

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: "THIS MAKES ME WHO I AM": THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP FOR NINTH GRADE STUDENTS TRANSITIONING TO HIGH SCHOOL

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This dissertation examines the motivational aspects of academic engagement from a social-psychological perspective by introducing the concept of school membership as a mediating factor between academic environment and the behaviors that comprise academic engagement. School membership is rooted in identity theory and is defined as the possession of social bonds with a social network of school members through which a highly salient self-identity and high levels of commitment as a member of the school are internalized.

In order to identify links between academic environment, school membership, and academic engagement, I qualitatively examine disadvantaged students within "City High", a school employing the Talent Development High School Model, a comprehensive school reform model with that creates an environment conducive to the internalization of school membership. Using ethnographic methods, I compare and contrast school membership levels and perceptions of in and out of school environment within a diverse group of students at "City High". In order to test my qualitative findings on a broad scale, I quantitatively examine links between academic

environment, school membership, and academic engagement through multilevel modeling techniques, using data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002.

Both the qualitative and quantitative portions of this dissertation provide suggestive results indicating both the presence of school membership within disadvantaged students with high levels of academic performance and effort. In addition, both phases of this project indicate that students' social and structural academic environment were related to the creation and maintenance of school membership. This dissertation concludes by examining the ways in which comprehensive school reform models benefit by focusing on students who are transitioning to high school and placing the creation of a "culture of success" on par with raising student achievement levels, as these goals are intertwined.

“THIS MAKES ME WHO I AM”: THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF
SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP FOR NINTH GRADE STUDENTS TRANSITIONING
TO HIGH SCHOOL

By

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Over the last three years, I have been blessed to have the insight and consent of a multitude of individuals and organizations in my continual search for the “holy grail” of internal motivation for academic engagement. At many points over these past three years, I’ve felt as though this search for motivators of academic engagement may just be as fruitless searches for the mythical object. At those times, I’ve had many people in my academic and personal lives that have kept me focused, given me guidance, and at times delivered a much needed reminder that I’m not always right. Truly, to borrow from an advisor’s acknowledgements section from her dissertation, I’ve experienced firsthand the meaning of the African proverb “It takes a village...”

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH	4
CHAPTER TWO: THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT	9
ECOLOGICAL THEORY AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY	9
STUDENT-TEACHER INTERACTION.....	11
<i>The Positive Effects of Student-Teacher Interaction</i>	11
<i>Constructivist Pedagogy</i>	12
<i>Pedagogy of Care</i>	13
<i>Interactive Pedagogy and School Membership</i>	15
HIGH ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS	17
<i>High Academic Expectations and School Membership</i>	20
SCHOOL STRUCTURE	20
<i>School Size, Class Size, Overcrowding and Membership</i>	21
<i>School Safety and School Membership</i>	23
<i>Teacher Turnover and School Membership</i>	24
<i>Classroom Materials, Cleanliness and School Membership</i>	25
<i>Strong Leadership and School Membership</i>	26
SUMMARY	28
CHAPTER THREE: THE DEFINITION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP	30
IDENTITY THEORY – OVERVIEW AND RESEARCH.....	31
<i>Defining the Self – Identity Salience and Commitment</i>	32
<i>Research Regarding Behavior within an Identity</i>	34
<i>Identity Theory and Adolescent Development</i>	37
<i>Integrating Identity Theory and Ecological Theory</i>	39
SCHOOL LEGITIMACY.....	39
HOW IS SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP CREATED?	40
SUMMARY	42
CHAPTER FOUR: SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT	45
EXISTING RESEARCH ON CORRELATES OF ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT	46
ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.....	47
SUMMARY	48
CHAPTER FIVE: WHEN, AND FOR WHOM IS SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP MOST CRITICAL?	52
EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION.....	52
<i>The Effects and Extent of Transition Year Grade Retention</i>	53

<i>The Challenges of the Transition Year</i>	54
RESEARCH ON NINTH GRADE INTERVENTIONS	57
FOR WHOM IS SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP MOST CRITICAL?.....	58
SUMMARY	60
CHAPTER SIX: RESEARCH SCOPE, LIMITATIONS AND HYPOTHESES	62
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	64
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE TALENT DEVELOPMENT HIGH SCHOOL	
MODEL	65
THE RISE OF COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM MODELS	65
TALENT DEVELOPMENT HIGH SCHOOL MODEL	70
<i>The Ninth Grade Success Academy</i>	71
RESEARCH LINKING THE TDHS MODEL TO POSITIVE ACADEMIC	
ENVIRONMENT AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT	74
SUMMARY	75
CHAPTER EIGHT: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH SITE, RESEARCH	
SAMPLE, AND RESEARCH METHODS	77
RESEARCH SITE	77
<i>Educational Policy in the Central City School District</i>	79
<i>City High</i>	86
RESEARCH METHODS: SAMPLE AND DATA ANALYSIS	90
DATA ANALYSIS.....	94
SUMMARY	96
CHAPTER NINE: QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS	99
DATASET	99
<i>Dependant Variables</i>	101
<i>Environmental Independent Variables</i>	105
<i>Control Variables</i>	107
RESEARCH METHODS	108
SUMMARY	114
CHAPTER TEN: QUALITATIVE RESULTS	116
PROLOGUE: BECOMING PART OF CITY HIGH	116
PART ONE: STUDENT IDENTITIES, IN THEIR OWN WORDS	120
PART TWO: SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP AND STUDENT SELF-PERCEPTIONS	
.....	124
<i>Self-Esteem and Self-Verification</i>	125
<i>Locus of Control</i>	127
<i>Aspirations</i>	129
<i>Self-Efficacy</i>	132
PART THREE: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF IN-SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT	
.....	135
<i>Social Networks</i>	135

<i>Peer Groups</i>	138
<i>School Membership and School Structure</i>	141
PART FOUR: “THE STREETS” - STUDENTS’ OUT OF SCHOOL	
ENVIRONMENT	150
<i>Single Parenthood and Caretaking</i>	151
<i>Poverty</i>	153
<i>“The Streets”</i>	154
<i>Previous School Experiences</i>	156
SUMMARY	157
CHAPTER ELEVEN: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS	160
ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT AND SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP	160
<i>Descriptive Statistics – Academic Environment and School Membership</i>	160
<i>HLM Equations-Academic Environment and School Membership</i>	163
SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT.....	169
<i>HLM Equations-Academic Environment and Academic Engagement</i>	171
<i>HLM Equations- School Membership and Academic Engagement</i>	174
SUMMARY	179
DISCUSSION	180
CHAPTER TWELVE: CONCLUSIONS	185
RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS	191
<i>A New Framework of Comprehensive School Reform</i>	192
<i>Reconceptualizing School Reform</i>	201
<i>Roadblocks to Implementing Holistic Comprehensive School Reform Models</i>	203
STUDENTS ON THE BRINK	209
APPENDICES	213
WORKS CITED	220

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE ONE: AVERAGE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE FOR 2007-08 SCHOOL YEAR, BY SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP AND SKILL/EFFORT GROUP.....	94
TABLE TWO: SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP MEAN BY VALUE OF KEY INDEPENDENT VARIABLES.....	162
TABLE THREE: VARIANCE COMPOSITION FOR NULL MODELS OF SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP.....	163
TABLE FOUR: FREQUENCY OF STUDENTS WITHIN SCHOOLS.....	165
TABLE FIVE: HLM ESTIMATES OF THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT ON SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP.....	168
TABLE SIX: ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT MEAN BY VALUE OF KEY INDEPENDENT VARIABLES.....	171
TABLE SEVEN: VARIANCE COMPOSITION FOR NULL MODELS OF ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT.....	172
TABLE EIGHT: HLM ESTIMATES OF THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT/SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP ON ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT.....	178

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE ONE: THE PROCESS OF ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT.....	51
FIGURE TWO: HLM EQUATION FOR MODEL WITH SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP AS THE DEPENDANT VARIABLE.....	112
FIGURE THREE: FULL HLM EQUATION FOR MODEL WITH ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AS THE DEPENDANT VARIABLE.....	113
FIGURE FOUR: LIST OF STUDENT ALIASES, BY SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP LEVEL AND TEACHER CLASSIFIED SKILL LEVEL.....	123

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In what cannot be considered breaking news, many school districts that serve low-income urban and rural areas throughout the United States are experiencing a dropout epidemic. Graduation rates in large urban districts such as Memphis, Oakland, Chicago, Milwaukee and Cleveland have consistently hovered around or below fifty percent despite the implementation of standards based legislation such as No Child Left Behind (Greene 2001). Rates of non-graduation in many isolated, rural districts have also been historically higher than national averages (Sherman 1992). Considering that a number of students in high-dropout districts leave school before their freshmen year of high school, the actual graduation rates for these cities may be even lower than reported (Hauser et al 2004).

Academic engagement is the most reliable predictor of eventual graduation (Connell et al 1995, Kamins and Dweck 1999, DeBruyn 2003, National Research Council 2003). Students who exhibit academic engagement - behaviors such as regularly attending school, passing courses and positive behavior are more likely to graduate. Recent research “on-track” research from the Chicago and Philadelphia school districts have demonstrated that number of credits earned and attendance rates are more predictive of graduation than standardized test scores or student background (Allensworth and Easton 2005, Balfanz et al 2007).

