, like still do it. I still hang out with them, but that doesn't mean I'm going to do it, because I already went through that, and I'm like, ‘No way, that's insane!’

Aisha also mentioned that she was able to maintain friendships without allowing them to negatively impact her decision-making. Aisha said she was also able to remain friends with the individuals who initiated the dare that ended in her expulsion without becoming entangled in their bad decision-making. “I’m still friends with both people, just not as close friends, because they’re still kind of trouble-makers, and I don’t want to be a part of it,” she said. Jerome commented, “If you choose the wrong decision you will find yourself surrounded by negative energy and bad people. So if you choose good, you’re gonna surround yourself with positive people that care about your future and theirs.”

Participants who said that they struggled with respecting authority before their expulsion said they developed an appreciation for rules and authority through their experience. These participants also reported that their change in thinking had contributed to better behavior in school. Jasmine asserted, “I know I have to follow the rules because the rules are there for a reason.” Aisha said:

I can’t lie. Being expelled has had a very good impact on me. My attitude – I have a big one I sometimes can’t control, but being in expulsion program helped me lessen that attitude. It’s not fully gone, but it’s getting there.

Devin contrasted his behavior toward teachers before and after his expulsion:

My past teachers would describe me as hard headed ‘cause I’d never listened when they told me to stop talking, do my work, and pull up my pants. They would have said I was disrespectful ‘cause I had a smart mouth and I would always cuss or tell them to shut up. The expulsion teachers showed that teachers aren’t all bad, but if you disrespect them, they disrespect you. So now I don’t disrespect them anymore ‘cause I need their help to teach me.

Some students shared that they saw themselves as emerging leaders. “I am a leader now because when I follow someone else I will get in trouble and I’m not trying to get in trouble,” Carlos said. Aisha explained that she learned, “Just to not be a people-

pleaser and a follower; to be a leader. Because I have leadership qualities. I just haven't put them into full effect." She explained how she had begun to be a leader stating, "I try to keep my friends away from the drama. Try to get them focused on better things like graduating."

Gabriela said, "I'm kind of proud of myself because, if my friend sees me, she's not going to want to do bad things anymore. I have so many friends I don't want to lose, so I'd rather stay straight and clean with my body." Gabriela explained that she believed that she had transformed from a follower looking to be accepted into cliques through drug and alcohol distribution into a leader promoting a drug-free lifestyle. She noted that after her expulsion she had many friends, unlike in the past. She saw herself emerging as a leader as her friends emulated her behavior. She shared that she perceived herself as a leader in not using drugs and protecting her friends from the ill effects of substance abuse.

Participants reported that, although they lost respect for themselves at the time of their expulsion, they not only regained but also increased their self-respect as they rebuilt their lives after expulsion. Talking about himself before his expulsion Seth wrote, "I respected other people, just not myself." Carlos spoke about his expulsion as a catalyst in finally understanding self-respect, developing respect for himself, and adopting a values system based on increasing self-respect. Carlos told this story:

My aunt once told me that when we have nothing else, we have our self-respect, but when we lose that, we have nothing. From there on, I decided I would live my life as a self-respecting person. Thinking back on it, I never really knew what self-respect was before I lost it, though. I lost my self-respect and gained it back, all through my expulsion. I lost it by giving in to what people said to me about being a loser because I got kicked out of school. Then I gained it back by not caring

what people say about me at all, because I redeemed myself and proved that I could have a lot more successes being kicked out of school than a lot of people can being in school. I have a lot more self-respect now than I ever did before, because I actually had to do something to prove that I deserve it. That's how I feel I grew up. Now I judge my next move by wondering whether I'll gain or lose my self-respect. It's how I make every decision.

All participants articulated a new found realization that they had control over their lives. They talked about being masters of their own destiny. They noted that their choices had consequences, both good and bad. Contemplating the impact of his expulsion, Carlos remarked, "It's had me think of the future ahead of me and how I want to make it." Devin stated, "Now I'm just a kid trying to succeed and avoid failure." Jasmine realized that allowing others to affect her decision making and her actions could lead to dire consequences. "I can't let people who are only in my life for a short period of time effect my future," she declared. Gabriela espoused the importance of developing self-control and autonomy, noting, "You have to control yourself exactly." "Walk away from any drama that comes your way because you saying anything or doing anything might have just messed up your education for good," she added.

Jerome spoke about the role of decision making in determining his future. He highlighted in a drawing the importance of proceeding carefully to ensure his success in the future. He drew a picture of a boy sitting on the hood of a car looking at a highway overpass sign. The sign showed one road splitting and going in two different directions. One side was labeled "Success – Next exit $\frac{3}{4}$ miles." The other side was labeled "Failure- Exit # 206 – 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles." "Proceed carefully" was written on the bottom of the sign. On the back of the page he wrote, "Expulsion is a road to nowhere. So take the next exit and get on the road to success."

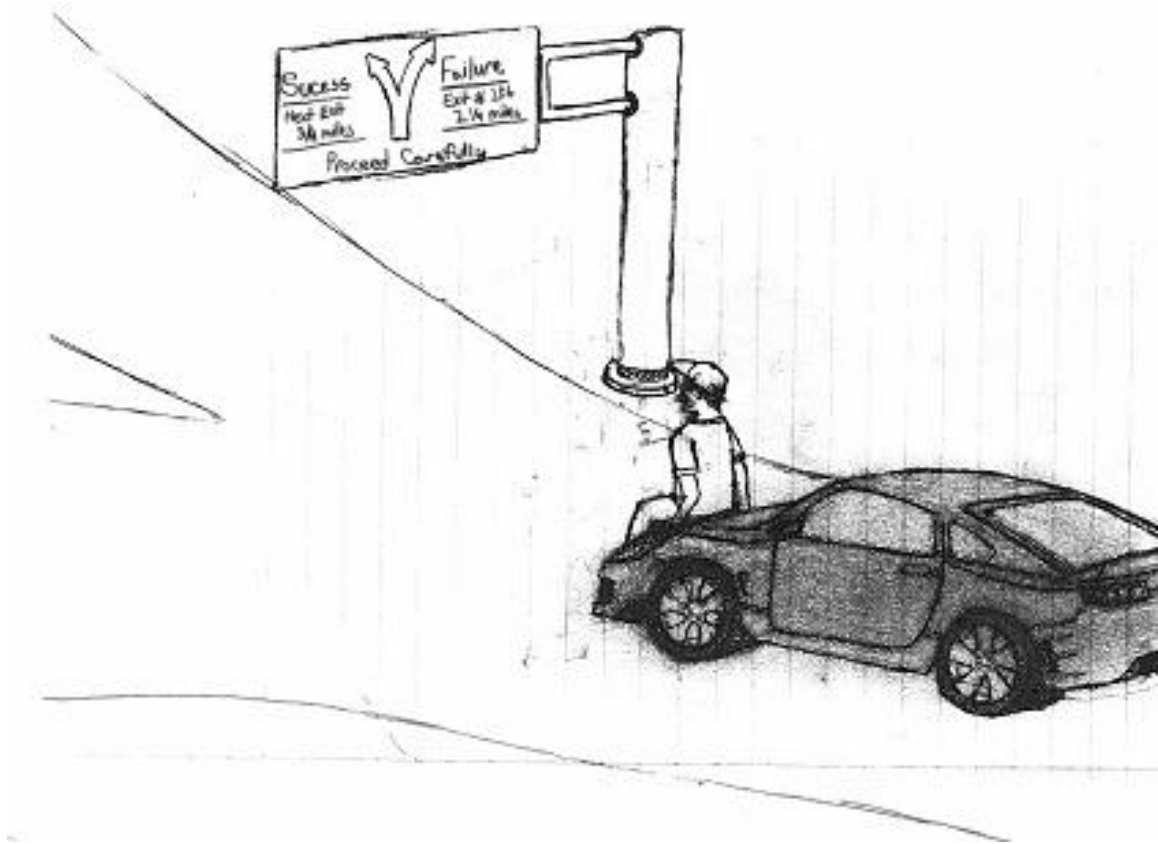


Figure 5: Jerome's drawing of "getting on the road to success"

Devin wrote a poem about being the master of his own destiny. Devin highlighted the theme of the poem by titling it, "Master of Destiny." He brought the reader's attention to the power one has over his or her life by closing the poem with the statement, "Your actions shape you and your future." The story he told in his poem mirrored sentiments shared by all participants regarding the impact of expulsion on their lives and the personal power and autonomy they felt as they looked to the future:

Master of Destiny

No matter the difficulty
You have to challenge yourself
And unleash your full potential
Expulsion is a side effect of bad choices
Made by you and only you can change it.
The past has past
The future is ahead of you
The future keeps going
The world keeps turning
Life goes on
Never forget
Your actions shape you and your future.

Conclusion.

Although expulsion itself was a negative event in students' lives, the outcomes of the expulsion experience, as a whole, positively impact students' lives. Students reported personal growth and self-discovery as a result of overcoming adversity. They perceived that overcoming adversity made them more resilient and would help them persevere through difficult situations in the future. They conceptualized the expulsion program as a second chance and viewed their expulsion term as a time for re-building their lives and re-creating themselves. They viewed success in the expulsion program and upon returning to school as a form of redemption for their mistakes.

While participants did regret violating the district's conduct code, they did not regret their experiences during their expulsion term and the changes that grew out of these experiences. Participants stipulated that making mistakes and learning from them was a critical step in improving themselves and their lives. One lesson learned by all participants was to think for themselves and to be more independent of their peers. Students who were originally motivated to engage in expellable behaviors to gain

approval from their peers distanced their thinking and behavior from the negative influences of peers. Their expulsion experience was a catalyst that promoted increased autonomy. Students' success in overcoming adversity in expulsion served as evidence that they were the masters of their own destiny who would find success in the future.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

The purpose of this study was to provide educators with an understanding of expelled students' experiences and perspectives with the goal of informing policies and practices to improve educational outcomes for students. This study was designed to understand the expulsion experience from the point of view of the student in order to represent this critical stakeholder group and to aid in future decision making. The research questions addressed in this study were: 1. What is the expulsion experience from the perspective of expelled students? 2. What are the contextual, organizational, and personal issues that emerge from the voices of expelled students? Since the views of adult stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, and administrators, have already defined the school exclusion debate, this study focused on students' reports of their own experiences.

Students' voices, behaviors, and images provided a rich and consistent response to the expulsion experience. All students revealed aspects of a search for social acceptance and approval, the emotional impact of expulsion, the educational impact of expulsion, and personal growth and self-discovery after expulsion. The chapter includes analysis of study findings and implications of these findings. First, themes that emerged from students' voices are discussed in detail. Themes included the need for acceptance and approval from peers as a precursor to expulsion, the intense trauma of expulsion as a

major catalyst for change, the belief that they were stigmatized due to expulsion, increased resilience through supportive relationships with adults, increased resilience through improved self-concept and increased self-efficacy, and expulsion as a catalyst which moved students' decision-making from an external to an internal locus of control. Analysis and interpretation of data are discussed in this chapter. Second, the essence of students' experience is presented. Third, a description of the program students attended is provided, since students reported that it had a positive impact on the trajectory of their lives. Fourth, limitations of the study are identified. Fifth, recommendations for future research are presented to respond to study limitations. Sixth, recommendations for educators are distilled from the study to assist educators in improving educational outcomes for expelled students. The chapter concludes with a closing statement from the researcher.

Discussion

Students' stories were examined in search of core commonalities that formed the underlying structure of students' experiences. Six themes essential to all students' accounts emerged from study findings. First, an external locus of control driven by the need for acceptance from peers was a precursor to students' expulsion. Second, the intense trauma of expulsion was a major catalyst for change. Third, students' need for external approval contributed to the 'imaginary audience' and the belief that they were stigmatized due to their expulsion. Fourth, supportive relationships with adults had a positive effect on students' resilience to the negative outcomes associated with expulsion. Fifth, students' resilience to adversity was also increased through improved self-concept

and increased self-efficacy. Sixth, expulsion was a critical incident that moved students' decision-making from an external to an internal locus of control.

Need for acceptance from peers as a precursor to expulsion.

All participants cited seeking acceptance and approval as the primary factor that drove them to engage in expellable behavior. Their stories indicated searching for acceptance and approval from external sources before and during their expulsion term. They sought validation and recognition from sources outside of themselves, specifically, from their peers. Participants agonized over how well they were liked and accepted by others. Although this trait is typical of many adolescents (Brown, Mory, & Kinney, 1994), in this case, attempting to impress peers went too far. Attempts to gain social acceptance from peers ended in the commission of an expellable act.

Since participants attempted to conform to their peers' social norms to be "cool," they did not conform to scholastic social norms due to the incompatibility of these value systems. "Cool" behaviors, such as drug and alcohol use and distribution, fighting, weapon carrying, and defiant behavior toward authority figures, were completely incompatible with scholastic values such as ensuring a safe environment – free of drugs, alcohol, weapons, and fights – and promoting academic achievement. Similarly, Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2006) attribute disciplinary referral rates, suspensions and expulsions to conflict between students' culture and the predominantly White, middle class culture of the school. Townsend (2000) argues that suspension and expulsion occur in a context of cultural conflict in which students' culture clashes with the culture of White, middle, and upper class school staff. While race and social class may have played

a role in students' culture, findings indicate that peer culture clashed with adults' values. The clash of these values was so significant that it led to students' removal from the school environment. Expulsion, in turn, precipitated major life changes.