However, examination of these behaviors alone does not get us much closer to making sense of high school dropout, as these behaviors are an output of student motivation. Psychological motivation and corresponding behavior has been shown to

correlate to dropout independent of academic achievement (Wehlage and Rutter 1986, Rumberger 1995, Rumberger and Larson 1998). Therefore, a pertinent research question becomes “what motivates students to become academically engaged in high school?”

This project addresses the question of student motivation by introducing the concept of school membership. While there has been a large amount of attention given to the effects of academic engagement – namely, academic achievement, and correlates of academic engagement such as interactive pedagogy and high academic standards, there has been an assumption within previous research that a particular teaching style or school reform policy “naturally” leads to greater engagement, or simply enhances the chances of academic engagement. This ignores the individual level psychological processes that mediate the link between the social and structural environment of the school and academic engagement. Ignoring these processes leads to a top down approach to comprehensive school reform which does not adequately focus on changing the social and physical environment that students face within school.

In order to further examine the links between academic environment and academic engagement, the following study utilizes a diverse theoretical base incorporating educational policy, ecological theory and social psychological theory. It is from this diverse knowledge base that I introduce the concept of *school membership* as a product of student’s social and physical environment, and a direct causal factor of academic engagement.

School membership is defined as the possession of social bonds with a social network of school members, through which a highly salient self-identity and high levels of commitment as a member of the school are internalized. Possession of school membership is theorized as a factor in academic engagement – actions on the part of the student in line with a “student” identity, such as school attendance, lack of behavioral problems, and high amounts of effort on schoolwork. School membership is thus a product of a student’s social and physical environment both inside and outside of school. While the school is not the only environment in which school membership is either developed or inhibited, it is certainly a critical social agent in this regard, particularly for students who may not experience a social or physical environment outside of school that is conducive to school membership formation.

Comprehensive school reform with a focus on school membership will allow researchers and school officials to bridge gaps between divergent viewpoints and more effectively target comprehensive school reform at the high school level towards building skills necessary for college or the workplace and creating an internalized notion of school membership. It is from this sense of school membership that lasting academic engagement and eventual high school completion will result.

In order to empirically examine the salience of school membership, I undertook a yearlong, ethnographic case study of within a high school in a high poverty urban school district. Most of these students were in the ninth grade, and were recruited to participate in this study due to their very high or very low motivation levels. The high school that these students attended has implemented several structural reforms based in part around the idea of engendering student

engagement, and school membership. While the non-graduation rate of this school's district was alarmingly high, this school's dropout rate over its first four years was well below the district average, despite serving a highly disadvantaged student body. In order to provide some initial generalizable support for my qualitative findings, I also created a set of multilevel quantitative models using nationally representative survey data that examined the relationship between academic environment, school membership, and academic engagement.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

Before examining the utility or effects of school membership, the following four chapters will elaborate the theoretical bases and processes of school membership by answering the following questions:

- 1) What type of academic environment engenders a sense of school membership?**
- 2) How can ecological theory, identity theory and education policy be combined in a manner that mediates the links between academic environment, school membership, and academic engagement?**
- 3) What is the place of school membership within the existing literature on academic engagement?**
- 4) At what point in the student's high school experience is engendering school membership most crucial?**
- 5) For whom is school membership most crucial?**

In order to answer the first question, chapter two examines the theoretical basis of school membership: ecological theory. This theory posits that human development is driven by complex interactions between the individual and his or her physical and social environment. Chapter two then examines the three structural or

social factors which are theorized to create an environment in which school membership may be fostered: high amounts of student-teacher interaction, high academic expectations, and school structure.

Chapter three examines the concept of school membership in greater detail, including an overview of identity theory, the social psychological theory upon which school membership is based, which posits that the self is made up of a hierarchy of identities which are enacted based upon their salience and the external cues of a given social situation. This chapter also elaborates upon the links between ecological theory and identity theory.

Chapter four examines the concept of academic engagement, and the well documented links between academic engagement and educational attainment. This chapter also elaborates upon the differences between the psychological state of school membership and the actions which constitute academic engagement. While chapters two through four explain the “what” and “why” of school membership, chapter five explains the “when”. Specifically, this chapter examines the importance of the ninth grade, the transition year to high school as a time in the student’s academic career where school membership most vital. In addition, chapter five examines the “who”; as in, for whom is school membership most critical?

While chapters two through five introduce school membership theory and explain its place within the process of academic engagement, chapters six through nine outline the methodology of this dissertation. Chapter six contains a brief description of my research questions, study limitations and study scope. Chapter seven introduces the Talent Development High School Model and examines its

structural features, goals, and place within the comprehensive school reform movement. This chapter also outlines why this school model creates an ideal setting in which to examine school membership.

Chapter eight outlines the ethnographic qualitative methods that were used in my yearlong study of students within a disadvantaged urban school using the Talent Development model. This chapter provides a more in-depth look at both the site of this study and the study's participants. Chapter nine examines my quantitative models and methods, including the hierarchical linear modeling techniques used to supplement my qualitative findings. These models utilized data from the Educational Longitudinal Survey of 2002, a nationally representative survey from the National Center for Education Statistics. This survey provided several questions that helped me approximate the social and physical environment of schools, as well as the individual characteristics of school membership and academic engagement.

This study comes to fruition in chapters ten and eleven, which provide results from the qualitative and quantitative phases of the research, respectively. Chapter ten is an in depth examination of students who possess or lack school membership. After briefly introducing these students, and discussing the social atmosphere of the school in general, I compared these two groups of students in four ways: their self-professed identities, their perceptions of themselves, their perceptions of their in-school social and physical environment, and their perceptions of their out of school environment, "the streets". In all four cases, students' internal perceptions were determined both through students' words, as well as their actions as observed by myself and these students' teachers.

Chapter eleven contains the quantitative results of this dissertation. The primary focus of this chapter is two sets of hierarchical linear models. The first model examined the strength and direction of the effects of two aspects of students' social and physical academic environment: student-teacher interaction and school structure, on school membership levels. The second group of hierarchical linear models included a stepwise examination academic engagement. The model included student-teacher interaction and school structure as independent variables within the first step. In the full model, school membership was also included as an independent variable.

Chapter twelve concludes this dissertation by summarizing the findings of this research and relating these findings to the broader contexts of identity theory research and educational policy in particular. The implications of this study toward comprehensive school reform practices, as well as practical steps that should be taken in terms of additional school membership research are also discussed.

Above all, this dissertation aims to illuminate the importance of including social-psychological viewpoints in the ongoing debate over the most effective forms of comprehensive school reform for disadvantaged high schools. This work also aims to demonstrate the utility of comprehensive school reform at the secondary level, as it is not too late to engender academic engagement in high school students, as some practitioners would believe. At the core of valuing social-psychological viewpoints within comprehensive school reform is a belief that a solely "top down" model of comprehensive school reform does not adequately take students' everyday social milieu into account. Without an appreciation of the social and physical environment

students experience on a daily basis, agents of comprehensive school reform will have a difficult, if not impossible task in creating academic engagement within an environment where academic engagement has traditionally been the exception rather than the rule.

CHAPTER TWO: THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

ECOLOGICAL THEORY AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY

An increasing body of educational and psychological literature has utilized the ecological perspective, a perspective that “posits that human development is driven by proximal processes, increasingly complex interactions between the individual and the environment” (Brenner and Mistry 2007, p. 140). Putting ecological theory within the context of high school dropout and disengagement, it posits that the proximal processes of a school’s social and structural environment may be able to offset some of the negative effects of “disadvantaged and disruptive environments” a student has experienced outside of school, or in previous schools he or she has attended (Bronfenbrenner 1979, Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998, Swick and Williams 2006).

Ecological theory is also an integral part of developmental behavioral science, a relatively recent construct of developmental psychology. Developmental behavioral science recognizes that the various social constructs the individual is embedded in such as families, peer groups, schools and communities shape the individual’s behavior. This paradigm was developed in part as a response to the critique of developmental psychology that social contexts and social problems such as poverty and racism are ignored in research (House and Mortimer 1990, Jessor 1993, Rumberger 2004). The role of environment may be direct, such as the individual reacting to a perceived lack of resources, or indirect, such as a stigma or negative self-outlook as a result of a lack of resources. Several early studies linking student

self-esteem and educational environment incorporated an ecological perspective (Blyth et al 1978, Simmons and Blyth 1987).

When applied to educational policy, ecological theory and developmental behavioral science examine the interaction of the student's personal characteristics and the school's social and structural environment in creating the student's self-identity. Ecological theory posits that the student's social and structural school environment has the capacity to help drive the development or maintenance of a self-identity that could best be described as a pro-school or salient "student" identity. In other words, school membership. With these identities come norms and goals that drive behavior. Thus, the development of these identities, particularly within students whose environments outside of school do not encourage "student" identity formation or behavior, is key in creating academic engagement and improved academic achievement among disengaged students, especially those students within disadvantaged schools with a substantial non-graduation rate.

From the theoretical foundation of ecological theory, this chapter begins the synthesis of social-psychological theory and educational policy by examining the potential of several widely implemented teaching practices and structural aspects of school reform towards creating an academic environment conducive to the formation of school membership. These teaching methods and reforms can be put into three categories: high amounts of student-teacher interaction, high academic expectations, and structural organization.

STUDENT-TEACHER INTERACTION

Educational theorists have created volumes examining the effects of consistent, positive interaction between students and teachers within and outside of the classroom, demonstrating that increased levels of student-teacher interaction are related to behaviors consistent with academic engagement (Wang et al 1993, Ball 2000, Croninger and Lee 2001, Boccanfuso and Dance forthcoming). Interactive pedagogy emphasizing the active construction of knowledge and a caring environment has been characterized by these studies as a best practice. These teaching methods have been suggested to lead to academic engagement, academic achievement and an improved academic self-evaluation.