Being accepted by cliques and crowds was a driving force that compelled participants to engage in expellable behaviors. Crowds, social groups defined by reputation and stereotypes, influence adolescents' behavior by establishing norms for their members (Susman, Dent, McAdams, Stacy, Burton, & Flay, 1994). Participants identified the norms of the crowds to which they hoped to gain membership as behaviors that the crowd considered "cool." Engaging in these activities was students' attempt to demonstrate conformity to a group's norms and to gain acceptance to that group by engaging in behaviors that were valued by its members. Removing students from interactions with all peers was counter to students' expectations since gaining inclusion to a particular crowd was the driving force in students' commission of expellable acts. Students did become well known among their peers – but in all the wrong ways. The notoriety and admiration students hoped to obtain from their peers by engaging in expellable behaviors only earned them infamy.

Affiliation with peers was critical in participants' decision to engage in risk-taking behaviors that led to expulsion. This is not surprising since adolescents' affiliation with friends is a strong predictor of adolescents' own risk-taking behavior (Keenen, Loeber, Zhang, Stouthjamer-Loeber, & Van Kammen, 1995). Adolescents' own risk-taking behavior has been related to the risk-taking behavior of friends, including alcohol use (Hawkings, Catalan, & Miller, 1992; Urberg & Pilgrim, 1997), drug use (Lynskey,

Fergusson, & Horwood, 1998; Urberg & Pilgrim, 1997), defiant behavior, and aggression (Dahlberg, 1998). The attention-seeking behaviors participants reported were risky in nature. One explanation may be that, over time, affiliation with peers who engage in risky behaviors increases teens' risk-taking behavior (Keenen, Loeber, Zhang, Stouthjamer-Loeber, & Van Kammen, 1995).

Peer pressure, whether it be through fear of refusing to participate or fear of not fitting in, was the primary driving force in students' behavior. Although two participants cited fear of retaliation for not going along with risky behavior as significant factors which motivated them to engage in expellable behaviors, most participants were not pressured into engaging in expellable behaviors due to fear. Instead, students engaged in risky behaviors to impress their peers. This is consistent with findings by Susman, Dent, McAdams, Stacy, Burton and Flay (1994) that show that most adolescents are influenced by peers because they admire them and respect their opinions.

Participants were hyper aware of what their peers thought about them. This intense focus on their peers' opinions of them indicates that participants placed great importance on gaining acceptance from their peers. Prinstein and Aikins (2004) found that the degree to which adolescents valued being accepted by their peers was a mitigating factor of the negative effects of peer rejection and membership in a low-status social group. Since participants viewed being accepted by their peers as instrumental in their success and perceived acceptance as fundamental to their wellbeing, they may have been especially vulnerable to the negative effects of peer rejection. Expelled students

may have been more vulnerable than their peers to negative outcomes of rejection, since this factor did not mitigate the negative effects of rejection or low social status.

Instead of being comfortable in their own skin, participants sought to create a persona that they believed others would find to be more attractive and appealing. Participants' self-worth was often measured by their ability to be accepted by cliques and crowds they perceived as popular. They assumed gaining and maintaining acceptance to a clique or crowd as important to their wellbeing. This is consistent with Brown and Lohr's (1987) finding that adolescents have higher self-esteem when they are part of a high-status crowd. Mc Elhaney, Antonishak and Allen (2008) found that the combination of low popularity and feeling that he or she did not fit in was especially problematic for teens' social functioning over time. Since students in this study expressed concerns of low popularity and felt that they did not fit in, this may have intensified the negative influence of peers. Adolescents who felt positively about their social standing with their peers may have been less susceptible to the negative influence of peers, making them less likely to engage in risky behaviors to impress peers and less likely to be expelled.

Engaging in their expulsion incident was only one act in a larger pattern of acceptance-seeking behavior. Looking for validation, approval, and recognition from peers was not new for students in this study. Most participants had a history of trying hard to be accepted by others. Participants' attention-seeking behaviors and intense need for external validation may be linked to difficulties in socio-emotional functioning. Some participants indicated that others viewed them as having low socio-emotional intelligence before expulsion. This perceived lack of socio-emotional intelligence may be linked to

students' strong external locus of control and poor decision-making skills, since external locus of control has been linked to unfavorable social outcomes such as low social maturity and follower versus leader behaviors (Lefcourt, 1981).

All participants described their interactions with peers as being far more positive after expulsion, than before. This suggests that their expulsion experience had some effect, primarily positive, on their social functioning. Improvements in participants' social functioning may have also had a positive effect on students' success in school, since students tend to excel in school when they are well liked by their peers (Guay, Boivin, & Hodges, 1999). Students' success in school may have also increased since social acceptance by one's peer group may also increase students' interest in school and motivation (Wentzel, 1991) as well as their level of engagement in the classroom (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). This reciprocal relationship may explain students' reported improvements in social and academic functioning. Changes in participants' perception of their acceptance by their peers may have contributed to their perceived increase in academic success because peers have been found to influence academic achievement and pro-social behaviors in school (Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997).

Trauma of expulsion as a change agent.

The intense trauma of expulsion was a major catalyst for change. This trauma acted as an unexpected, unwanted change agent. While many negative socio-emotional and academic consequences came with removal from school, the opportunity to rebuild life acted as an opportunity for growth for fortunate students. This traumatic experience

seemed to be related to a transformation from an external to an internal locus of control. Even the images of the experience changed from death to a road block as students developed resilience and self-efficacy as they internalized the experience and reflected on it as a catalyst for personal growth.

Expulsion was a traumatic, confusing, stressful experience that had immense destructive potential to hinder students' socio-emotional functioning. This is consistent with the American Academy of Pediatrics' classification of expulsion as a stressful, life-altering event. Although the trauma of expulsion precipitated undesirable socio-emotional outcomes, including sadness, depression, suicidal ideation, shame, embarrassment, isolation, feelings of stigmatization, concerns of insanity, and negative self-concept, it also served a desirable function as a catalyst for change. In fact, it may have been the immensity and intensity of trauma and consequences that created conditions in which individuals previously resistant to change became open to learning and growth. However, the utility of using expulsion as a catalyst for change is still suspect, due to the risks inherent in experiencing trauma. Considering the overwhelming body of evidence documenting the destructive potential of school exclusion, expulsion should not be employed as a change agent as the risks are simply too great for students (Adams, 2009; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Ball, Maguire, & Macrae, 2000; Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziegenberg, 2000; Casella, 2001; Casella, 2003; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1994; Macrae, Maguire, & Milbourne, 2003; Rice, 2009; Skiba, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Catalysts for initiating change, other than school exclusion, should be explored and implemented.

Traumatic events and stressors, like expulsion, have been well documented as risk factors that decrease individuals' resilience to negative outcomes (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Garmenzy, 1993; Rak and Patterson, 1996). The trauma of expulsion could have caused additional difficulties for participants in social functioning during their expulsion term. Adolescents may be especially vulnerable to social learning effect from peers who engage in risk-taking behaviors when experiencing high levels of social or psychological distress (Prinstein, Boergers, & Spirito, 2001). This suggests that expulsion could act as a catalyst for students' risk taking-behaviors to increase. This may not only make expulsion ineffective in decreasing expellable behavior but also actually increase students' participation in risky behaviors. An increase in risk-taking behaviors after expulsion is consistent with findings that students who are excluded from school have more suspensions after expulsion than their peers (Arcia, 2006). However, participants reported decreased risk-taking after expulsion suggesting that the program they attended may have acted as a protective factor, limiting students' risk taking behaviors during and after their expulsion terms.

Being out of school was a serious risk to participants' futures. All participants reported being out of school for at least one month, but as many as four months, before attending an alternative program for expelled students, which was consistent with reports that students are out of school for weeks, and often months (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003). These findings are concerning as time engaged in an academic setting is one of the strongest predictors of students' achievement (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). It is also concerning since the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (1994)

found that when young people are not in school, they are more likely to engage in a variety of dangerous activities, including using alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine, smoking cigarettes, fighting, carrying a weapon, and engaging in sexual intercourse. This may contribute to the reciprocal relationship of school exclusion and increased disciplinary concerns (Arcia, 2006). Ironically, although expulsion was intended to decrease students' participation in expellable behavior, removal from school has actually been documented to increase these behaviors (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1994).

Findings were consistent with the American Academy of Pediatrics (2003) that found that suicidal ideation and behavior is more likely to occur when youth experience social exclusion and isolation. Participants' depression and suicidal thoughts were especially concerning since participants reported little mental health support during this difficult time. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2003), professional assistance is most necessary after the trauma caused by a stressful, life-altering event, such as exclusion from school. This was concerning since only one participant reported receiving assistance from a mental health professional outside the expulsion program. Lack of mental health support was also concerning since a lack of professional assistance from school-based mental health support from psychologists, counselors, and social workers has been documented to increase the risk of mental health problems for students who are out of school for extended periods of time (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000). Although mental health support was a component of the program, participants stated that they desired more counseling from the program's psychologist and all cited increased access to mental health professionals as a means of helping expelled students.

Students' experiences support existing literature on expulsion in recommending increased mental health support as a means of increasing students' resilience (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000).

Need for external approval contributed to perceived stigmatization.

Students believed that they were stereotyped and stigmatized due to their expulsion. They assumed that others made a plethora of upsetting assumptions about them. Since data included only participants' self-reports of their experiences, it is unclear as to the source of students' intense feelings of stigmatization.

Participants' need for external validation may have made them especially sensitive to concerns of how others viewed them. Participants seemed to take these negative interactions to heart, internalizing others' negative comments. Students' concern for how others viewed them at pivotal moments is concerning as a higher incidence of mental health problems occurs in individuals who are more sensitive to criticism from others, more dependent on others' approval, and more accepting of negative feedback (Campbell, 1990). Increased risk for mental health problems due to this risk factor is another reason that expelled students may benefit from increased support from counselors and psychologists during and after expulsion.

One explanation for students' feelings of being judged, negatively stereotyped, and stigmatized as a result of expulsion is that adolescents tend to overestimate the extent to which others evaluate them (Lapsely, 1985). An increased focus on others' opinions may be related to the 'imaginary audience' in which people believe that others are constantly observing them and evaluating them, even if this isn't reality (Frankenburger,

2000). The perceptions of an imaginary audience may have contributed to students' feelings of stigmatization. Although perception of the imaginary audience is present into adulthood, it peaks in adolescence (Frankenburger, 2000).

It is unclear to what extent students were actually stigmatized and stereotyped by others and to what extent they only *perceived* to be stigmatized by others. However, since all participants talked at length about feeling stigmatized and shared stories of specific hurtful events in which they had been judged, it is likely that some stigmatization occurred. The frequency and intensity of these experiences is not known. It is also unclear as to whether stigmatization was intentional or unintentional on the part of others.

The fact that all participants made a direct appeal to educators to suspend judgment suggests that students placed great importance on being seen as normal and human. Students felt that adults assumed that, because they had been expelled from school, they had no motivation and would be unsuccessful as adults. Therefore, it was very important for students to communicate the high expectations they had for themselves for the future. Communicating this sentiment to others may have actually protected students from negative outcomes associated with expulsion because an optimistic outlook, hope, and investment in the future are characteristics that facilitate resilience through adversity (Brooks, 1994; Werner, 1993). Although students perceived that they were stigmatized and unfairly judged instead of being seen as "human" or "normal," they were able to remain resilient in their views of themselves as good people. They normalized making mistakes as being part of the human condition and as part of being a teenager. They equated their expulsion offenses to the other mistakes normal

people make. Brooks (1994) cited the ability to learn from both success and failure as a characteristic that facilitated resilience through adversity. Therefore, conceptualizing expulsion as an opportunity for learning lessons as a result of making mistakes may have protected students from the potential ill effects of expulsion.

Positive effect of supportive relationships with adults.

Students did not gain approval or recognition from their peers; however, in the end, they did acquire the support and affirmation they were searching for – but from adults. Ironically, in hopes of avoiding feeling embarrassment and shame for deviating from their peers, students felt embarrassment and shame for disappointing their families and teachers. Although disappointing important adults in their lives and losing the trust and respect of these adults was not a concern for participants at the time of their expulsion incidents, relationships with adults became a major concern for participants after expulsion. One explanation is that a change occurred in the sources of the reflected appraisals that were the basis of their self-concept. Before expulsion, students looked to peers for information about themselves. Once participants were distanced from their peers, they looked to a new source for reflected appraisals. That source was adults, such as parents and teachers.

They acquired support from caring adults who supported them and believed they were capable. These supportive relationships may have protected students from some of the negative outcomes associated with expulsion, since positive relationships with caring adults are well documented to facilitate resilience in children and adolescents (Garmezy, 1993; Howard, Dryfen, & Johnson, 1999; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Werner, 1993; Werner

& Smith, 1992). Findings were consistent with studies by Garmezy (1993), Werner and Smith (1992) and Howard, Dryfen and Johnson (1999), in that participants specifically identified teachers in this supportive role.

Participants' external locus of control at the time of expulsion may have increased the importance they placed on adults' perceptions of them and their abilities. Their strong external locus of control may have made positive support from caring adults who believed they were capable especially significant to this population. Students gleaned messages about their worth as students and as people from their interactions with educators before, during, and after their expulsion terms. Negative interactions with educators also impacted students. From student's comments, it was evident that positive relationships acted as a protective factor mitigating the potential negative impact of negative interactions. Adults who believed they *were* capable helped students to overcome the challenges and negativity that they experienced. This highlights the importance of hiring caring, supportive adults to work closely with expelled students.

As in the Kauai Longitudinal Study, all students cited at least one adult in their life who was consistently supportive. As Werner (1993, p. 512) wrote:

Most of all, self-esteem and self-efficacy were promoted through supportive relationships. The resilient youngsters in our study all had at least one person in their lives who accepted them unconditionally, regardless of temperamental idiosyncrasies, physical attractiveness, or intelligence.

These interactions transformed the negative experience of being expelled into an opportunity for growth and bettering of the self. Students' experiences conform to Jordan's (1992) theory of resilience as a transformational process in which a person is able to navigate adversity by developing connections and relationships with others.

Students explained that receiving positive reinforcement from adults not only improved their expulsion experience but also changed how they felt about themselves. Their comments indicated that their self-concept was rather negative after experiencing humiliation and the devastating fallout of expulsion. At the time of expulsion they internalized others' disappointment in them for getting expelled. They felt that they were "not good anymore." As the messages they received from the adults around them changed, their perception of themselves changed as well. Program staff may have helped students' self-concept to improve by communicating that success was possible. Opportunities provided a platform for developing self-efficacy, allowing them to experience success. Their self-confidence and self-efficacy grew as they felt pride in their accomplishments. Students' journey follows Higgins' (1994) finding that meaningful relationships with adults can instill in children the sense that they are special for being who they are. One student summed it up, stating: "Care. Care about the students." This statement highlights Higgins' finding that children who recovered from adversity believed that their teachers took a personal interest in their wellbeing both within and outside of school. Although experiencing shame and embarrassment after disappointing adults they cared about was primarily a negative experience, shame and embarrassment had some positive effect on participants. The shame and disappointment of others served as motivation to make changes to their behavior. In this case, participants' strong external locus of control may have actually contributed to better decision making in the future. At first, students' motivation was to please adults. However, over time, participants' motivation was based less on pleasing others and became more internally driven.

Although they desired to receive recognition for their accomplishments, receiving recognition from others was secondary to the pride they felt in their own accomplishments. Achieving their goals and making their dreams a reality was the primary decision driver in students' decision making. Receiving praise from others for their accomplishments was just an added benefit.

Students' reports of increased motivation may also have been attributed to the encouragement they received from caring adults. The positive reinforcement they received for their accomplishments may have been a factor in feeling more successful in school. The discipline they reported developing through the expulsion program, may also have been a factor in making them more successful academically. Being successful when held to a high standard may also have increased their feelings of success. Adults' high expectations may have increased students' resilience since Bernard (1993) also found that resilience was fostered by schools that set high expectations for all learners, and provide the necessary support for all learners to meet these expectations.

Development of resilience.

Students experienced high levels of resilience to the risk factors that cause negative outcomes for expelled students. Through their experience students may have developed a more positive self-concept, increased self-efficacy, and adopted an optimistic outlook on the future. These changes may have protected students from some of the negative consequences of expulsion, since these traits are common in resilient individuals, (Brooks, 1994; Gordon, 1996; Werner, 1993). Students reported that one especially powerful avenue for developing a positive self-concept and increasing self-

efficacy was earning the chance to return to school before a student's official expulsion end date. Experiencing success in this endeavor may have contributed to students' increased self-efficacy, development of a more positive self-concept, and development of an internal locus of control.

Students' self-concept improved in three critical areas of self-concept – social self-concept, academic self-concept, and competence. This is not surprising since self-concept rapidly changes in adolescence as young people take on new social roles and have new experiences (Brown, 2004). Being integrated into a new environment may have provided students with new experiences and new social roles, potentially contributing to a more positive self-concept.

Before expulsion participants' self-concept depended on their success in being accepted by peer groups they deemed desirable. Their self-concept was built primarily on reflected appraisals of how they perceived others viewed them. It is not surprising that students' self-concept heavily relied on the appraisals of others since young people become increasingly aware and concerned about others' opinions of them during puberty, and reflected appraisals play an increasingly important role in adolescents' self-concept (Sebastian, Burnett, & Blakemore, 2008). Having a negative self-concept may have contributed to the socio-emotional struggles students experienced before expulsion and immediately after expulsion. Ybrandt (2008) found that having a negative self-concept in adolescence is associated with depression, anxiety, delinquency, and aggression. Negative self-concept prior to expulsion may have been a factor in students' expulsion incidents because many incidents included elements of aggression and delinquency. Low

self-concept immediately after expulsion may have also led to some of the negative emotions students experienced after expulsion, including anxiety and depression.

Students' primary concerns at pivotal moments in their lives were feeling shame and embarrassment. Although some individuals' concerns while in court or while being arrested might have been based primarily on their future wellbeing, the participants' concerns were primarily focused on others' perceptions of them. They were concerned that others would see them in a poor light after these experiences. This indicated the importance of reflected appraisal in building their self-concept before expulsion.

After expulsion students determined that what their peers thought of them was not as important as they had once believed. They determined that they would have been better served by looking inward for validation. Through their experience students' need for external validation diminished as they developed and reinforced their own paradigm of what was "cool." After expulsion their self-concept was based less on reflected appraisals of how others perceived them and was increasingly based on their own direct appraisals of themselves. After expulsion students made distinctions between direct appraisals of their own behavior and the reflected appraisal of others. Prioritizing positive information about themselves from their direct appraisal of their behavior, over the negative reflected appraisal of others, allowed them to build a positive self-concept at a time when they were at increased risk.

Developing a positive self-concept may have been helpful in increasing students' overall wellbeing and success in other areas, since positive self-concept has been documented to have many positive outcomes. Individuals with positive self-concept

experience lower levels of psychological stress and are more capable of dealing with stressful events (Matto & Realo, 2001; Nadler & Leiberan, 1986). As students' self-concept became more positive, they may have experienced lower levels of stress associated with expulsion and may have been more capable of dealing with the stress they did experience.

Before their expulsion experience, participants were not confident in their competence as students and their academic self-efficacy was low. This may have been in part due to poor performance in school, since school performance is a strong predictor of expulsion (Morrison and D'Incau, 2000). Participants in this sample were not representative of expelled students at large since, historically, students who have been expelled drop out at higher rates than their peers (DeRidder, 1991). However, participants did report losing graduation credits as a major obstacle, which mirrored findings by Marrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong, and Morrison (2001). The researchers also found that excluded students performed well below average in terms of both grades and academic achievement scores in comparison to their peers. However, participants in this study did not report decreased academic achievement as a result of exclusion from school. Instead, they reported that they became more successful in school after their expulsion. Specifically, they cited increased discipline, improved attendance, decreased truancy, increased focus, better student skills, better relationships with teachers, increased willingness to seek out help, less rule breaking, fewer discipline referrals, improved grades, and improved student skills. Participants did not attribute their newfound success to any specific cause but, rather, to many aspects of the experience.

Since this study focused only on students' expulsion experience, it is not clear whether participants were more successful in school or if they simply *perceived* themselves to be more successful in school. Without comparing data, such as students' attendance, grades, and discipline records before and after expulsion, it is not possible to discern the actual effects of students' experiences on students' success in school. Perception of academic competence and efficacy may have been enough to improve students' academic performance. Perceiving to be more successful in school may have in itself, improved students' academic functioning, since students utilize more autonomous learning behaviors when self-efficacy is high (Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2006).

Participants desired to be held to high behavioral and academic standards. Bandura (1994) asserted that highly efficacious students don't see difficult tasks as threats to be avoided but, rather, as challenges to be mastered. Students' desire for teachers to have high expectations of them indicated high levels of self-efficacy. Furthermore, if students were not confident in their abilities to meet high expectations, it is likely that they would not request higher standards. Students interpreted being held to high standards as a message that they could do impressive things.

Students' statements indicated an improved efficacy after expulsion. Within self-efficacy literature, a distinction is made between motivational theories and cognitive theories of efficacy (Gecas, 1989). Students experienced increased efficacy in both realms. Cognitive theories emphasize one's *beliefs and perceptions* of his or her self-agency (Pittman & Heller, 1987) while motivational theories focus on the *experience* of self-agency and control (Gecas, 1989). Students' cognitive efficacy may have increased

as supportive adults communicated that they believed in students. Students' motivational agency may have increased as students experienced control through their experiences at the expulsion program and in re-entering the traditional school environment.

Increased efficacy may have also precipitated increased success in other areas since self-efficacy is related to favorable outcomes including better physical health, better psychological health, creativity, cognitive flexibility, better problem solving skills, better coping skills, and higher self-esteem (Gecas, 1980). Since the relationship between self-efficacy and other desirable traits is likely reciprocal (Gecas, 1980), students' overall wellbeing may have increased as all these factors worked together.

Participants' outlook on the future may have increased their resilience. Participants felt more positive about themselves and their abilities after rebuilding their lives. Participants felt empowered as a result of overcoming adversity. They developed strength and coping skills during this difficult period that helped them to sustain themselves as they waited for their expulsions to end, which would bring forth a time of increased opportunity. They saw their goals as attainable as long as they remained resilient and continued to persevere, regardless of the struggles they encountered or the obstacles they faced. Students' hope for the future and sense that they could surmount all odds may have protected them from the potential negative impact of expulsion and other stressful events in the future. Students used their ability to be resilient and to survive through their expulsion experience as evidence that with continued perseverance they would be successful at navigating adversity and experiencing success in the future. Werner (1993, p. 512) stated, "The central component in the lives of the resilient

individuals in this study that contributed to their effective coping in adulthood appear to be a feeling of confidence that the odds can be surmounted.” Similarly, Brooks (1994) stated that resilience was impacted by the feelings and thoughts that individuals have about their abilities to make a difference and to confront rather than to retreat from challenges. Students’ experiences support these findings.

Development of an internal locus of control.

Students’ stories indicate that follower behavior is the most significant contributing factor in the commission of expellable acts. Higher incidences of follower versus leader behaviors are associated with an external locus of control. External locus of control has been associated with negative outcomes such as aggression (Halloran, Dumas, John, & Margolin, 1999) and sexual offending (Parton & Day, 2002). These traits associated with an external locus of control may have played a role in students’ expulsion.

Participants’ external locus of control before expulsion may have contributed to their impulsiveness. The inability to think things through before acting on external suggestions or pressure was prevalent in students’ stories. They believed that acting on impulses was instrumental in their expulsion offenses. Their comments indicated that as their internal locus of control developed, they attempted to utilize it to limit the potential negative impact of impulsive decision-making after expulsion.

Since students were driven by an extrinsic locus of control, they may have been especially sensitive to the messages they believed they received from others. Participants were hyper-aware of how others reacted to their expulsion. Students’ comments

suggested that their feelings of sadness, embarrassment, and shame seemed to be greatly exacerbated by their awareness of the disapproval they received from extrinsic sources. Their external locus of control prior to expulsion may have caused them to be especially susceptible to feelings of embarrassment and shame. Their statements illustrated the negative impact that others' disappointment had on their emotional state and sense self-concept.

Normal adolescent development and maturation may have contributed to participants' increased autonomy over time. Most participants in this study were in mid-adolescence when their expulsion incidents occurred but had moved into late adolescence at the time of this study. Individuals are more influenced by peers in middle adolescence as compared to late adolescence (Brown, 1990). Simply maturing may have been a factor that caused participants to report increased autonomy. Crowd membership also becomes less important as teens age (Gavin & Furman, 1989). Crowds become more permeable and less hierarchical (Gavin & Furman, 1989). These changes to peer social structures may be another factor in participants' reports of decreased interest in crowd and clique membership.

Expulsion was a critical incident that moved students' decision making from an external to an internal locus of control. As their need for validation from her peers decreased, their internal locus of control grew, and they became more confident in making their own decisions. Being distanced from their classmates facilitated their ability to look critically at their own behavior and was a catalyst in helping them to think for themselves. They identified that, after expulsion, they had developed the ability to think

and to act independently, unlike many of their peers. An internal locus of control allowed them to stand up for their convictions and to walk away when others' behavior violated their morals. Their developing their own internal locus of control allowed them to put their own wellbeing over the whims of others and to avoid risk-taking behavior that would endanger their wellbeing.

After expulsion students' behaviors were driven by an internal locus of control. At the time of the interviews all participants took responsibility for their actions and for the harm they had caused. Although they cited peer pressure and hanging out with "the wrong crowd" as a contributing factor to expulsion, students did not blame their actions on others. They all accepted the consequences of their actions as fair, including expulsion. Accepting responsibility for their actions indicated increased internal locus of control after expulsion, since students attributed expulsion to their own faulty decision-making and bad behavior, instead of blaming luck, chance, other persons, or the situation (Rotter, 1996; P. Gurin, G. Gurin, and Morrison, 1978).