The Positive Effects of Student-Teacher Interaction

Studies have indicated that high levels of student-teacher interaction are correlated with a wide range of positive student outcomes. In several of her studies, Valerie Lee has concluded that social capital between students and teachers reduced the risk of dropping out, especially among students at risk of dropout (Croninger and Lee 2001). Psychological literature has also confirmed that academic engagement is caused in part by student perceptions of the relationships with students and teachers at school. Teachers that encourage self efficacy and instill a sense of feeling cared for in the student are particularly beneficial to students who may feel a sense of helplessness or isolation as a result of their social or structural environment

(Goodenow 1993, Wentzel 1999).¹ In addition, case studies have shown that students judge interactive pedagogical styles to be more effective than direct instruction (Wang et al 1993, Rose 1995, Ball 2000, Howard 2003).

Interactive pedagogy also holds benefits for teachers. Not only does it help prevent teacher burnout, but a more interactive, learner-centered approach also allows the teacher to understand the social and cultural milieu of their students, creating more effective dialogue between the student and teacher (Waxman and Padron 1995). In addition, Darder found that teachers who increased interaction with their students were more likely to recognize and address the academic and social needs of their students (Darder 1993). A greater understanding of the student is likely to facilitate social bonding within the classroom. Constructivist and caring pedagogies are two pedagogical avenues that have been characterized as both effective and interactive.

Constructivist Pedagogy

Educational theorists such as Paulo Friere have condemned the “banking” concept of teaching where the teacher is the distributor and the child is the recipient of knowledge. Friere instead characterized a dialogical approach; interactive, problem-posing education that allows students to become active learners, incorporate their experiences into a dialogical learning process, and critically examine their environments, as a more effective, moral way to teach disadvantaged youth (Friere 1970). Following Friere’s lead, Comer demonstrated that an approach that develops the student cognitively and emotionally through curriculum which the student can

¹ Self efficacy is a psychological term defined as the feeling that one is a causal agent on their surrounding environment.

internalize and relate to their life is effective in creating academic engagement (Comer and Maholmes 1999).

The idea of experience and interaction producing knowledge is related to John Dewey's works on constructivist education (Dewey 1907, Thornton 2001, Vanderstraeten 2002). Constructivist pedagogy emphasizes a student-centered approach and "authentic projects" that encourage students to find solutions which are not readily apparent, explain concepts, justify their reasoning, seek explanations and provide extended answers. This model encourages student-teacher interaction through high standards and rigorous investigation of knowledge by student and teacher (Lee 2003, Gutstein 2003).

Pedagogy of Care

While constructivist pedagogy relies on interaction for skill building, pedagogy of care, put forth by Nel Noddings (1984, 1995, 2002 and 2005) relies on interaction between student and teacher to instill a sense of morality and being cared for within the student. Caring pedagogy creates a home-like environment where there is a sense of both familial obligation and reciprocal interaction between classroom members. Students and teachers are open and honest about their life experiences, as a family member or friend would be to another. Through caring pedagogy, teachers are more able to relate lessons to their students' lives, as they are more familiar with the intersection of student lives with constructs such as race, class, and gender.

Noddings also examines a classroom structure conducive to care. Noddings emphasizes an interdisciplinary, holistic curriculum through which personal,

academic, moral and emotional growth is emphasized, as opposed to condensing measures of knowledge gained to standardized tests. Noddings also characterizes smaller class size and teachers remaining with the same students over the course of two or three years as beneficial to the student. This allows for increased student-teacher interaction which facilitates an ethic of care within the classroom, as it allows the teacher to cultivate student interests through steering curriculum towards these interests. Noddings also recommends that students study fewer topics in greater depth, creating more attachment to the material and a less abstract sense of knowledge (Noddings 1984, 1988, 1995, 2002, 2005, Stanford 1997, Goldstein 1998).²

Educational researchers have examined the benefits of feeling cared for in the form of academic engagement and a feeling of belonging within school.³ Wang characterized frequent social (as opposed to academic) interactions between teachers and students as affecting academic gains and fewer incidences of disruptive behavior through praise and extensive feedback (Wang et al 1993). Lee's works suggest that increased student social capital is facilitated in part by student belief that teachers actively guide and support their efforts (Lee and Croninger 2001, Croninger and Lee 2001). Qualitative studies have also suggested that students who feel that their teachers are interested in their progress and believe in them are more likely to identify themselves foremost as a student (Wehlage et al 1989, Bryk et al 1993, Goldstein 1998, Wentzel 1998, 1999, Howard 2001, 2002).

² Noddings intends this pedagogy for all classrooms, as she believes this style of instruction will create more well-rounded students. She does not distinguish between classrooms in advantaged or disadvantaged areas.

³ Wentzel has documented the mitigating effects of positive student-teacher interactions where peer or family support is not strong (Wentzel 1998).

Developmental psychological studies have also examined the effects of caring pedagogy utilizing the concept of “stage-environment” fit - the fit between the needs of the student (acceptance, autonomy and self-efficacy) and the environment the student resides in.⁴ Feelings of caring, acceptance and support by school members are correlates of school fit. These feelings of school fit, in turn, have been correlated with academic engagement, academic achievement, feelings of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control (Ryan and Deci 1991, Roeser and Eccles 2000, Zimmerman et al 2006).⁵

Interactive Pedagogy and School Membership

Increased student-teacher interaction creates a high amount of social bonding between teacher and student, and among students. The constructivist learning process encourages social bonding between student and teacher as the role of the student and the counter-role of the teacher necessitate constant interplay. By emphasizing “liberation” and valuing personal experiences within the classroom, teachers demonstrate a sense of care, commitment and shared values to the student. Caring pedagogy also creates a clear sense of roles and obligations between teachers and students, as well as a sense that teachers and students have invested something of themselves in educating each other. An emphasis on care also creates sets a strong

⁴ Self-efficacy is defined as the belief of an individual that they are a causal agent in their environment.

⁵ Internal locus of control is defined as the belief that factors which affect one’s life are within personal control. This is correlated with self-esteem and academic goal orientation (Wehlage 1989, Wentzel 1998).

example of appropriate behavior and mindsets (known as an identity standard in identity theory) within the classroom, complimenting bonding.⁶

High teacher standards are implied through constructivist pedagogy, as higher-order thinking skills are necessary within most college classrooms or skill oriented occupations. Constructivist pedagogy also prepares students for adult social roles by emphasizing social and academic responsibility through being more active participants in curriculum development (Waxman and Padron 1995). At the same time, the role of the school--creating knowledge that is contextual--, allows the school to become legitimate source of knowledge in the eyes of the student as the knowledge can be applied to everyday life. A key pre-requisite to social bonding and membership is the perceived legitimacy of the social organization one becomes a member of.

Caring pedagogy also effects school membership positively by enhancing self-esteem. According to identity theorists, self-esteem is a powerful motivating factor in enacting a particular self-identity. If the student gains self-esteem from classroom interactions that teachers deem positive, the student is more likely to enact a student identity and interact in the classroom in a way that elicits praise from teachers. Research has demonstrated that higher self-esteem leads to an increased sense of belonging to school (Seidman et al 1994, Ma 2003).

⁶ I will come back to identity theory and its integral position within my definition of school membership later in this piece.

HIGH ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS

A second environmental factor that aids in creating an internalized sense of school membership is high expectations of students from their teachers. An impressive amount of research has indicated that students tend to become academically engaged and feel like a member of their school when they perceive that their teachers have high expectations in terms of immediate school achievement and future educational attainment.

On the opposite side, research has demonstrated that low academic expectations create academic disengagement. Teachers that view the intelligence levels of their students as low and innate are less likely to seek innovative strategies to aid low-performing students, as they are likely to feel that the student's skill level is out of their control (Hallinan 1994, Oakes and Wells 1997, Hyland 2006, Watanabe 2006, Brenner and Mistry 2007). Teachers that believe that intelligence is a fixed entity also tend not to organize their classrooms around different types of intelligence (Rubin 2003, Lotan 2006, Brown and Medway 2007).⁷ This disproportionately affects students from racial minorities or low-income families who are most likely to be within the lowest tracks, in part due to a lack of the dominant cultural capital teachers often reward (Delpit 1996, Oakes and Wells 1997, Nelson 2001, Howard 2001, Crozier 2005, Brenner and Mistry 2007).

Most of the research on academic expectations examines expectations from an institutional level through the practice of academic tracking. While explicit academic tracking (placing students entirely in vocational or college track courses based upon

⁷ Life experience, differing viewpoints, "traditional" academic ability all can be construed as knowledge.

perceived academic ability) is no longer widely used in public schools, it has been replaced by the offering of divergent course levels, where students are enrolled in honors, regular, or remedial classes on a subject by subject basis and no student is automatically placed into any class level (Hallinan 1994, Watanabe 2006). However, student choice in the level of classes they enroll in is still constrained for a variety of reasons, including teacher expectations which may subtly or overtly indicate to students what level courses are “appropriate” for the student.

Research has demonstrated that being enrolled in non-college track classes creates academic disengagement. Teacher evaluations of student ability and the types of knowledge subsequently disseminated create a self-fulfilling prophecy where students perceive their own abilities to be consistent with the types of instruction they receive. Student aspirations, self-esteem, classroom participation and consequently academic engagement may be influenced by these expectations (Oakes 1985, Lee and Bryk 1989, 1993, Cohen 1994, Hyland 2006, Watanabe 2006, Rubie-Davies and Hamilton 2006, Hallam and Ireson 2007). Self-fulfilling prophecies and lower self-esteem are not just the result of lower expectations by teachers, but also a result of the connotations certain classes carry as high or low track courses. Labeling as a result of being enrolled in a low track class results in being classified as a slow learner or unmotivated (Boykin 2000, Hallam 2002, Crozier 2005, Jussim and Harber 2005).

The materials taught within lower level classes add another dimension of disadvantage. Students in non-academic tracks may find it difficult to advance in course level due to the discrepancies between what is taught within different class levels. Remedial classes cover less material than higher level classes in terms of

depth and breadth. In addition, classes may be divided into college and vocational levels, precluding vocational level students from learning higher order skills necessary to advance through higher education (Oakes 1985, Page 1987, Nelson 2001, Rubin 2006).⁸. Students within lower track classes also tend to feel that materials presented to them are not appropriate for their skill level, are useless, and are not easily contextualized within their lives, inhibiting engagement (Oakes 1985, Hallam and Ireson 2007).

In contrast to the experiences of low track students, students who are within higher tracked, or “gifted” classes tend to have higher academic self-esteem, are more academically engaged and report higher academic aspirations. Students within these classrooms are also more likely to report interactive teaching methods and more likely to describe their teachers as competent, caring and effective (Oakes 1985, Rumberger 1995, Muller 1999, Hallam and Ireson 2004, Benner and Mistry 2007, Brown and Medway 2007).

The works of Lee and Bryk also demonstrate that high levels of commitment and involvement by teachers and a strong, constrained choice of curriculum for all students promote a more equitable distribution of achievement across race, class, and academic background of students (Bryk et al 1984, Lee and Bryk 1988, 1989). Case studies and quantitative examinations of detracked schools demonstrate that students of roughly equal ability levels gain more knowledge when placed in academic tracks rather than lower tracks. In addition, economically and academically advantaged students in these classrooms are able to expand their critical thinking skills through experiencing the viewpoints of less privileged students while maintaining similar test

⁸ Oakes (1985) terms this the “hidden curriculum”.

scores in core subjects (Oakes and Wells 1997, Weintraub 1997, Rothenberg et al 1998, Hyland 2006, Hyland 2006, Rubin 2006, Brown and Medway 2007).

High Academic Expectations and School Membership

Students who perceive their teachers to have high expectations of them are likely to develop an internalized sense of school membership for several reasons. As with interactive pedagogy, teachers who hold students to high academic and behavioral standards demonstrate a commitment to the student, as maintaining high standards requires effort on the part of the teacher. This commitment is a critical requisite of social bonding between students and teachers. In addition, by enforcing high academic standards, teachers create a student identity standard for their classroom. Students within the class gain a clear sense of what is expected of them, and have a clear sense that behavior in line with this standard will be rewarded. Finally, students who perceive that teachers are holding them to high academic standards will be more likely to regard the school as a legitimate institution that will provide tangible social rewards in return for their efforts.

SCHOOL STRUCTURE

While high levels of student-teacher interaction and high academic expectations entail accumulations of social interactions, school structure - the third condition that facilitates an environment conducive to the internalization of school membership consists of several meso and macro-level within school factors. These factors include small school and class size, school safety, low teacher turnover, a

neat, organized school environment and strong leadership. All of these factors have been cited as correlates of “effective schools” serving low income urban students (Weber 1971, Wehlage et al 1989, Taylor 1990, Rossi and Stringfield 1995, Boykin 1996, Lee et al 1997, Serpell 1999, Cole-Henderson 2000, Corbett and Wilson 2000, 2001, Weiss 2001, Hanushek 2001, Howard 2003). These factors are not only correlates of “effective schools” but are also environmental factors that encourage school membership, which in turn helps create “effective schools”. A safe, orderly school environment can affect levels of reciprocity, or perceived commitment between students and school staff. If there is no perceived reciprocity on the part of the school evidenced by an organized structural environment and availability of teachers or materials, students will be less likely to form social bonds with school members.

School Size, Class Size, Overcrowding and Membership

Sociological studies indicate that school size positively influences dropout rates through creating larger classes, a less personal school environment and inhibiting mentoring or opportunities for academic engagement (Bryk and Thum 1989, Rumberger and Thomas 2000). The negative effects of large school size seem to be most pronounced within schools that serve a predominantly impoverished population (Rumberger 1995). Lee and Loeb found a negative relationship between school size and teachers’ willingness to take responsibility for their students’ learning in elementary schools (Lee and Loeb 2000). The research of Lee and Smith uncovered school size effects on both the levels and equitable distribution of

academic achievement, as well as a relationship between school size and a less differentiated curriculum (Lee and Smith 1995, Ready et al 2004).

Larger schools also tend to have large student-teacher ratios. Multiple studies conclusively demonstrated that increased class size has a significant positive relationship with dropout rates and a negative relation with knowledge gain even after several contextual factors that might affect dropout rates are controlled for (Rumberger 1995, McNeal 1997, Krueger 1999, Rumberger and Thomas 2000, Rumberger 2004).⁹

“Ideal” school size in terms of cultivating school membership and academic engagement may not necessarily be extremely large or small, but somewhere in between. Ready and colleagues’ meta-analysis of school size studies explained that while larger schools seem to inhibit academic engagement, very small schools also have problems in terms of students “living down” bad reputations, which consequently prevents social bonding between students and teachers. Teacher turnover is also a more disruptive occurrence for smaller schools, as there are fewer staff members available to “pick up the slack” or help a new teacher adjust to the position (Ingersoll and Rossi 1995, Ready et al 2004).

Overcrowding may be a more significant correlate of disengagement than school size. By the NCES definition, 22% of U.S. schools were overcrowded as of 1999 (NCES 2000, Ready et al 2004).¹⁰ The limited studies that exist indicate that

⁹ The relationship between class size and student achievement has been characterized in economic studies as significant and positive, significant and negative, non-linear, or simply insignificant (Hanushek 2001, Hanushek and Somers 2001).

¹⁰ Both qualitative and quantitative studies have examined this, defining overcrowding through mathematic formulas (percentage above “capacity”, however capacity is defined), or through qualitative interview and survey research. The NCES defines schools with an enrollment more than six percent over the intended capacity of the school as overcrowded.

achievement is lower in overcrowded schools with a majority low-income student body in comparison to non-overcrowded, low income schools. Students experience frequent distractions due to being placed in rooms not originally intended for classroom learning (gymnasiums, cafeterias, and even utility closets). Overcrowded schools are also more likely to report inadequate safety, heating, electrical, air conditioning, and other infrastructure problems, creating a less physically and emotionally healthy environment for the student. Overcrowding has psychological effects as well, contributing to a sense of anonymity or alienation within school. Overcrowding also inhibits student belief in the school as a legitimate institution with the means and ability to aid the student in fulfilling their academic or occupational goals (Kozol 1990, Rose 1995, Rivera-Batiz and Marti 1995, Rivera-Batiz 1995, NCES 2000, Ready et al 2004).

School Safety and School Membership

School safety is another prerequisite of academic engagement and school membership (McPartland et al 1998, Cole-Henderson 2000, Neild et al 2002). Neild found that among ninth grade students in Philadelphia, characterizing school as unsafe or responding that crime and student misbehavior was a problem within their school were significantly related to grade retention and eventual high school dropout (Neild et al 2002).

Students are also less likely to view school as a support system, recognize school rules as legitimate, or create trusting relationships with representatives of a school if a school does not seem to have the capacity to control student behavior

(Heyns 1986, Fine 1991, Delpit 1996, Cole-Henderson 2000, Neild et al 2002, Kitsantas et al 2004, Garcia-Reed et al 2005, Whitlock 2006, Chen 2007). The school is perceived as legitimate when the rules the school has set forth are enforced uniformly, the school is an environment where it is possible to learn, and the efforts of students are rewarded by knowledge gain and academic progress in line with the mission of the school. Thus, school safety is paramount in creating legitimacy. As one student interviewed by Corbett and Wilson (2000) said in response to a decrease in safety problems in her school “It’s like a real school now” (McPartland et al 1998, Corbett and Wilson 2000, 2001, Kitsantas et al 2004, Garcia-Reed et al 2005, Whitlock 2006, Chen 2007).

Teacher Turnover and School Membership

School structure not only includes the school’s physical organization, but also its social organization, which is created by both students and school staff. Therefore, teacher skill levels and continuity, characterized by low rates of emergency certified teachers, low teacher turnover rates, and low rates of students switching classrooms are essential in creating an environment conducive to school membership (Cole-Henderson 2000, Weiss 2001, Neild 2002(a), 2002(b), Howard 2003).

Highly qualified teachers are more likely to leave districts with high levels of student mobility, poor or unsafe conditions and funding uncertainty for more lucrative jobs. Districts with high teacher turnover rates are also more likely to have teachers switch classes mid-year due to uncertainty about enrollment, personnel or resources

(Bryk and Thum 1989, DeLany 1991, Oakes and Guiton 1995, Kerbow 1996, Pribesh and Downey 1999, Cole-Henderson 2000, Weiss 2001, Ruby 2002).