Developing an internal locus of control may have contributed to changes in students' motivation, persistence, and ability to complete academic tasks. Their increased use of internal attributions may have impacted students' academic achievement, since whether students believe they have control over their learning outcomes affects how much effort they expend in learning and how long they will persist to persevere (Oxford, 1994). Increased effort and persistence may have had an actual positive impact on their achievement. Students' internal locus of control may have also positively impacted their academic achievement, since students with an internal locus of control may also be more

successful learners because they are better at planning how to complete academic tasks (Hall, 2001).

Expulsion Program Goals, Philosophy and Structure

While it is possible that attending the expulsion program may have been a positive force in students' lives, assessing the relationship between program attendance and positive outcomes was not the purpose of this study. This study was designed not to identify best practices in educating expelled students but to understand their experiences of expulsion. Therefore, without further inquiry it is not possible to ascertain the type of change or magnitude of change that may have occurred. Whether students would have experienced similar growth without attending the program is also unknown. What is known is that all participants reported that program attendance was a catalyst for positive change in their lives. The experiences of other program attendees, both positive and negative, are also unknown. However, since students reported that the program they attended a positive impact on their lives, a description of the program goals, philosophy, and structure are presented. Explanation of staff's intentions in program design and implementation is not intended to represent best practices, but to provide insight into the program which served as the context for students' experiences. Potential connections between program design and students' experiences are presented only as possible hypotheses for explaining the growth students reported experiencing.

Taking responsibility for one's actions in his or her expulsion incident and addressing and correcting behaviors and thinking processes which led to students' expulsion was a cornerstone of the program. Since poor decision making led

to engagement in maladaptive behaviors, improving students' decision-making skills was a priority. The program's psychologist counseled students privately and in a group setting on socio-emotional decision-making, problem solving, and life-skills. Counseling with a mental health professional was an important component of the program. Students participated in a weekly life-skills group with the program's psychologist as well as in individual counseling on an as-needed basis. The psychologist also addressed issues that led to students' expulsion and helped students to develop thinking and behavioral skills which would facilitate successful re-entry into school. Teachers modeled and led students through academic and social problem solving and decision-making. Providing students with strategies for making better choices may have increased students' feeling of competence in making positive changes in their lives. This may have bolstered students' sense of control over their lives and, potentially, contributed to students' development of an internal locus of control.

Helping students to earn the privilege of returning to school before their official expulsion end date was a primary function of the program. Students who earned the privilege of early re-admittance were allowed to attend school and to participate in all school-sponsored events and activities. Program staff developed plans for facilitating students' successful attainment of requirements for early re-admittance. The program served as a proving ground for students to earn the privilege of returning to the traditional school environment before their official expulsion end date. Students who met specific academic and behavioral criteria set by the superintendent earned the privilege to return to school on school probation. Students also met additional requirements to address

concerns specific to their expulsion incidents, including proof of absence from school, drug/alcohol education classes, drug/alcohol intervention or treatment, anger management, and counseling with a certified mental health professional outside of school. Students formally petitioned their school for early re-admittance both in writing and in person at a meeting with program staff, school administration, and students' families. At this meeting a contract of academic and behavioral requirements was devised by attendees, and a plan was put in place to help students to meet the requirements of the contract. Those who violated the conditions of the contract and school probation returned to the expulsion program to serve out the remainder of their expulsion. Success in earning early re-admittance may have contributed to students' increased self-efficacy and in developing a more positive self-concept.

Staff believed that support from adults outside of school was key in facilitating real and lasting changes to students' thinking and behavior. Before enrolling in school, prospective students and their parents/guardian met with the program staff to gather information about the students' lives, both in school and outside of school, to assess students' needs, to educate families about the program, and to begin building a trusting relationship between staff and families. Intake meetings provided staff with information necessary to address students' and families' individual needs immediately upon enrolling in the program. Program staff also collaborated with social services, law enforcement agencies, and outside mental health professionals to provide students with a cohesive network of support.

Discipline and consistency was a priority for program staff. Day-to-day functioning of the program focused on developing students' discipline as well as promoting self-efficacy and self-reliance. To begin their school day, students were required to arrive at school in dress code with required supplies and homework 100% complete. Students who did not come prepared were not allowed to participate in class that day. As students consistently exhibited discipline, they earned additional privileges. Program structure also stressed self-advocacy and developing students' ability to communicate with individuals in positions of power. Class time was devoted to actively teaching behaviors that facilitate academic success such as note-taking, study skills, test preparation, grade monitoring, organization, and time management. All students were encouraged to attend daily tutoring sessions. Applying these strategies may have contributed to students' academic confidence and increased self-efficacy.

Students' mistakes, struggles, and failure, both academic and social, were conceptualized as opportunities for learning. Conflicts between students were seen as an opportunity to discuss social problem solving. Conflicts with teachers were used as a chance to practice strategies for interacting with authority figures such as educators and supervisors. Struggles with organization and time management were seen as a natural transition into explicitly teaching these skills. Difficulties in content and skill acquisition were an opportunity to practice self-advocacy. Disengagement and apathy were a chance to re-evaluate priorities. Incomplete homework was a gateway to discussing time management outside of school. Engagement in risky behaviors, such as drug use, gang involvement, fighting, and illegal activity was an opportunity to process

potential outcomes of such behaviors. Students were encouraged to conceptualize mistake making, struggle, and failure as catalysts for growth. Staff members' focus on conceptualizing mistakes as opportunities for learning may have protected students' self-concept from becoming more negative as a result of expulsion, potentially contributing to students' resilience.

Defining clear goals for the future and beginning to work toward them was a priority for staff. For older students this typically revolved around high school graduation or earning a GED. Students developed short-term plans for either graduating high school or earning a GED. As well as taking English and math classes, high school students focused on online credit recovery to earn graduation credits for classes previously failed as well as independent work-study and P.E. credit to make as much progress as possible toward graduation. Students' post-secondary planning consisted of financial literacy, career selection, and post-secondary education and career training. Students first imagined their lives immediately after high school graduation and then later in adulthood to identify values and goals. Students selected careers of interest to research and weighed the benefits and potential problem with each option. They then identified options for career training or post-secondary education for their career or careers of choice. Upon determining which course of study, institution, and program were the best fit for achieving their long-term goals, participants completed applications to these programs. Participants also explored options for funding post-secondary education and completed scholarship applications. Program staff worked toward the goal of all students leaving the program with well-defined goals and a tentative plan for achieving their goals. This may

have fostered a positive outlook on the future, potentially contributing to students' resilience.

Mastering student skills that facilitate academic success was a goal for younger students. Homework completion, note taking, study skills, test taking, taking advantage of test re-takes and assignment revision, grade monitoring, time management, organization, question asking, self-advocacy, and active participation in class were both encouraged and explicitly taught. Before asking the student to practice these skills, a teacher might model what a student could say to ask for help, to request to re-take a quiz or to re-write a paper, or to schedule a tutoring session in order to encourage self-advocacy, for example. Then the teacher would follow up with the student to see what progress he or she had made in improving his or her situation. A teacher might show a student his or her own organizational system, suggest multiple ways one might organize his or her things, and then to assist a student in developing an effective organizational system for his or her backpack and binder. To help a student work through a conflict with another adult, a teacher might role play possible scenarios for resolving the conflict, compare the merits and drawbacks to various approaches, discuss appropriate times for approaching the adult to resolve the conflict, and follow up with the student to see if he or she had initiated contact with that adult.

Essence of the Expulsion Experience

Expulsion from school is life-changing. This single event can change the trajectory of a student's life – for better or for worse. Educators have the opportunity to take advantage of this disruption in students' education to improve the trajectory of students' lives. However, without thoughtful intervention from caring educators, this interruption in students' education may have an irreparable destructive impact on students' future.

Although other students may have far more negative experiences, for students in this study, expulsion was life changing in a positive way. Their experience during the expulsion term was a transformative experience that had positive impact on the trajectory of their lives. Although expulsion itself was a traumatic and stressful event, expulsion was a catalyst for personal transformation. Before expulsion participants were primarily focused on others. Their behavior and decision-making was fueled by a desire to be accepted by their peers, demonstrating an external locus of control and little autonomy. Their self-concept depended on their success in being accepted by peer groups they deemed desirable. Their self-concept was built primarily on reflected appraisals of how they perceived others viewed them. Following peers led to a violation of the district's conduct code and expulsion.

Participants conceptualized expulsion as a needed interruption in their lives. Students' expulsion incidents were only one event in an established pattern of behavior and decision-making based on gaining social acceptance and approval from peers. Students perceived that they would have continued engaging in detrimental, risky

behaviors had they not been expelled, and received intervention through the alternative educational program they attended. Being removed from school, the social setting that fueled their peer-centered thinking and behavior provided an opportunity to evaluate their priorities and to re-build their lives. Participants who attended the district's expulsion program received the support necessary to take advantage of this opportunity. Had students opted out of attending the expulsion program, or had they lacked support during the expulsion term, this opportunity for growth may have been wasted.

The experience of attending the district's alternative program for expelled students may have served as protection for the potential negative outcomes of expulsion. The program may have provided a number of protective factors documented to increase individuals' reliance to the negative impact of the risk factors associated with expulsion. Support from caring adults, opportunities to develop self-efficacy through mastery, success in meeting the high expectations of program staff, development of an internal locus of control, improved self-concept through experiencing success, increased hope, and a newfound investment in the future may have protected students from common negative outcomes of expulsion. As a result of targeted intervention, participants may have experienced desirable outcomes including improved self-concept, increased self-efficacy, increased autonomy, increased resilience, and development of an internal locus of control. Each of these desirable outcomes has been documented to have a positive impact on individuals' wellbeing (Clausen, 1986; Werner & Smith, 1992; Ybrandt, 2008).

The risk factors and protective factors at play in each individual student's case are unique to the student and context. The interplay of risk factors and protective factors

impact an individual student's resilience, determining the level of positive or negative outcomes experienced as a result of expulsion. Outcomes of expulsion become increasingly positive as more protective factors are in play. Educators must develop interventions focused on bringing forth protective factors that are documented to increase resilience and to make students less susceptible to the risks inherent in excluding students from school.

Although this specific group of students perceived the overall impact of expulsion to be life changing in a positive way, other expelled students may have a far more negative experience. The large body of existing literature documenting the negative social, emotional, physical, psychological, and academic effects of expulsion must be taken into consideration when assessing the utility of expulsion (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Ball, Maguire, & Macrae, 2000; Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1994; DeRidder, 1991; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Macrae, Maguire, & Milbourne, 2003; Morrison & D'Incau, 2000; Schwartz, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Although students experienced growth and maturation while attending the district's alternative educational program, being barred from the diverse opportunities afforded to them by traditional school, caused them to miss out on learning experiences that could never be re-created.

In conclusion, the experiences of these eight students are evidence that, when students receive appropriate intervention, the expulsion experience can change students' lives in a positive way. Knowing this, responsible educators must develop socio-emotional and academic interventions for expelled students that channel the positive life-

changing potential of this experience. This study is proof that expulsion from school does not have to be a tragic event. Instead, educators can harness the trauma of expulsion and utilize this interruption in students' education to intervene in patterns of counter-productive behavior. Through thoughtful targeted intervention by educators, expulsion can be the first step in students' journey to achieve their goals and live their dreams.

As Devin stated, "Being expelled is being damned. But from the ashes a phoenix will rise. Life suddenly has new meaning and purpose... Some will fall into old habits, but the strong will rise from the ashes and change." Devin explained, "The phoenix is all of us. The few of us who made a mistake and paid for it with our everything. As Devin pointed out, a phoenix exists with in every expelled student. It the duty of educators to support each student to rise and flourish.

Limitations

This study must be understood as a window that provides a glimpse into the lives of one small group of students who have been expelled from school. This study functions as a tool for members of the educational community to gain insight into the lives of expelled students. It is hoped that researchers and educators may read this study and think, "Now I better understand what it is like to be expelled from school." This study was not meant to be generalized to expelled students overall and should not be used independently from the larger body of research about expelled students in developing policy which impacts young people's lives. The findings of this research provide one snapshot of the expulsion experience, and many others must be taken to construct the collage of what it means for students at large to be expelled from school.

The findings of this study are not to be generalized to other students, schools, programs, or districts, without consideration of context. Findings are based on only the experiences and perceptions of eight young people who attended one educational program for expelled students after they were expelled from one large school district in Colorado. This setting provided the context for students' experiences. The context in which these eight students experienced expulsion was unique and findings were born out of this specific context. Other settings may provide a context for experiencing expulsion contrary to study findings and may require interventions different from those that were helpful to the sample in this study.

This study focused only on self-reported experiences and perceptions. Results are based only on the views and opinions of participants. Views of other individuals and groups are not represented in study findings. Others may have experienced identical or similar events differently and may have perceived experiences through a different paradigm.

Participants in this study consisted of a self-selecting convenience sample of expulsion program attendees. Only about one half of students who are expelled at any given time attend the program from which study participants were recruited; thus, only one half of expelled students even had the opportunity of being included in the sample. The experiences of students who did not attend the program may have been dissimilar from the students who chose to attend. The experiences of the self-selecting sample of participants may have also differed from the experiences of those who received

invitations to participate but did not volunteer for the study. Following up with those who were less eager to share their stories would be warranted.

Although the intent of this study was to explore the full range of outcomes experienced by expelled students, primarily positive outcomes are reported. Although the participants in this study perceived expulsion from school to be a life-changing process that helped them to grow and to mature, many students may experience expulsion to be life changing in a far more negative way. A major limitation in this research is that views of students who did not experience growth and maturation were not represented.

Although the researcher's position as a teacher at the expulsion program was beneficial in gaining access to participants, developing trust with participants and their families, and understanding the context of students' experiences, the researcher's dual role of teacher and researcher may have also been a limitation. The information that students were willing to divulge to their former teacher might have been very different from what they might share with a stranger with whom they have no prior relationship. Although great effort was spent in developing an interview protocol which would not bias participants' responses, student may have been motivated to respond in ways that they believed would please an adult who, at one point, played a role in their lives.

A further challenge was for the researcher to remain unbiased in both collecting and analyzing data. This was difficult because this study was born out of a passion for working with expelled students and from a desire to improve conditions for expelled students on a larger scale than just a single classroom. Although Moustakas' (1996) bracketing method was employed to identify, define, and exclude the personal views of

the researcher, bracketing could not totally remove the experiences and views of the researcher from the study results. As noted by Van Manen (1990), it is never possible for a researcher to completely detach from the subject being studied. Although steps were taken to achieve an *intersubjective attitude* (Giorgi, 2010), the researcher's experiences and views did inform the development and findings of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was only the first small step in the quest to understand expelled students and to help them to be successful. An end goal of this study was to arouse interest in the lives and wellbeing of expelled students among educators and researchers. While this study does add the voices of eight young people to this discussion, a deep rift still exists in our understanding of how students experience and perceive school exclusion. More research on expelled students' experiences is needed to truly include students in the debate surrounding the use of exclusionary discipline.

This study was only one small step in a lengthy journey to understanding expelled students and must be understood as such. Only a small body of research has been conducted on students' experiences and perceptions of exclusionary discipline (Gordon, 2001; Knipe, Reynolds, & Milner, 2007; Moses, 2001; Soto Carillo, 2004). Marrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong, and Morrison (2001) state that little is known about students' experiences after expulsion. A review of the scholarly research on this topic validates this conclusion (Gordon, 2001; Knipe, Reynolds, & Milner, 2007; Moses, 2001; Soto Carillo, 2004). Scholars who have conducted studies similar to this study have also highlighted the importance of continuing research on expelled students and their

experiences. This study brought to light many specific aspects of the expulsion experience that warrant continued inquiry.

Future research on preventing expulsion is critical in sheltering students from the potential negative outcomes of school exclusion. Research on triggers for developing an internal locus of control may be relevant in developing school-wide initiatives or targeted intervention for vulnerable students. Solidifying best practices in developing internal locus of control may limit students' attention seeking through risky behaviors, potentially limiting expulsion.

Future research conducted in a variety of regions, school districts, schools, and programs is warranted. Since students' experiences of expulsion are context-specific, research in other contexts may provide a more complete picture of students' experiences. Since expulsion policies and practices vary on the state, district, and school level, regulation and implementation may create a myriad of contexts for students' experiences. Other settings may provide a context for experiencing expulsion contrary to what is reported in this study.

Future studies could compare the perceptions of expelled students across educational programs and expelled students who do not attend programs. Understanding the experiences of these students may be helpful in identifying weaknesses within the system. Having experienced expulsion as a destructive force, these students may provide recommendations for limiting the potential negative impact of expulsion. Discussion with those who were less eager to share their stories should be a priority.

Additional research conducted by a detached third party may be warranted. Students may feel more comfortable sharing negative experiences with an individual who was not a participant in upsetting experiences. Future research may explore whether students reveal varying accounts of their experiences and perceptions to an adult with whom they did not have an existing relationship.

Additional examination of alternative program structure is advisable. While all participants in the study attended one school district's expulsion program, two participants also attended programs in other school districts. Participants discussed many differences between the three expulsion programs and reported differing levels of satisfaction with each program. Similarly, researchers have documented varying degrees of effectiveness of programs for expelled students (Burns, 1996; Fitzgerald, 1999). Case studies comparing various educational programs for expelled students may be useful in better understanding how program structure impacts students emotionally and educationally.

Research into what constitutes educational opportunity, or a lack thereof, is warranted. Since a lack of educational opportunity was a concern for students in this study, as well as being documented in previous research, inquiry into what specifically constitutes a lack of opportunity may prove to be advantageous. If researchers are able to pinpoint the opportunities that are available to students, as well as the opportunities they miss the most, increasing educational opportunity in a thoughtful, targeted way may be possible. A better understanding of the opportunities that students need, may be applied in developing educational programs that are best suited to meet those needs.

Inquiry into the relationship between perceived academic improvement and actual academic improvement may be useful. Since this study focused only on students' expulsion experience, it is not clear whether participants were actually more successful in school, or if they simply perceived themselves to have been more successful in school. Without comparing data, such as students' attendance, grades, and discipline records before and after expulsion, it is not possible to discern the actual effects of expulsion on students' success in school. Research on the effect of perceived academic achievement on actual academic achievement could also be salient in improving educational outcomes for expelled students. Studies determining whether achievement was perceived or actually occurred would be useful in assessing the effectiveness of alternative educational programs.

Participants reported that looking for validation outside themselves in the form of acceptance and approval from peers was a contributing factor in their participation in "expellable" behaviors. Assessing the plausibility of a causal relationship between students' need for acceptance from peers and engagement in expellable behaviors is warranted. If a causal relationship between need for external validation and expellable behaviors is identified, it may be possible to develop systems for proactively identifying students at risk for these behaviors.

Students in this study reported that their expulsion was a catalyst in developing a more positive self-concept, increased self-efficacy, increased resilience, autonomy, and internal locus of control. Determining what factors might be in play in developing these traits may be useful in program development. Applying theory in each of these bodies of

knowledge to expelled students may be useful in developing interventions that foster these positive traits prior to expulsion or during the expulsion term. Identifying catalysts for change other than expulsion may also be useful in fostering growth and maturation.

Since it has been documented in past research that many students choose not to attend programs for expelled students, future research into why students and their families opt out of these programs is necessary. This study did not address the issue of low rates of participation in programs for expelled students as all participants were selected through participation in one expulsion program. Interviews or focus groups with expelled students on the reasons they attended or opted out of these programs may be useful in improving recruitment strategies and increasing program attendance. Both parents' perspectives and students' perspectives should be considered, as program attendance is often a joint decision.

Overall, researchers must take heed of the importance of continuing research on the experiences of this population. Marrison, Anthony, Storino, Cheng, Furlong and Morrison (2001) call to action experts in the field to expand research on the expulsion process and its impacts. Moses (2001) also discusses how impacted students' voices have been silenced and calls for redress. Gordon (2001, p. 69) argues for the need for such research stating, "More attention should be given to the opinions and ideas of the excluded children themselves in the search for a solution to young people's disaffections with education and England's high rates of exclusion." Similarly, continuing to hear young people's voices continue to provide insights useful in developing solutions that improve outcomes for students excluded from American schools.

Recommendations for Educators

All participants shared insights for improving the educational and socio-emotional outcomes for expelled students. Participants articulated recommendations for policy makers, district officials, school leaders, traditional school staff, and expulsion program staff. Some participants presented recommendations directly to educators in letters written to district officials or administrators at their home schools. Their insights are presented. Students' experiences and existing literature were also utilized in developing suggestions for implementation of students' recommendations. Specific areas addressed are preventing expulsion, maximizing positive outcomes during a student's expulsion term, transitioning students back into the traditional school environment, and utilizing students' experiences in decision-making.

Prevent expulsion.

Although participants' experienced positive outcomes as a result of expulsion, they shared a conviction that the traditional school is the best environment for students. Although their experiences were primarily positive, they still felt that missing out on the opportunities afforded to them by traditional school caused irreparable harm. "There's just so much more you can experience [in traditional school] that'll help you later in your life. You miss out on it and you ain't ever gonna make it up," Jerome explained. As he pointed out, preventing expulsion is the first step in limiting the risks and potential negative outcomes associated with expulsion. Educators' focus must be on keeping students in school, because any time a student is removed from the school setting, there is potential for harmful outcomes (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003).

Educators must keep in mind that the findings in this study do not suggest that expulsion is a preferable means to improving student outcomes. Instead, findings provide recommendations for mitigating the risks of expulsion after preventive measures have failed. Although students in *this* study experienced primarily positive outcomes from expulsion, other students' experiences may have been far more negative, thus providing rationale for working to limit expulsions. Focusing on keeping students in school is further reiterated in a large body of research that has documented the harmful effects of expulsion (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Ball, Maguire, & Macrae, 2000; Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1994; DeRidder, 1991; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Macrae, Maguire, & Milbourne, 2003; Morrison & D'Incau, 2000; Schwartz, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

Identify students at risk for expulsion.

Participants believed that it was possible for schools to prevent students from engaging in expellable behavior. Carlos explained, "I take full responsibility for my actions, but I do believe that it may have been preventable. The solution is clear: Help the students early on and they won't continue to be a problem." As Carlos suggested, identifying students that have a record of risk taking behaviors that put them at risk for expulsion may be the first step in implementing intervention. "If we were given the proper help, both academic and emotional, I believe that many of us would not be repeat offenders," Seth explained.

Often, it may be possible to identify students that are likely to commit expellable acts based on their discipline record, since findings suggested that students' expulsion

incidents were only one act in a pattern of concerning behaviors. This may be especially true in “third strike” expulsions for drug or alcohol use or paraphernalia. Intense interventions after a student’s first and, especially, second substance abuse strike may prevent students from engaging in behavior that may constitute a third strike and expulsion. Similarly, identification and intervention may be helpful in preventing expulsions for fighting, threats, and assault, since findings indicate that a student’s expulsion incident is often preceded by similar events. Students’ historical discipline records may be useful in identifying red flags and patterns of concerning behavior. Identifying and providing intervention for students who engage in high levels of attention-seeking behavior, specifically disrespecting and disobeying adults, may also be useful. These students can be identified through discipline records as well as teachers’ reports. Parents may be another avenue for identifying students at high risk, as findings suggest that parents may have existing knowledge of their child’s susceptibility to negative peer influence. Students may also be able to self-identify because findings suggest that students were also aware of personal traits that might make them susceptible to risk-taking. After high-risk students are identified, targeted intervention could occur.

Provide targeted interventions for at-risk students.

Participants suggested that interventions prior to expulsion may ameliorate the problematic behaviors that lead to expulsion. “If I would have been given more support I wouldn’t have continued to rebel and eventually get expelled,” Aisha said. Gabriela said, “Find out why we’re doing bad stuff and try to fix the problem. I almost can guarantee that we wouldn’t keep gettin’ in trouble if we got the *right* help.”

Support from mental health professionals may be one avenue for supporting students in identifying the causes of their risk taking behaviors and providing students' support in changing these behaviors. Individual counseling may be helpful in identifying students' unique needs and determining appropriate interventions. Group counseling may also be implemented to minimize the personnel requirements for providing intervention and maximize the number of students able to receive intervention. After students' needs are identified, students might be grouped with other individuals that share common concerns to support one another in making changes.

Study findings indicate that students who have been identified for high levels of acceptance-seeking behaviors or a strong need for peer acceptance might be provided with opportunities to help them to feel better about themselves, potentially negating their need for external approval. Interventions could be designed to foster positive self-concept, internal locus of control, self-efficacy, and autonomy as study findings and existing literature suggest that these traits increase students' resilience to risk (Feyl-Chavkin & Gonzalez, 2000). As well as potentially preventing expulsion, programs that foster these traits in students are positive in themselves because positive self-concept, internal locus of control, self-efficacy, and autonomy are all traits associated with overall positive outcomes and high levels of wellbeing (Bailer, 1961; Clausen, 1986; Feyl-Chavkin & Gonzalez, 2000; Lefcourt, 1981; Matto & Realo, 2001; Nadler & Leiberman, 1986; Strickland, 1989; Ybrandt, 2008).

Connect at-risk students with caring adults.

All participants stressed the significance of their relationships with teachers and other school personnel. Findings also indicated that relationships with adults—both positive and negative—had remarkable power over participants in this study. Students all reported that support from caring adults could have interrupted their pattern of poor decision making. “We need to feel wanted and we need help,” Devin wrote. Study findings indicate that receiving positive reinforcement from adults changed how students felt about themselves. The comments of school staff had a lasting effect on students’ perception of themselves. As the messages participants receive from the adults around them became increasingly positive, their perception of themselves improved as well. Through relationships with adults who were concerned about their wellbeing, teachers helped participants think about the repercussions of their actions and make better decisions, potentially decreasing students’ engagement in risk taking behavior.