A recent study by Goldhaber using statewide data for North Carolina public schools demonstrated that the state's most disadvantaged students were the least likely to have access to a highly qualified teacher (Goldhaber et al 2007). Districts with the highest concentrations of disadvantaged students often have a lower than average percentage of certified or highly qualified teachers to begin with, as many certified teachers within impoverished districts take these jobs as a fall back option. Teachers who do take positions within these schools as a fall back option tend to have a negative attitude towards their students, which has been correlated with lower teacher expectations, more reported discipline problems and academic underachievement (Bruno and Doscher 1981, Knapp 1995, Gay 2000, Howard 2003).

Students who are taught by certified teachers and have continuity within the classroom have a more successful learning experience and are more likely to be assigned to classes that meet their educational needs (Oakes and Guiton 1995). Students are more likely to create the social bonds necessary for school membership or perceive the school as a legitimate institution if teachers are more experienced in interacting with students and if students know from day to day who will be teaching them (Noddings 1995, 2002, Stanford 1997).

Classroom Materials, Cleanliness and School Membership

In line with developmental behavioral theory, the availability of classroom materials and the organization of the classroom are important ecological factors that

engender school membership and academic engagement. Weiss found that ninth grade students in Philadelphia public schools who had at least three experiences of “turbulence”-- incidences where students changed teachers, classrooms, or had insufficient books or desks within a class during the school year were negatively related to first semester marks when controlling for prior grades. Over forty-six percent of students sampled experienced three or more “turbulent” events in ninth grade (Weiss 2001).

Students who are taught within disorganized classrooms, classrooms and schools in disrepair, or classrooms with insufficient materials will have a more difficult time perceiving the school structure as legitimate or effective. Classrooms that are messy, unsafe, or uncomfortable are also less likely to produce students who are able to concentrate during class time, another barrier to school membership. Also, a lack of materials increases the chances that classroom time will be spent on non-educational tasks, such as dividing scarce resources among students, leaving less time for interaction which cultivates social bonding. In this way, clean, organized facilities are an extension of high expectations within the classroom (McPartland et al 1998, Corbett and Wilson 2000). Clean, organized classrooms may also contribute to teacher continuity, as schools with inadequate facilities are less likely to be desirable to teachers and are correlated with teacher resignations or transfers (Howard 2003).

Strong Leadership and School Membership

Strong leadership is a final aspect of school structure critical to engendering membership among students of disadvantaged schools. Strong leadership has

significant effects on membership and engagement through the enforcement of school policies as well as the creation of a positive, fulfilling workplace for staff (Purkey and Smith 1982, Taylor 1990, Stringfield and Slavin 1994, Boykin 1996, Serpell 1999, Cole-Henderson 2000). School mission statements in effective high-poverty, urban schools generally include putting the burden of student achievement on the school and setting high expectations for students (Lee et al 1991, Cole-Henderson 2000).

Strong leaders also help in the creation of a fair disciplinary climate. Students who view the disciplinary climate of a school as both fair and effective will be more likely to regard the institution as legitimate (Fine 1991). Lee has documented that an environment where discipline perceived as strong and fair by students is related to more equitable and high distribution of achievement (Lee and Bryk 1989, Lee and Croninger 2001, Croninger and Lee 2001).

Strong leadership also promotes teacher autonomy and efficacy. Allowing teacher autonomy in what is taught and how it is taught increases the likelihood that teachers will utilize interactive pedagogies, collaborate with colleagues to create effective teaching methods and tailor their lessons to the specific academic and social needs of students (Bryk et al 1993, Darder 1993, Waxman and Padron 1995, Howard 2003). Autonomy also promotes self-efficacy, which is correlated with job satisfaction and improvements in teacher perceptions of their pupils' ability.¹¹ Teachers that perceive their students to have high ability levels produce higher

¹¹ Organizational features such as a safe, clean school environment and lower student-teacher ratios are also associated with job satisfaction (Fine 1991, RIT, Inc. 2000, Howard 2003).

expectations of their students (Bryk et al 1989, Lee et al 1991, Cole-Henderson 2000, Howard 2003).¹²

SUMMARY

This chapter examined one of the theoretical bases of school membership: ecological theory. This theory posits that human development is driven by complex interactions between the individual and his or her social and structural environment. Applying this theory to the context of school reform, I posit that the student's social and structural school environment has the capacity to help drive the development of a self-identity with accompanying norms and goals that could best be described as a pro-school, or "student" identity. The development of these identities, particularly within students whose social and physical environments outside of school do not encourage "student" identity formation, is key in creating academic engagement and improved academic achievement among disengaged students, especially those students within disadvantaged schools with a substantial non-graduation rate.

Using the foundation of ecological theory, the remainder of this chapter synthesized social psychological theory and educational policy by examining three general aspects of a school's physical and structural environment which can be transformed through educational policy and interactive teaching methods: high amounts of student-teacher interaction, high academic expectations, and several structural aspects of school: school and class size, school safety, teacher turnover, classroom organization, and effective leadership.

¹² Several components of membership-enhancing school environment overlap with components of what Bryk and Lee would call the "communal organization" of school (Bryk et al 1989, Lee et al 1997).

Although there is a dearth of research that specifically ties specific teaching methods or school reform policies to identity formation, a substantial amount of educational research has indicated that the social environment created by high amounts of student-teacher interaction and high academic expectations have translated to positive academic results, as well as higher amounts of student motivation and effort in school, even within academic environments that had traditionally not been positive.

A structural academic environment characterized by small school size, small class size, school safety, low rates of teacher turnover, clean, well stocked classrooms, and strong, focused leadership has also been related to improved academic achievement. Studies have linked these structural factors to higher rates of grade promotion and high school completion, as well as a sense among students that they hold a stake in their school, and their school is a “legitimate” institution that has their best interests in mind and has the capacity to aid the student in achieving their academic or occupational goals. Now that I have discussed the social and structural factors of academic environment that aid in creating or maintaining school membership, chapter three explains defines and explains the theoretical foundations of school membership.

CHAPTER THREE: THE DEFINITION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP

The preceding chapter examined a wealth of empirical evidence that high amounts of student-teacher interaction, high academic expectations, and various facets of school structure affect student outcomes through creating a social and structural environment that is conducive to the development of school membership. This leads to two questions: what is school membership, and what is school membership's place within the existing body of knowledge on dropout? Group membership is a psychological state, defined as *possessing social bonds with a social network of members of an institution, through which a highly salient identity and high levels of commitment as a member of that institution are internalized*. School membership utilizes identity theory, a social-psychological construct.

Utilizing a construct of school membership that incorporates social psychological constructs allows a look inside the "black box" of the engagement process, with school membership introduced as an internal to the student factor causal in academic engagement which is encouraged or discouraged by the student's in school and out of school social and structural environment. The majority of educational studies examining the effects of academic engagement assume a direct causal path between school environment and academic engagement.¹³ School membership offers a different direction in that the behaviors and commitment that

¹³ My previous research (forthcoming) demonstrated that different students reacted to a given environment in very different ways due to any number of reasons internal or external to school. Given this, it seems illogical to expect environment to have uniform effects on the student. It seems more feasible that the mix of *personal identity* and environment that creates a "student" identity that is more or less likely to be activated on a case by case basis.

comprise academic engagement are considered a separate, visible outcome of the internal motivation of school membership. The following chapter provides an overview of identity theory and explains how it is incorporated into the concept of school membership.

IDENTITY THEORY – OVERVIEW AND RESEARCH

Identity theory, a social psychological theory of self, examines how the human being classifies him or herself in the context of the world around him/her and how this classification relates to subsequent human action. Stryker examines relationships between the individual and larger social structure from a structural symbolic interactionist perspective. Structural symbolic interactionism incorporates three traditional symbolic interactionist assumptions: one cannot explain human behavior without examining the individual's point of view, both social structures and the structure of self are created through social interaction, and reflexivity (responses to how individuals perceive themselves) links micro and macro level interactions.¹⁴ Structural symbolic interaction adds a twist to traditional symbolic interactionism by contextualizing micro level social-psychological processes within existing social structures. By combining these assumptions, structural symbolic interactionism acknowledges human agency, albeit human agency that is constrained not only by social interaction but also by geography – the intersection of social, economic, demographic, and physical location. For example, a structural symbolic interactionist would not examine why an individual rejects a self-identity as a student without

¹⁴ The structure of self refers to one's self-concept, and how one compartmentalizes the several identities, such as student, mother, sister, and employee she must activate on any given day.

examining the individual's economic situation, their physical location and the connotations which accompany that individual's race and gender (Owens 2003, Stryker and Vryan 2003).¹⁵

Defining the Self – Identity Salience and Commitment

Within identity theory, the self is defined and objectified by multiple, interlocking identities and meanings the individual attaches to each identity. The meaning of an identity comes from being a member of a social network (for example, school or family) and an inhabitant of a role within this network. Along with each role within a group comes an identity standard – an ideal or standard of behavior and attitudes that the role occupant is expected to fulfill. The identity standard is related to a specific role identity and is constructed by the social network that fits with that identity.

Stryker identifies the self as having a hierarchy of identities. Placement of an identity within this hierarchy is based on the salience of the identity and the individual's commitment to an identity's role relations. The higher the place a particular identity occupies within this hierarchy, the more likely that this identity will be activated, meaning that the individual gives primacy to the identity and the norms and goals that go along with it (Stryker 1966, Stryker 1980, Gecas and Burke 1995, Stryker and Burke 2000, Owens 2003, Stryker and Vryan 2003).