Participants gleaned messages about their worth as students and as people from their interactions with educators. Participants internalized negative interactions with school staff, often becoming less engaged in school. From students’ comments it was evident that positive relationships acted as a protective factor mitigating the potential negative impact of negative interactions with both peers and adults. The protective effect of positive relationships with caring adults may be especially important to students who engage in risk taking behaviors, since these students are likely to have more negative interactions with adults, including teachers, administrators, parents, and police officers, as a consequence of increased poor decision making. Mitigating the harmful effects of

negative interactions with school staff may be especially relevant for students at increased risk of school exclusion since students who are expelled from school have lower grades and more suspensions than their peers, prior to expulsion (Arcia, 2006), suggesting higher rates of negative interactions with adults.

For students who are dependent on external approval, positive appraisals from caring adults may also mitigate students' need for approval from peers. Although adolescence is a time when peers become increasingly important to young people, supportive relationships with caring adults has been identified as a factor that protects students from undesirable outcomes, such as expulsion (Feyl-Chavkin & Gonzalez, 2000; Garnezy, 1993; Higgins, 1994; Howard, Dryfen, & Johnson, 1999; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Werner & Smith, 1992). Actively fostering these relationships may increase students' resilience to negative influences before, during, and after expulsion. Building a relationship with a caring teacher, administrator, mental health professional, coach, extracurricular activity sponsor, community member, mentor, or school support provider might foster resilience in a vulnerable student as resilient students in this study and in the Kauai Longitudinal Study (Werner, 1993) all had at least one supportive relationship with an adult, even if the adult played a very minor role in the student's life.

Maximize positive outcomes during a student's expulsion term. Participants' experiences indicate that it is possible for students to experience positive outcomes as a result of expulsion. Knowing this, educators must focus on promoting positive outcomes during a student's expulsion. In program development school leaders should work to minimize risk factors and to maximize protective factors during a student's expulsion

term. Alternative educational programs can be designed to foster resilience in students by capitalizing on these protective factors.

Increase enrollment in alternative educational programs.

When preventive measures fail and students are expelled, educators must focus on providing students with opportunities that maximize positive outcomes during the expulsion term. To take advantage of these opportunities, students must be in school. Participants in this study experienced many positive outcomes as a result of program attendance. “Expulsion program changed my ways of thinking. Because of expulsion program I think I am a better person than I was before,” Devin said. Although there is no guarantee that program attendance will improve outcomes for all students, it is probable that program attendance may improve students’ prospects, since a strong body of literature had documented very poor outcomes for students who do not attend school.

Low program participation is especially problematic because a high percentage of expelled students choose not to attend alternative programs available to this population (Burns, 1996; Christensen, 2003; Morrison, 2001). Increasing program attendance may be useful in improving educational outcomes for expelled students since time engaged in school is a strong predictor of students’ academic achievement (Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002). Opting out of educational programs curtails students’ opportunities for both academic and socio-emotional growth. Curtailing growth may be especially harmful to expelled students as study findings suggest that expelled students may already have poor socio-emotional functioning and expelled students have been documented to have poorer

academic functioning than their peers (Morrison and D’Incau, 2000). Extended absence from school is likely to compound these deficiencies.

Help families to understand expulsion.

Participants experienced especially high levels of stress and confusion during the expulsion proceedings. Assisting families in understanding expulsion may decrease students’ stress and confusion, potentially decreasing the magnitude of risk associated with expulsion. If students and parents understand the expulsion process, they may experience less stress and confusion all around. Gabriela said:

The thing that would have helped more is to know my options at the hearing. My mom wasted a lot of time calling schools ‘cause she didn’t know I couldn’t go to them after being expelled. Kids need to know their options so they can start school as quick as possible.

Fostering understanding of students’ options may curtail problems like Gabriela’s family experienced, potentially decreasing students’ time out of school and potentially increasing expulsion program enrollment.

When discussing expulsion with a family whose child is in the expulsion process, educators should be mindful of the rift between educators’ understanding of expulsion and families’ understanding of expulsion. Families may struggle to understand the difference between suspension and expulsion, the implications of expulsion, students’ rights during expulsion proceedings, legal issues associated with expulsion, specialized language, and the process as a whole. Written explanations of each of these topics may be useful in fostering understanding. Appointing a knowledgeable individual to meet with families to explain confusing topics and to answer questions may also foster trust between families and schools. Increased communication between expulsion program staff

and students' families may be helpful in informing parents of their child's educational options, ameliorating parents' concerns regarding program attendance, and explaining the potential positive impact of program attendance on students' academic and socio-emotional functioning.

Limit loss of education during the expulsion proceedings.

Participants articulated that schools should limit loss of educational opportunity during the expulsion proceedings. "The process needs to run much faster so you don't miss learning that will benefit you in the future," Seth said. First, school districts might work to expedite the expulsion process, limiting students' time out of school. Next, expelling schools and expulsion programs might develop protocols regarding responsibility for providing school-work to students during the expulsion proceedings, so students could continue to learn while they wait for the outcome of their expulsion hearings. Expelling schools could also develop plans for students to complete coursework when they are expelled near the end of a grading period in order to decrease loss of graduation credit.

Increase educational opportunities during the expulsion term.

Participants argued that expelled students want and need increased educational opportunities while barred from attending a traditional school. All participants desired more learning opportunities for themselves while expelled. All participants shared a conviction that expelled students should have access to more educational opportunities. Jasmine equated the lack of schooling to "a drought." Jordan saw it as a "lack of

options.” Seth felt he was “being left behind.” “There wasn’t enough education,” Gabriela stated.

Older students specifically requested the opportunity to earn more credits so as not to delay their graduation. Increased course offerings and credit offerings may keep students from falling behind in learning and in graduation credits. In addition to attending an alternative program, students might take online classes through the school district or an online university that offers high school coursework. Students might also earn credits independently by attending classes at a private gym for physical education credit or by earning work-study credit through employment. Allowing students to attend summer school, regardless of an active expulsion, may be another alternative for credit recovery. Additional opportunities would also decrease students’ unsupervised time, potentially decreasing engagement in risk-taking behaviors (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1994).

Provide diverse opportunities for experiencing success.

Participants argued that expelled students need increased opportunities to be successful. “We need more opportunities to be successful as a way to show that there’s still hope for us,” Jordan said. Providing students diverse avenues for experiencing success may increase the likelihood that a student becomes engaged in school. Providing support in achieving success may increase students’ likelihood of success. Schools might facilitate can encourage resilience by providing children opportunities to participate in a wide variety of pursuits and facilitating opportunities for developing strengths, as well as communicating that all students’ strengths are valued (Bernard, 1993). Avenues for

experiencing success include leadership training, extracurricular participation, and enrollment in interest-specific courses.

Participation in community groups, clubs, and organization could be used to supplement students' education. Since expelled students are also prohibited from participating in all school-sponsored events and activities, community engagement is especially relevant. Mentorship programs, religious organizations, youth groups, club sports, scouting, civic organizations, job training programs, internships or job shadowing opportunities, non-profit organizations, and community centers may provide additional opportunities for students to experience success. These opportunities may increase positive outcomes in all expelled students since participation in extracurricular activities has been found to build resilience in young people (Braddock, Royster, Winfield, & Hawkins, 1991). Community engagement may increase if school staff takes steps to connect families with community support.

Have high expectations for expelled students.

Participants desired to be held to high academic and behavioral standards. They asked that educators have high expectations for this population, since they felt competent after meeting teachers' high expectations. Devin explained that he had become more disciplined as he worked to meet the high expectations of program staff because, "There's no excuses. You have to be at school EVERYDAY with supplies, in dress code, with all your homework done. They don't let you get away with being lazy." Aisha said, "I feel I have learned the discipline I so desperately needed. If not for this experience and getting discipline, I think I would have gotten into even bigger trouble than now."

Students may experience increased efficacy after meeting the high expectations of adults. Students' resilience may also increase since resilience is fostered by schools that set high expectations and provide support for all learners in reaching those expectations (Bernard, 1993).

Invest resources in programs for expelled students.

Participants all cited a need for increased resources. When asked what expelled students needed to be more successful, he said, "Better technology. Better books. Better supplies. Just, better everything." "They obviously don't care about us. We don't have textbooks and the buildings are falling apart. We have nothing. It's not a proper learning environment. But they don't care; to them, we're nothing," Devin lamented. Participants perceived low program funding as evidence that the educational system had given up on them. If students internalize this belief, their academic achievement may suffer. This perception may also be damaging to their emotional welfare. Inversely, students may feel valued and capable if programs are amply funded. Since students linked their worth to the conditions in which they attended school, the quality of expulsion school facilities should be considered in devising plans for improving outcomes for expelled students.

Support students in building relationships with caring adults.

All participants shared a belief that supportive relationships with caring adults are critical in limiting the negative impact of expulsion. All participants cited support from caring adults as key, not only in surviving but also in thriving during their expulsion term. When asked what advice he would give educators to improve outcomes for expelled students Jerome said, "Care. Just care about the students." In response to the

same question, Seth said, “Don’t give up on them. Let them know you care about them. Help ‘em out.” Jerome explained, “Expulsion program made me feel better about being expelled. Telling me that I can. Showing me the way. Helping me all the time.” Caring relationships with supportive adults may also likely to promote resilience, protecting students from the negative outcome associated with expulsion (Feyl-Chavkin & Gonzalez, 2000; Garmezy, 1993; Higgins, 1994; Howard et al., 1999; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Werner & Smith, 1992). The process in which students navigate adversity by developing connections and relationships with others may in itself promote resilience (Jordan, 1992).

Provide ample mental health support.

Participants believed that providing mental health support to expelled students is key. When asked what she thought had been most helpful to expulsion program students, Aisha said, “We had Mr. Wright [program psychologist] to talk over our problems. You know at the expulsion school they all had issues or problems. And sometimes they were part of their expulsion. So, kids need more people to talk to.” Support from mental health professionals may be useful in mitigating the stress, confusion, isolation, embarrassment, and shame that students experience as a result of expulsion. Mental health support is likely to decrease the negative socio-emotional impact of expulsion, including depression and suicidal tendencies (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000). Students could be supported by psychologists, counselors, and social workers. Support might occur as individual counseling, family counseling, group counseling, or socio-emotional skill development classes, either in school or through a community agency. In order to

maximize positive outcomes, students would receive mental health support both in school and outside of school through a variety of formats, as expulsion has an immense impact on many facets of students' lives.

Provide socio-emotional education.

In order to ensure that students' peer social interactions are positive and to promote pro-social behavior, it is necessary to provide socio-emotional education in alternative educational programs. Students may benefit from assistance in building and maintaining pro-social relationships with both adults and peers. Students who have a history of disrespect and defiance toward authority figures might benefit from explicit teaching of pro-social interaction with adults. Learning and practicing specific strategies for communication, mediating conflicts, solving problems, and getting help may assist students in obtaining the support they need from adults during and after expulsion. Interventions designed to improve social functioning may be particularly important for expelled students, as this population viewed being accepted by their peers as instrumental in their success and may have been especially vulnerable to the negative effects of peer rejection. Losing friends as a result of expulsion and a sense of isolation make expelled students prime candidates for interventions aimed at improving social functioning. Providing opportunities for expelled students to have positive social interactions with peers is critical for students' long-term social functioning because developing personal relationships with peers in adolescence is necessary for success in building romantic relationships and friendships later in life (Connolly, Furman, & Konarshi, 2000; Furman

& Wehner, 1994). Socio-emotional support may be especially critical for expelled students since findings indicate that participants struggle with socio-emotional efficacy.

Conceptualize expulsion as an opportunity for growth.

Participants experienced positive outcomes after conceptualizing expulsion as an opportunity for learning instead of a punishment. “Try to rehabilitate us instead of focusing on punishing us,” Aisha said. Reframing expulsion as an opportunity for learning, growth, and change instead of a punishment may improve outcomes for students enrolled in alternative programs. If students view expulsion as nothing more than a punishment, socio-emotional and academic outcomes for students may be low, as they may have little buy-in. If students believe that expulsion is a punitive measure, serving only to punish them, they may feel “thrown away” or like “society’s rejects.” These negative self-appraisals may lead to a negative self-concept that may hinder coping abilities (Nadler & Leiberan, 1986; Matto & Realo, 2001) as well as potentially increasing depression, anxiety, delinquency, and aggression in adolescents (Ybrandt, 2008). Participants shared that, if students regard expulsion as a punishment instead of a chance for rehabilitation, they may also lack motivation, as they may believe that the time and effort required to be successful in attending an alternative program as pointless. On the other hand, students who see their expulsion term as a time to continue learning outside the traditional school setting, to change the negative aspects of their lives, and to experience growth may be more likely to take advantage of the opportunities that they are offered.

Framing expulsion as a chance for learning, change, and growth may increase expulsion program enrollment rates. If parents see expulsion as a punitive measure, they may be less likely to enroll their child in an alternative program. If parents see expulsion as a productive force meant to bring about positive change in their children's lives, they may have more buy-in and satisfaction with alternative programs. Framing expulsion in a positive light may also increase program efficacy because parents may be more likely to support program staff if they believe that educators' intention is to do whatever is best for their child.

Conceptualizing expulsion as an opportunity for learning may also be helpful to educators. If educators who work with expelled students conceptualize expulsion as a chance for students to learn and to grow from making mistakes, educators may feel that their work is more important. These convictions may increase teachers' motivation, improve instruction, and raise teachers' expectations for their students, potentially improving student performance. A sense of purpose may also decrease teacher burnout, potentially increasing retention rates of alternative program staff.

Treat expelled students as normal people who make mistakes.

All participants appealed to educators to suspend judgment and treat expelled students like normal teenagers who make mistakes. Jerome pleaded for educators to view expelled students, "As people, human beings, just like any other person." Participants requested that expelled students receive the same treatment as their classmates who had not been expelled. When asked what others should know about expelled students, Jordan stated:

That we're just like normal students who don't get expelled. You just make mistakes. It's true that when you get expelled people treat you differently. We're just like other normal students. We've just made mistakes and everyone makes mistakes. So, little ones or big ones, there are still consequences. Just treat us all the same.

Findings indicate that thinking of themselves as good people who make mistakes allowed students in this study to maintain a positive self-concept, which has been documented to lower levels of psychological stress and to increase coping abilities in stressful situations (Nadler & Leiberman, 1986; Matto & Realo, 2001). Findings also indicate that understanding mistake making as a part of being human, as well as growing up, may have increased students' resilience. Making a distinction between *bad people* and *bad decisions* may also prove useful in maintaining a positive self-concept. Framing expulsion incidents as bad decisions that good kids make also help students to see the difficulty of expulsion as avoidable through improved decision making. Perceiving oneself to be a bad person may be seen as an unchangeable, hopeless condition. Empowered with the knowledge that they can change their lives through positive decision-making, students may avoid future risk taking.

Frame expulsion as a surmountable challenge.

At the time of their expulsion, participants conceptualized expulsion as a life-ending event, but as they continued to live life in the wake of expulsion, they came to understand expulsion as an "overcomable" obstacle. Carlos wrote:

I find expulsion to be nothing but a limit for students, sort of like a delay. I chose the word obstacle, instead of delay, because some students just can't get over the fact that they're expelled and give up. Most students, however, find a way to overcome their expulsion and prove to the district and to the public that no one should be judged on their mistakes, but on what they do to recover from their mistakes.

When asked what advice they would give expelled students, participants stated that they hoped their stories could serve as inspiration to students in the future. Carlos hoped his writing would, “Be an inspiration for kids just like me!”

If educators frame expulsion as a surmountable challenge, they may positively influence students’ paradigm of expulsion. Understanding the distress of expulsion as a temporary condition may limit some of the emotional distress that students experience after expulsion. Students who initially perceive expulsion as a life-ending event may regain hope for the future if educators reframe expulsion as an obstacle that will be overcome. Students who see expulsion as a surmountable challenge may have a renewed purpose as they work to overcome challenges. This may mitigate some of students’ depression and suicidal tendencies. Success in overcoming adversity may then increase their resilience to future adverse experiences through improved self-concept, increased self-efficacy, and development of an internal locus of control (Bailer, 1961; Clausen, 1986; Feyl-Chavkin & Gonzalez, 2000; Lefcourt, 1981; Matto & Realo, 2001; Nadler & Leiberman, 1986; Strickland, 1989; Ybrandt, 2008).

Help students set goals and plan for the future.

Participants asked for help in devising plans to achieve their goals. They shared that after expulsion they felt lost and desired support in getting back on track. Carlos wrote:

Being expelled is a building crumbling down, and expulsion teachers are architects. When I was in school I was making a building that would let me climb to success, but then something bad happened and it crumbled down to little pieces. When something interferes with your plans and they crumble you’re

gonna need help building back up. Expulsion teachers are architects because they helped me design and rebuild from scratch what got destroyed.

Participants also reported that looking forward to a brighter time, after expulsion, provided them with hope. Devin shared his pride in taking strides in creating the future he desired. “I have changed as a person from a boy into a young man planning his future,” he said.

Providing opportunities for students to set goals and to plan for the future might increase students' resilience since a positive outlook and focusing on the future have been identified as protective factors (Brooks, 1994; Werner, 1993). Supporting students in developing action plans and implementing them might also develop self-efficacy, autonomy, and an internal locus of control. Making progress toward achieving one's goals may also foster a positive self-concept.

Recommendations for transitioning students back into school.

Transitioning back into the traditional school environment after expulsion is a major change in students' lives. With this major change comes both risk and opportunity. Returning to school might act as a catalyst for students to return to past bad decision making and proximity to peers may increase students' susceptibility to negative influences. Returning to school might also serve as a fresh start, a chance for new experiences, and an opportunity to experience success. It is the job of educators to ensure that students are supported in order to promote maximum positive outcomes upon school re-entry.

Provide opportunities for students to earn early re-admittance.

All participants recommended providing students with the opportunity to return to school before their official expulsion end date as an incentive for success in attending an alternative program. Providing students a chance to earn the right to return to school before their official end date may be helpful in decreasing students' time out of school and may diminish the negative effects associated with being out of school. "I would have done *anything* they said and met *any* requirement they had to get back in school, Aisha stated." As indicated by her comment, returning to school early may motivate students to improve their behavior and academics during their expulsion term. District personnel, school administrators, and alternative program staff might work together to develop requirements that students must meet in order to earn early re-admittance. They might also develop conditions to which students must adhere to in order to remain in the traditional school setting. Students might be more motivated to continue to succeed after returning to school if violating the conditions of school probation would cause them to serve out the remainder of their expulsion. Findings indicate that success in earning early re-admittance might also facilitate positive self-concept, an internal locus of control, and increased self-efficacy.

Conceptualize re-entry as a fresh start.

Participants all stressed the importance of getting a fresh start upon returning to the traditional school environment. "Everyone deserves a second chance," Anthony stated. Helping students to conceptualize school re-entry as a fresh start may prevent them from returning to poor decision-making and to decrease students' susceptibility to

bad influences. If administrators communicate to students that their slate has been wiped clean of their prior mistakes, students may be more positive in returning to school.

Students who believe that they have the power to create a new reputation at school might have greater motivation to be successful. Focusing on students' success during their expulsion term, instead of their expulsion incident, might increase students' confidence in their ability to be successful in the traditional school setting. Conversely, students who believe that there is no chance of repairing a bad reputation may become disengaged. Believing that their past bad decisions dictate how others see them might make them feel helpless about changing the future.

Since students may be tempted to return to their old ways, supporting students through their transition may help students to develop new habits that facilitate success in school. Sources of support may include daily, weekly, or monthly check-ins with a designated adult, support from the sponsor of an extracurricular activity, counseling in a group or individual setting, enrollment in courses with teachers who have been supportive in the past, assisting a teacher or administrator, or appointment to a leadership role. Helping students to set goals upon re-entry might help students to stay focused. Students, parents, and administrators could work together to develop a plan for achieving students' goals. Support measures should be put in place to respond to concerns of parents and students regarding re-entry.

Utilize students' experiences in decision-making.

All participants provided insights for improving academic and socio-emotional outcomes for students. They shared a conviction that expelled students could inform

leaders and policy makers in improving outcomes for students expelled in the future. They appealed to adults who make decisions pertinent to expelled students' lives to take the time to get to know the population their decisions impact. "We're people, not numbers, and they need to see that," Carlos explained. They argued that educators must recognize expelled students as a critical stakeholder group and take their experiences into consideration in decision-making, program development, and policy writing.

This research might help to humanize expelled students and dispel the misconceptions and negative stereotypes that participants believed runs rampant through educational institutions and society at large, but research alone cannot improve outcomes for expelled students. After seeing expelled students as people, instead of statistics, educators must be dedicate their efforts to creating positive change for this underserved population. Improving outcomes for expelled students is not limited to policy development and implementation at the state and district level. Educators need not wait for directives from above, new legislation, or changes in policy to increase expelled students' odds of experiencing success. Instead, building administrators, classroom teachers, mental health professionals, and expulsion program staff have the power to take action to help future expelled students accomplish their goals and live their dreams.

Having spoken to students regarding their motivation in participating in expellable behavior, policy makers may be better equipped to put policies in place which decrease students' participation in expellable behavior, potentially decreasing expulsion. Having taken the time to visit alternative programs for expelled students, school and district leaders are likely to be better informed about the programs students attend and

may be better equipped to develop programs that best address the needs of expelled students, potentially increasing academic and socio-emotional outcomes for students. Having a better understanding of students' experiences of expulsion, educators in traditional schools may be better equipped to address students' needs upon returning to school, potentially improving students' success in the traditional school setting. By personally meeting with expelled students, educators may be able to move past common stereotypes and stigmas associated with expelled students and to move forward with a more accurate understanding of this population. Overall, decision-makers may be better equipped to make decisions with a deeper understanding of this population's best interests. Carlos stated:

I honestly don't know how to convince you with words that we're not bad because there are so many stigmas. I guess the only way for you to find out is by coming to meet us. If you were to come down here, you would see that we aren't bad people or dangerous.

In conclusion, all educators must be aware of the power they command over the lives of expelled students. Participants' repeatedly appealed to educators to help them and their expelled peers to experience success. "Our future is in your hands," Carlos wrote. "Please help us receive the education we want and deserve," Jasmine pleaded. In a letter directed to educators Carlos wrote, "Many of us will go on to do great things, but we need help. If you don't give it to us, we might end up in jail, or worse. I am appealing to *you*, the district administrators, the principals, the teachers: Help us!" As Carlos suggests, educators must recognize the potential that exists within this population. Only when educators recognize the potential that too often lays dormant within these students, will

all expelled students have the chance to accomplish their goals and live their dreams. As Aisha stated, “We’re good kids; we’re worth it!”

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Appendix A

Search Terms and Databases Utilized in Research

In preparation for this research, a thorough search of research databases was conducted. The following keywords, phrases, and word combinations were utilized:

- “expulsion”
- “student expulsion”
- “expulsion from school”
- “expulsion” and “education”
- “expulsion” and “phenomenology”
- “education” and “phenomenology”
- “school” and “phenomenology”
- “discipline” and “phenomenology”
- “phenomenology” and “methods”
- “phenomenological methods”
- “schools” and “discipline”
- “suspension”
- “suspension” and “school”
- “suspension” and “education”
- “academic achievement”
- “achievement gap”
- “academic achievement gap”

- “discipline” and “schools”
- “discipline” and “education”
- “discipline” and “equity”
- “disproportionate discipline”
- “exclusionary discipline”
- “school exclusion”
- “school safety”

The following data bases were searched:

- Academic Search Complete
- Educational Research Information Center (ERIC)
- Google Scholar
- Academic Search Premier
- Dissertations and Thesis: Full Text
- ProQuest Social Science Journals
- PsychINFO
- PsychARTICLES
- Teacher Reference Center

Appendix B

Invitation to Participate

(Insert date and month), 2011

Dear *(insert first name of student)*,

I am inviting you to participate in a research study. I am doing research to find out what it is like to be a teenager who has been expelled from school. I am asking you to participate in this study because you were a Rocky Mountain Expulsion Program student and because you know what it's like to be expelled.

My purpose in doing this study is to give students the chance to explain to educators what it's like to be expelled. As a teacher working at the Expulsion Program, I have had many students tell me that they feel like teachers and administrators at their schools don't understand them. If policy makers, administrators and teachers understand expelled students better, they can make decisions which will help kids who are expelled be more successful at school in the future.

Detailed information about the study is included with this letter. Please read the "Information for Students" sheet, and share the "Information for Parents" sheet with your parent or guardian.

I would like to answer all of your questions. You can reach me at (720) 217-6102 or NadiaColeman@gmail.com.

I look forward to hearing your story!

Sincerely,

Nadia Coleman
Ph.D. Candidate, University of Denver
Teacher, Rocky Mountain Expulsion Program
(720) 217-6102
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Appendix C

Informed Consent for Parents

Resilience through Adversity: A narrative case study of students' experiences of expulsion from school

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Main Researcher:

Nadia Coleman
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(720) 217-6102
NadiaColeman@gmail.com

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Kent Seidel, Ph.D.
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(303) 871-2496
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Who are you and what are you doing?

My name is Nadia Coleman. I am a teacher at the Rocky Mountain Expulsion Program. I am also a graduate student at the University of Denver. I am inviting your son or daughter to participate in a research study. I am studying what it's like to be a student who is expelled from school. Many of my students have shared with me their feelings of frustration in being "forgotten" and "discarded" by the schools. Students have talked about feeling stereotyped and misunderstood. I hope that this research will give expelled teens the voice they have never had.

Why are you doing this research?

I am doing this research to find out what it is like to be a teenager who has been expelled from school. As a teacher working at the Expulsion Program, I have had many students tell me that they feel like teachers and administrators at their schools don't understand them. My purpose in doing this study is to give students the chance to explain to educators what it's like to be expelled. If policy makers, administrators and teachers understand expelled students better, they can make decisions which will help kids who are expelled be more successful at school in the future.

Why are you asking my child to participate?

I am asking your child to participate in this study because your child knows what it's like to be expelled from school. I am asking your child to participate because he or she was a student at the Expulsion Program sometime in the past two years. I have invited all of your child's peers from the Expulsion Program to participate also.