Identity salience refers to probability that a particular identity will be activated by an individual in a given social situation. The more salient the identity, the more

¹⁵ A named and structured society refers to entities such as school, government and church, as well as social groups such as friends, family and co-workers, and other classifying structures such as race and gender.

likely it will be activated. Taking a cue from cognitive social psychology, identity theorists view identities as internally stored information and meanings which act as a lens through which the individual's experiences are interpreted. The enacted identity is defined by the situation around the individual. As such, different identities are sensitive to different cues for behavior. Highly salient identities are sensitive to cues that occur more often within the individual's experience. Stryker theorizes that individuals will actively seek opportunities to enact identities that are the most salient, meaning that these identities don't solely become activated as a reaction to a situation, but also as a way to change a given situation through the identity's activation (Stryker 1980, Stryker and Serpe 1994, Stryker and Burke 2000, Owens 2003).

Empirical studies utilizing identity theory have generally supported the concept of identity salience. Salient identities as a religious person, a blood donor, and a mother all successfully predicted higher instances of individual activating those identities in separate studies (Stryker and Serpe 1982, Callero 1985, Nuttbrock and Freudiger 1991). In addition, Stryker and Serpe's study of first year college students found that these students tended to decorate their rooms similarly to how they did at home, at least in part because it allowed them to be reminded of their identity (Stryker and Serpe 1987). This is a perfect example of the agentive nature of highly salient identities.

This brings up the question of how an identity becomes highly salient in the first place. Individuals who develop high levels of commitment to other individuals in their social network via their role identity experience cues to enact this identity

more often as it becomes highly salient. Commitment has two aspects, interactional and affective commitment. Interactional commitment refers to the number and scope of interactions the individual has by virtue of their participation in a social network. Affective commitment refers to the emotional impact others within the social group have upon the individual. An individual may be more likely to enact an identity (willingly or not) if they have either a large number of ties to several members of a social group, or have very strong ties to one or more members within a social group.

Burke and Reitzes' study of college students confirmed that higher levels of commitment within an identity were related to closer ties between that identity and behavior geared toward fulfilling that identity's identity standard (Stryker 1980, Burke and Reitzes 1991, Stryker and Serpe 1994, Stets and Burke 2000, Owens 2003). Eder's research on adolescent peer culture has focused on the importance of discourse such as self-disclosure and collaborative narratives in the creation of peer groups and peer group hierarchy. While Eder does not speak directly to identity theory, her research supports identity theory's concept of commitment (Eder 1988, Corsaro and Eder 1990).

Research Regarding Behavior within an Identity

It is not only important to understand what makes one identity more likely than another to be activated in a given setting, it is also important to explore the processes that drive actions dictated by an activated identity. In other words, what motivates the behavior of an individual (for example, a student), once a specific

identity (such as a “student” identity) is activated? Furthermore, what motivates highly salient identities to be activated independent of situational cues?

Theorists have examined a multitude of motives for enactment of a salient identity and subsequent action to fulfill the identity standards associated with that identity. Self-verification is the most widely examined cognitive process that drives identity. According to Burke, behavior is motivated by reconciling differences between the perceived meaning of a situation or behavior and the individual’s identity standard within their activated identity and role. Thus, self-verification involves the individual behaving as to maintain consistency with the identity standard of the activated identity. Another theorized motivation is self-esteem stemming from a positive evaluation of oneself in terms of fulfilling an identity standard. An internal locus of control – the belief in the power of personal behavior to affect a particular outcome is also a theorized motivation within identity theory.

Other theorized motivations of identity enactment include self-efficacy – the belief of one’s own capacity to accomplish a given action, and self-discrepancy – the motivation to reduce the discrepancy between one’s “ideal” self and how the individual actually perceives him/herself (Stryker 1980, Burke 1991, Gecas and Burke 1995, Stets and Burke 2000, Collier 2000, Grabowski, Call and Mortimer 2001, Deaux and Martin 2003, Owens 2003). More recently, identity theorists have expanded the examination of the relationship between individual and society to include resources. Resources help to sustain the roles and social networks that create and are created by these persons and interactions (Freese and Burke 1994, Stets and Burke 2000).

Burke examined how identities produce behaviors that express these identities, proposing that identities predict behavior only when the meaning of an identity corresponds to the meaning of a behavior. For example (using Burke's research as related by Stryker), students' self-view as sociable did not predict college plans because there was not a shared meaning between the self-view of sociability (one aspect of "student" identity) and college plans. However, student views of academic responsibility (another aspect of "student" identity) were a strong predictor of college plans, because the self-view of academic responsibility and college plans had a shared meaning (Burke and Reitzes 1981, Stryker and Burke 2000).

Bandura and Mortimer examined the importance of self-efficacy, a motivator for identity enactment, in behaviors in the educational and economic realm. Like Burke, they found that domain-specific measures of self-efficacy are the best predictor of within that same domain, or identity. Bandura demonstrated that academic self-efficacy is positively related to goal setting and academic achievement among middle school and high school students (Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons 1992, Bandura et al 1996). Mortimer's work has demonstrated that economic self-efficacy; the belief in one's ability to procure a high-paying occupation, fostered through personal achievements and social background, fosters academic attainment and achievement in secondary and postsecondary school (Grabowski, Call and Mortimer 2001).

Identity Theory and Adolescent Development

There have been a handful of recent studies that have applied identity theory to adolescent identity development using surveys administered to teenage students. This is a period in adolescence where identities may be most likely to change. McFarland and Pals found that the traits of one's social network (such as that network's prominence within school or number of friends in the same social network) were strong predictors of identity imbalance or identity change. Their findings were consistent with self-efficacy and self-verification theories, as students who considered their social network to be less prominent or missing many of their friends were less likely to derive self-esteem from fulfilling and verifying the identity standard of that group (McFarland and Pals 2005).

Cassidy and Trew's longitudinal examination of adolescents' identity hierarchy also provided support for identity theory, specifically the concepts of interactional commitment, the motivation of self-esteem from fulfilling an identity standard, and the psychological centrality of salient identities (Cassidy and Trew 2001). Despite the recent influx of literature on adolescent identity development, few, if any existing studies apply identity theory to a "student identity", or its potentially positive effects.

Prudence Carter's 2006 qualitative study of disadvantaged African-American and Latino youths also provides great insight into identity formation and salience among disadvantaged minority youths. While Carter does not explicitly test or mention identity theory, the results of her investigation of Ogbu's "acting white" thesis for the academic underachievement of "involuntary" minorities provides many

examples of identity salience and shifting identities. Carter demonstrated that examining one basis of identity formation is insufficient for explaining identity salience within adolescents. Some of her study participants gave primacy to their cultural identity more often, while others consciously acted, dressed, and spoke in ways that put them at risk of being labeled “white”. This label was considered a negative connotation among minority students according to Ogbu. Carter found that instead of this label being a negative connotation to all minority students, some students, identified as “cultural mainstreamers” did not consider this label negative. Other students were not necessarily afraid of being labeled “white” but preferred to act in accordance with African-American or Hispanic cultural norms (Fordham and Ogbu 1986, Carter 2006).

In addition, the concepts of self-verification and self-esteem were evident within Carter’s study through student characterizations of “acting white”, as well as their characterizations of what “acting black” or “acting Latino” entailed, as well as the negative views of black or Latino culture from students who had “assimilated” to other cultures or rejected the notion that “acting black” or “acting Latino” meant underachievement at school (Carter 2006).

Carter’s study also highlighted the importance of self-efficacy and locus of control within disadvantaged minority youths, as 70% of the students interviewed understood the value of education, but felt that themselves and their families faced considerable obstacles to job success despite their best efforts because of their social and economic status (Carter 2006). Because of these obstacles to a sense of self-

efficacy and locus of control, school membership is particularly critical to examine and engender in historically disadvantaged groups.

Integrating Identity Theory and Ecological Theory

Three of the primary factors in identity activation and identity-based behavior are *the role the individual possesses within a given social network, the identity standard for this role, and the level of commitment the individual has to other social network members*. The physical and social environment of the school is critical in creating commitment between school membership, as well as reinforcing the roles of the classroom members and the identity standards for each role. How the individual interprets situational cues is also affected by the individual's environment. Furthermore, the student's structural and social environment is responsible for presence of situational cues in the first place.

SCHOOL LEGITIMACY

The perceived legitimacy of the organization, in this case school, which a social group forms around, should also affect commitment levels to other group members. This incorporates an aspect of the school membership theory of Gary Wehlage, as he found that the student is not likely to form bonds within a social network if the student doesn't believe that network will help him or her fulfill his or her goals. In this case, that goal may be going to college or securing future employment (Wehlage and Rutter 1986, Wehlage et al 1989).

The concept of organization legitimacy, while not an explicit part of identity theory, is not entirely foreign to identity theory as well. Social bonding, a key component of Wehlage's school membership theory, is predicated in part on students' perception of their school's legitimacy. Students with an internalized sense of school membership that Wehlage and colleagues interviewed for their 1989 study felt as though their school would help them reach their goals of employment or postsecondary education.

This concept also links with locus of control, a motivator of identity activation. If students believe that the school fulfills the function of impartially educating students and providing skills desirable to a future employer, they will be more likely to believe that their school performance and their use of the benefits of schooling are under their control. Conversely, if they feel that their school is not legitimate, either in the sense that students are treated differently within the school, or that the school does not provide the necessary knowledge for the student to achieve their goals, they are less likely to feel that fulfillment of their goal is in their control (Hirschi 1969, Wehlage et al 1989).

HOW IS SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP CREATED?