Does my child have to do this?

Your child does not have to participate in this research. The decision is completely up to you and your child. If your son or daughter agrees to participate now, he or she can always change his or her mind later. You can choose to have your child stop participating at any time. Nothing, either good or bad, will happen to you or your child, whether you choose to participate or not.

What will he or she be asked to do?

I will meet with your child two times. He or she will choose whether we meet at your child's school or at the Expulsion Program. Before we meet for the first time, I will ask your child to bring with him or her anything that he or she thinks would help me understand what it is like to be expelled. It could be anything your child wants. He or she could bring drawings, art, poetry, stories, journal entries, rap or songs. Your child doesn't have to bring anything, if he or she doesn't want to. Then I will ask your child to tell me about what it is like to be expelled from school. I will ask questions like these:

- *“I am really interested in what it's like to be expelled. Can you tell me about it?”*
- *“I would like to hear the story of your expulsion. Would you please tell me your story?”*
- *“What do you remember most about your expulsion? What has stuck in your mind the most?”*
- *“Do you remember what you were thinking when you were expelled? Do you remember what you were feeling?”*
- *“I've never been expelled. Can you tell me what it is like?”*
- *What is it like to have your expulsion end? I would really like to know.”*

We will talk as long as your son or daughter wants. It will probably take 20 to 45 minutes, but the length of the interview is really up to him or her. The second time we meet I will tell your child what I remember from our first meeting. During this meeting he or she can check and make sure I understood everything from the interview. I might ask him or her some questions to clarify what we talked about before. I want to make sure that I really understand your child's ideas, so I will ask him or her to point out anything that I misunderstood or anything I have left out. At the end of the study, I will mail you and your child a letter explaining what I learned about expelled teens.

Will the interviews be recorded?

The interviews will be audio recorded. The interview will not be video recorded. Your child can ask to stop the recording at any point. I will listen to the recording to make sure I understood everything your child talked about, and to make sure I didn't miss anything. I will not share the recording with anyone else. Your child's name will not be used. The recording will be destroyed once the research is done.

What are the risks of participating?

Some teens feel upset, angry, sad, frustrated, or stressed when they talk about a difficult experience, like being expelled from school. Your child might experience these feelings during or after the interviews. If he or she feels upset, a psychologist or counselor will be available to help him or her right away. If you are concerned about your child's well-being, please contact me right away to get help for your child.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

You and your child will receive no direct benefits for participating in this study. However, this research might help teachers, administrators, and policy makers understand expelled teenagers better in the future.

Does my child get anything for participating?

You and your child will not get any money or other rewards for participating in this research.

Who will know about this?

No one will know that your child is participating in this study. The interviews will be private. All computer files will be password protected. Your child's name will never be used.

Will you tell me the results?

When I am finished with this research, I will mail you a letter to tell you about the results of the study. I will also tell other researchers and educators what I've learned. I will present my findings to the leaders of Rocky Mountain School District. This information may help them make better decisions about expelled students in the future. I will also try to get the results of this study printed in publications for educators, so other leaders and researchers can learn about expelled teens.

Can I choose for my child not to be in the research?

You can choose whether or not you want your child to be part of this study. Your child must have your permission to participate. If you choose to allow your child to participate, you can change your mind at any time.

Who can I talk to if I have questions about this study?

You may talk to anyone you like before you decide if you would like your child to participate. I would like to answer any questions you have. You can call or email me at any time to ask questions. If you or your child are uncomfortable at any point, please contact my advisor, Kent Seidel at (303) 871-2496 or Kent.Seidel@du.edu.

You can call me at: **(720) 217-6102**

You can email me at: **NadiaColeman@gmail.com**

What if I have concerns or complaints?

If you have any concerns or complaints about how your child was treated during the interview, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-4820.

I will also give you a copy of this information to keep for yourself, so you can look at it in the future.

PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE

I have read all the information about this study. I understand that this research is to find out about the experiences of students who have been expelled from school. My child will be interviewed about his or her experiences while expelled. My child will be interviewed by his or her former teacher from the Expulsion Program, and I am comfortable with that. The interviews will be audio recorded. I know that my child does not have to participate in this research. My child can drop out of the study at any time. I have gone over this information with my child. I have had all my questions answered and know that I can ask questions later if I have them.

_____ **I give my child permission to participate in this research.**

_____ **I DO NOT give my child permission to participate in this research.**

My child's name: _____ **Date:** _____

My name: _____ **My signature:** _____

Appendix D

Informed Assent for Students

Resilience through Adversity: A narrative case study of students' experiences of expulsion from school

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Main Researcher:

Nadia Coleman
Ph.D. Candidate

Chair

University of Denver
(720) 217-6102
Nadia.Coleman@du.edu

Advisor:

Kent Seidel, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and

University of Denver
(303) 871-2496
Kent.Seidel@du.edu

Who are you and what are you doing?

My name is Nadia Coleman. I am a teacher at the Rocky Mountain Expulsion Program. I am also a graduate student at the University of Denver. I am inviting you to participate in a research study. I am studying what it's like to be a student who is expelled from school. Many of my students have shared with me their feelings of frustration in being "forgotten" and "discarded" by the schools. Students have talked about feeling stereotyped and misunderstood. I hope that this research will give expelled teens the voice they have never had.

Why are you doing this research?

I am doing this research to find out what it is like to be a teenager who has been expelled from school. As a teacher working at the Expulsion Program, I have had many students tell me that they feel like teachers and administrators at their schools don't understand them. My purpose in doing this study is to give students the chance to explain to educators what it's like to be expelled. If policy makers, administrators and teachers understand expelled students better, they can make decisions which will help kids who are expelled be more successful at school in the future.

Why are you asking me to participate?

I am asking you to participate in this study because you know what it's like to be expelled from school. I am asking you to participate because you were a student at the Expulsion Program sometime in past last two years. I have invited all of your peers from the Expulsion Program to participate too.

Do I have to do this?

You don't have to participate in this research, if you don't want to. It is completely up to you. If you agree to participate now, you can always change your mind later. You can choose to stop participating in this study at any time. Nothing, either good or bad, will happen to you whether you choose to be in this study or not. Since you are a minor, your parent also has to agree for you to participate.

What will I be asked to do?

I will meet with you twice. You will choose whether we meet at your school or at the Expulsion Program. Before we meet for the first time, I will ask you to bring with you anything that you think would help me understand what it is like to be expelled. It could be anything you want. You could bring drawings, art, poetry, stories, journal entries, rap or songs. You don't have to bring anything, if you don't want to. Then I will ask you to tell me about what it is like to be expelled from school. I will ask you questions like these:

- *“I am really interested in what it's like to be expelled. Can you tell me about it?”*
- *“I would like to hear the story of your expulsion. Would you please tell me your story?”*
- *“What do you remember most about your expulsion? What has stuck in your mind the most?”*
- *“Do you remember what you were thinking when you were expelled? Do you remember what you were feeling?”*
- *“I've never been expelled. Can you tell me what it is like?”*
- *What is it like to have your expulsion end? I would really like to know.”*

We will talk as long as you want to. You can tell me whatever you think is most important to know about what it's like to be expelled from school. It will probably take 20 to 45 minutes, but the length of the interview is really up to you. The second time we meet I will tell you what I remember from our first meeting. During the second meeting you can check and make sure I understood everything you told me. I might ask you some questions to clarify what we talked about before. I want to make sure that I really understand your ideas, so I will ask you to point out anything that I misunderstood, or anything I have left out. We will talk only as long as you want to. At the end of the study, I will mail you and your parent a letter explaining what I learned about expelled teens.

Will the interviews be recorded?

The interviews will be audio recorded. This means that only your voice will be recorded. The interview will not be video recorded. You can ask to stop the recording at any point. I will listen to the recording to make sure I understood everything you talked

about, and to make sure I didn't miss anything. I will not share the recording with any other people. Your name will not be used. The recording will be destroyed once the research is done.

What are the risks of participating?

Some teens feel upset, angry, sad, frustrated, or stressed when they talk about a difficult experience, like being expelled from school. You might experience these feelings during or after the interviews. If you do feel upset, a psychologist or counselor will be available to help you right away.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

You will receive no direct benefits for participating in this study. However, this research might help teachers, administrators, and policy makers to understand expelled teenagers better in the future.

Do I get anything for participating?

You will not get any money or other rewards for participating in this research.

Who will know about this?

No one will know that you are participating in this study. The interviews will be private. All computer files will be password protected. Your name will never be used.

Will you tell me the results?

When I am finished with this research, I will mail you a letter to tell you about the results of the study. I will also tell other researchers and educators what I've learned. I will present my findings to the leaders of Rocky Mountain School District. This information may help them make better decisions about expelled students in the future. I will also try to get the results of this study published, so other educators and researchers can learn about expelled teens.

Can I choose not to be in the research?

You can choose whether or not you want to be part of this study. If you choose to participate, you can change your mind at any time. You can stop at any time.

Who can I talk to if I have questions about this study?

You should talk to people you trust before you decide to participate. I would like to answer any questions you have. You can call or email me at any time to ask questions. If you are uncomfortable at any point, please contact my advisor, Kent Seidel, at (303) 871-2496 or Kent.Seidel@du.edu.

You can call me at: **(720) 217-6102**

You can email me at: Nadia.Coleman@DU.edu

What if I have concerns or complaints?

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-4820.

I will also give you a copy of this paper to keep for yourself, so you can look at it in the future.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read all the information about this study. I understand that this research is to learn about the experiences of students who have been expelled from school. I will be interviewed about my experiences. I will be interviewed by my former teacher from the Expulsion Program and am comfortable with that. The interviews will be audio recorded. I know that I do not have to participate in this research. I can change my mind at any time. I have gone over this information with the researcher and with my parent. I have had all my questions answered and know that I can ask questions later if I have them.

_____ **I AGREE to participate in this research.**

_____ **I DO NOT AGREE to participate in this research.**

My name: _____ **Date:** _____

My signature: _____

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Obtaining Informed Assent

Before the start of the interview, I will go over the informed assent paperwork with participants, clarify the specifics of the study, and answer any questions they have. They will also have the opportunity to view the research questions and discussion prompts before committing to participate in the interview. I will ask participants clarifying questions to check their understanding of the assent form. After participants have confirmed full understanding of the assent form, I will ask them to sign the form. I will also check that the participant's parent has signed the informed consent form. Participants will be provided a photo copy of the assent and consent forms to take with them before starting the interview.

Discussion of Participants' Writings or Drawings

Students' creative representations will act as a conversation starter for the interviews. A discussion of any creative representation students have brought to their interviews will be the first topic of discussion during the interview session. I will ask students to share any writings or drawings they have chosen to bring to the interview session. I will state, "Thank you for bringing your work to share with me. I am excited to see it and it will be a great addition to our conversation today. Could you tell me about your (drawing, poem, song, etc.)?"

If participants struggle in starting to discuss their creative work, I will encourage them to start in any way they like and to respond in any way they wish. If participants ask what they are supposed to say, I will ask them to tell me whatever they think is important, and what is meaningful to them.

Discussion of the Expulsion Experience

After discussing students' creative representations, open-ended, informal, non-directive, and student-led discussion will continue. Hopefully, discussion of students' creative representations will allow for a natural foundation for students to begin explaining their expulsion experience. If students get stuck or have difficulty identifying what they would like to talk about, I will use non-directive conversation starters to help stimulate their thinking, without giving students any pre-conceived topics or subjects to address. Discussion prompts will be utilized to assist the participants in returning to the expulsion experience and talking about their memories and feelings about the experience. Prompts should facilitate informal conversation, so totally scripted questions would not be appropriate. However, conversation starters are likely to include the following:

- “I am really interested in what it’s like to be expelled. Can you tell me about it?”
- “I would like to hear the story of your expulsion. Would you please tell me your story?”
- “What do you remember most about your expulsion? What has stuck in your mind the most?”
- “Do you remember what you were thinking when you were expelled? Do you remember what you were feeling?”
- “I’ve never been expelled. Can you tell me what it is like?”
- What is it like to have your expulsion end? I would really like to know.”

Follow up questions to each of these open-ended conversation starters would be completely based on student's responses, in order to facilitate as natural a conversation as possible. Interviews are likely to take 20 to 45 minutes, but the length of the interview is really up to the participant and how much he or she would like to share. Interviews will come to an end when participants report having discussed everything they would like to share, or when participants begin repeating themselves. At the end of the interview, I will ask participants if there are any additional comments they would like to make, or if there is anything else they would like me to know. I will thank participants, and tell them I appreciate their participation very much. I will remind students that I will contact them in the future. I will remind them that they will have the opportunity to check my understanding of the first interview and to be involved in data analysis in the second interview.

The Confirmation Interview

In order to involve teens in the analysis and interpretation of findings, a second interview will be scheduled after I have conducted my own preliminary data analysis. Confirmation interviews with the original participants will be conducted. The purpose of these follow-up interviews with existing participants will be to ask participants any clarifying questions which arose from the first interview, to ask questions related to the themes identified in my preliminary analysis, to allow participants to reflect on the data which has been collected, and to allow participants to confirm or to question preliminary data analysis I have done.