The links between a school's social and structural environment, school membership, and academic engagement can be explained using several key tenets of identity theory. A school with an environment conducive to the formation of school membership encourages high levels of interactive and affective commitment between school members. This commitment serves as the starting point for identity salience.

In addition, the daily experiences of the student within this environment contains multiple cues for the activation of a “student” identity present, making the activation of a “student” identity increasingly likely as this identity becomes more salient.

Both the structure of school and its agents (teachers and administrators) have the ability to cultivate commitment among students and display cues for the activation of a “student” identity. Members of the social network with a counter-role to the role of student (e.g., teachers and staff) can accomplish these goals through behaving according to the perceived expectations of their positions, whether this entails effective instructional methods or teachers and administrators taking time to encourage and converse with, or set high standards for students. This also plays into the concept of school legitimacy, as teachers and schools that conform to students’ needs and expectations encourage student belief that their school will be able to help them achieve their goals.

Structural aspects of school environment such as small class size, which encourages student-teacher interaction or a clean, orderly physical plant may also engender a sense of the school’s legitimacy in the eyes of the student. A school’s structural environment may also provide cues for the activation of or increasing salience of a “student” identity. For example, one school in Cole-Henderson’s study of schools that successfully served high-poverty urban districts had a program in which many students were actively involved in maintaining the school’s grounds. This in turn helped to create a sense of community and shared goals among the student body (Cole-Henderson 2001).

Once high levels of commitment are created, and a “student” identity has become increasingly salient, the creation of an identity standard-- a socially constructed concept of the “ideal” student identity, against which the student with school membership can then use to compare his actions within his or her “student” identity--, should encourage and help sustain a sense of school membership. This may be done through teachers or administrators creating strong norms of expected behavior for the “student” role and providing incentives for students to enact and fulfill the norms and expectations of this role (good grades or praise from other class members, for example). Interactive, group based activities should also help create and sustain an identity standard, as these activities encourage teamwork towards a shared goal, as well as sustain or further encourage affective commitment between class members.

SUMMARY

In the main, this chapter both provided a definition of school membership and examined the psychological theory upon which school membership is built. School membership is defined as possessing social bonds with the social network of school members, through which a highly salient identity and high levels of commitment as a member of that institution are internalized. This concept was primarily created within the framework of identity theory.

Identity theory, a social psychological theory of self, examines how the human being classifies him or herself in the context of the world around him/her. This self-classification is created and objectified by a multiple, interlocking hierarchy

of identities and meanings the individual attaches to each identity. Placement of a specific identity on this hierarchy is dependent upon the salience of the identity- the likelihood that an identity will be enacted in a given situation, given the situational cues and the commitment levels of the individual to other individuals within the social network that an identity is activated in. This theory recognizes the importance of the individual's social and structural environment – specifically, how these two aspects of environment create cues for identity activation. Much of the research regarding identity theory has to do with motivations for behavior within a specific identity. This body of research has provided suggestive evidence for the existence of several motivating factors, especially self-verification and self-esteem, for behaviors performed while enacting highly salient self-identities.

This chapter concludes by explaining the link between environment and school membership through linking ecological theory and identity theory. Both theories acknowledge the effects of the individual's social and structural environments in the creation of self-identity. In addition, three of the primary factors in identity activation and identity-based behavior are the role the individual possesses within a given social network, the identity standard for this role, and the level of commitment the individual has to other social network members. The structural and social environment of the school is critical in creating commitment between members of school, as well as reinforcing the roles of the classroom members and the identity standards for each role. How the individual views situational cues, as well as the situational cues themselves are also affected by the individual's structural and social environment. In these ways, school environment and school structure are potential

causal factors in school membership. Chapter four moves us away from school membership, the internal motivator of academic engagement into a brief discussion of academic engagement and its place within the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

CHAPTER FOUR: SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

While school membership is defined as a psychological construct, academic engagement is an external, behavioral consequence of membership. Specifically, academic engagement is defined as student behavior that fulfills the identity standard of “student” created by the student’s social network. This social network could be the student’s peers, friends, family, teachers, or any combination thereof. These behaviors include regular class attendance, participation within class, satisfactory behavior and on-time completion of school work. These actions, in turn, lead to grade promotion and graduation. These behaviors also mutually reinforce and strengthen school membership once it is established.

Few definitions of academic engagement acknowledge the predecessor of engagement for many students: a mental commitment to behaviors consistent with the identity standard of student. Some studies examine concepts such as school connectedness through examining social bonding as a measure of academic engagement while other studies include behavioral measures. Yet other studies examine academic engagement through the student positively characterizing a teacher or class (for example, agreeing with the statement “I enjoy coming to this class every day”), which is not directly related to school membership or academic engagement (Libbey 2004).

EXISTING RESEARCH ON CORRELATES OF ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

Studies have generally characterized relations between various notions of academic engagement and environmental factors such as student-centered learning climate, high academic expectations, or school size as a secondary outcome that leads to the primary outcome of academic achievement. Qualitative studies have linked interactive pedagogy to academic engagement in terms of time spent on schoolwork (Rose 1995, Waxman and Padron 1995, Ball 2000, National Research Council 2003, Gutstein 2003). Meece and colleagues linked “learner-centered” teaching practices with improved academic engagement in terms of the commitment to positive behavior and skill mastery motivation (Meece et al 2003). Studies have also confirmed that perceptions of trust, respect and attentiveness from teachers are correlated to school connectedness (Bryk and Schneider 2002, Whitlock 2006).

Research on academic expectations has linked placement in higher level tracks with positive student assessment of their abilities, participation within class, non-disruptive behavior and high academic aspirations (Oakes 1985, Cohen 1994, Hallam 2002, Hallam and Ireson 2007). Several school structural factors have also been studied in terms of their relation to academic engagement. Lee and Smith found that students enrolled in high schools that were actively restructuring towards communal organization showed gains in academic engagement measured through student behaviors and attitudes (such as feeling challenged in school) compared to non-restructuring schools (Lee and Smith 1995).¹⁶ Two studies from the University of Chicago’s Consortium on Chicago School Research examined the effects of school

¹⁶ Communal organization is consistent with several organizational factors characterized as cultivating school membership.

size on academic engagement, finding a strong negative relation (Wasley et al 2000, Hess and Cytrynbaum 2002).

Social-psychological research has also examined correlates of academic engagement. Recent research has concluded that programs that are successful in increasing both behavioral and psychological engagement among adolescent learners directly address their needs for competence, control, and sense of belonging (Deci and Ryan 1985, National Research Council 2003). Berktold, Geis, and Kaufman found a third of the dropouts among more than 13,000 eighth graders they studied reported doing so because they could not keep up with schoolwork, while one fourth of dropouts did so because they felt they did not belong. Empirical research also supports the theory that a sense of belonging and social connectedness plays an important role in cognitive engagement (Baumeister, Twenge and Nuss 2002).

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The majority of studies which have examined academic engagement have done so by linking school ecology and policies directly to academic outcomes with academic engagement viewed as a secondary outcome that leads to academic achievement. This means that there is an assumed link between academic engagement and academic outcomes. This is seemingly a fair assumption, as behaviors consistent with academic engagement such as increased participation in class, high rates of attendance, increased effort on class work and improved grades are likely lead to grade promotion and high school graduation (Connell et al 1995, Kamins and Dweck 1999, DeBruyn 2003, National Research Council 2003). Because

of this assumption, few existing studies explicitly examine the link between academic engagement and academic achievement, even though ultimate utility of academic engagement lies within its ability to keep students on, or bring students back to the path to high school graduation.

Singh and colleagues tested this widely held assumption, demonstrating a link between academic engagement and motivation and positive academic outcomes in math and science class. Student evaluations of their math and science classes, their level of preparedness for class (measured by bringing proper materials), and level of attendance and participation, not surprisingly, led to increased achievement in math and science for a national sample of eighth graders (Singh et al 2002). Although no empirical study has taken into account a notion of academic engagement that included school membership, the preceding studies provide definitive proof of a relation between ecological school factors and academic engagement.

SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a definition and brief examination of existing research of the output of school membership: academic engagement. Academic engagement, for the purposes of this dissertation, is defined as actions which fulfill a “student” identity standard created by a student’s social network. This network (or networks) may consist of peers and teachers at school, parents, friends, or any other group with which the individual shares commitment.

While there are a handful of recent studies that have acknowledged the internal motivation necessary for behaviors consistent with academic engagement, the

majority of existing research examining academic engagement has not acknowledged the identity-based internal motivation necessary to enact the behaviors, such as regular class attendance or adherence to school rules, that I define as academic engagement. Existing research has predominantly defined academic engagement either through student satisfaction with a class or their schooling experience, by social bonding to peers or teachers, or through outcomes such as regular attendance instead of examining student identities. In addition, much of the existing research on correlates of academic engagement has inferred a direct causal link between factors that create an environment conducive to school membership (such as student-teacher interaction or high academic expectations) and academic engagement.

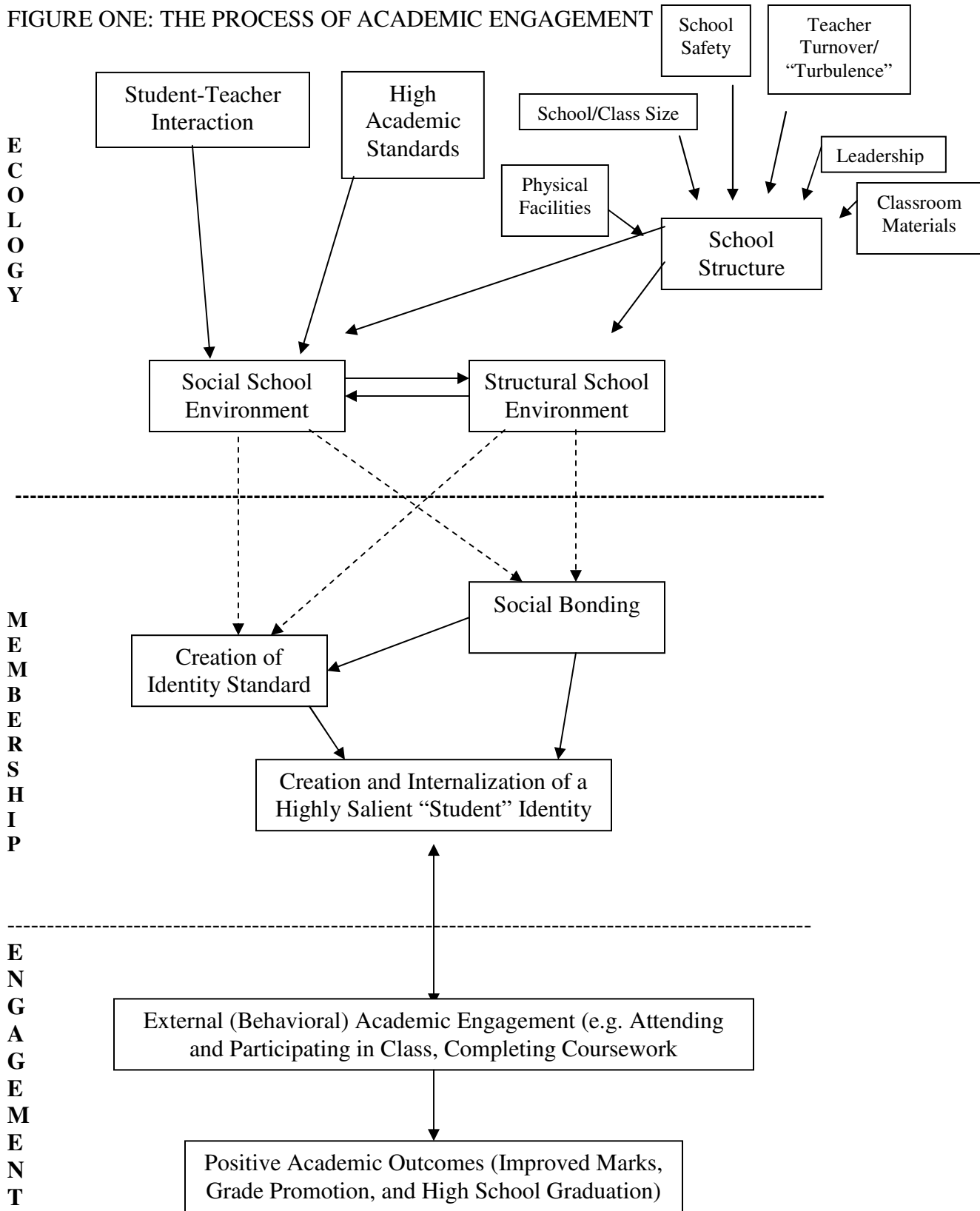
In sum, my dissertation research contributes to the body of knowledge on academic engagement by recognizing the possession of a salient student identity (school membership) as a causal factor of behaviors such as regular school attendance and a great amount of effort within the classroom (academic engagement). Given this causal model of academic engagement, chapter five examines when, and for whom the development of school membership is most crucial.

As a conclusion to this chapter, Figure One exhibits the hypothesized links between the three major concepts put forth in the first four chapters of this dissertation: social and physical school environment, school membership, and academic engagement.¹⁷ The top third of this chart shows that highly interactive

¹⁷ Please note that the dotted lines denote that while there is a definite causal relationship between school environment and school membership, the effects of school environment are by no means uniform. Individual level student factors also affect this relationship. It is these individual factors that schools effective in engendering membership must examine in order to modify the social and structural environment of schools so that it is effective in engendering membership for as many of its members as possible.

pedagogy, high academic standards, and several aspects of a school's structural environment: physical facilities, school and class size, school safety, teacher turnover, effective leadership, and sufficient amount of classroom materials are integral in creating a school's social and structural environment. The middle third of this chart represents the theorized relationships between the student's social and physical environment and the creation of a salient "student" identity. This identity is created through the creation of a "student" identity standard, and social bonding with other school memberships who have internalized this identity standard. The bottom third of this flowchart represents the outcomes of motivation based upon a "student" identity standard – academic engagement, and educational attainment.

FIGURE ONE: THE PROCESS OF ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT



CHAPTER FIVE: WHEN, AND FOR WHOM IS SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP MOST CRITICAL?

The question of whether there is a time in the student's academic career when developing school membership is most critical is paramount from a policy perspective. School membership is beneficial to the student at all grade levels, as a student who has internalized a sense of school membership in elementary or middle school already has a readily activated "student" identity and would be more likely to seek opportunities to activate that identity in high school. However, many students enter disadvantaged schools having never experienced a sense of school membership or an environment that cultivates membership. In addition, high school presents an entirely new set of norms, expectations and challenges to the student. Transitioning students are likely to be seeking their self-identity within the social network of high school. Therefore, school membership is especially important to examine within the transition year to high school.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION

There is a rich body of theory and research which has examined the importance of the transition year to high school in predicting eventual dropout, particularly in disadvantaged schools. This literature examines both the effects of poor academic performance in ninth grade on subsequent academic achievement, as well as the multiple educational and psychological challenges students face during the transition year. Much of this literature is based on the work of Melissa Roderick,

who demonstrated that the way in which the student handles the transition year to high school, evident by grade promotion, is a significant predictor of whether the student will drop out of high school (Roderick 1993). Roderick's research was based on adolescent development research linking physical development and the transition to a new school with decreased and unstable self-esteem and decreased school participation and perceived safety in school (Blyth et al 1978, Isakson and Jarvis 1999).

The Effects and Extent of Transition Year Grade Retention

Statistics from cities such as Philadelphia, where among first time freshmen in 1996, 57% of those not promoted to tenth grade had dropped out by the end of four years, compared to 11% of those children who were promoted support Roderick (Rumberger et al 1998, Neild and Balfanz 2006b, 2006). Neild found that the modal grade level of dropout in Philadelphia is ninth grade, although students often remain enrolled in school for three or more years before officially dropping out, indicating the prevalence of grade retention among dropouts (Neild and Farley 2004, Neild and Balfanz 2006a). Neild also found that ninth grade retention was a significant predictor of high school dropout after controlling for a variety of factors such as family background, eighth grade achievement, academic engagement and pro-social or anti-social peer relationships. She inferred that children who fail ninth grade may become increasingly disengaged with school, or these failures may illuminate deficiencies in study skills for these children which lead to eventual dropout (Neild et al 2002). Other studies have also confirmed that grade retention and academic

performance during this year is highly predictive of future school outcomes (Roderick 1994, Neild et al 2002, Neild and Farley 2004, Kerr and Legters 2004).

Abrams and Haney's findings are alarming considering that ninth grade retention is a strong predictor of dropout. They longitudinally examined the national enrollment of students by grade, finding that the "ninth grade bulge" - the percentage point increase of ninth grade students enrolled nationally compared to eighth graders, has tripled over the last thirty years to thirteen percentage points, growing most rapidly from 1990 to 2000. The increase in the "ninth grade bulge" has coincided with an increasing number of students disappearing from the school rosters between ninth and tenth grade, indicating that ninth grade retention is contributing to eventual dropout. The authors suggested that nationally, 70-80% of ninth grade students who are retained eventually drop out (Abrams and Haney 2004). Research from the Chicago and Philadelphia school districts produce similar grim statistics regarding the probability of dropping out for students retained in ninth grade (Allensworth and Easton 2005, Neild and Balfanz 2006a).

The Challenges of the Transition Year

This wealth of transition year research brings about the question of why the transition year to high school is so critical. Several dimensions of the transition to high school cause disruption in a student's academic life in terms of social-psychological processes and insufficient school-level student supports. Isakson and Jarvis found that the transition from middle school to high school was attributable to negative changes in GPA and attendance rates, and a corresponding increase in

number of daily stressors, (especially early in the ninth grade year). Increases in daily stressors partially mediated the relationship between transition and a decreased GPA. Multiple stressors were also highly predictive of low levels of school membership. The use of adaptive coping mechanisms and support from friends and parents at the beginning of ninth grade were correlated with high levels of school membership (Isakson and Jarvis 1999).¹⁸

Researchers in this vein have also characterized the mismatch between the developmental needs of the student and what a large high school provides or demands as a main reason why the transition to high school is so difficult. Specifically, the social environment of large neighborhood high schools may create a sense of alienation, inhibiting the ability of the student to find their identity within the context of school. This also inhibits the socialization that is necessary if the student is to eventually assume the adult roles and responsibilities that define early adulthood (Eder & Nenga 2002).

Blyth and Simmons' research has also demonstrated that adolescence is a time in the student's life where several changes, such as puberty and dating, in addition to transitioning into middle and high school (particularly large high schools) serve as detriments to high, stable self-esteem and contribute to a sense of anonymity (Blyth et al 1978, Simmons and Blyth 1987). Seidman's quantitative analysis of students in a large, urban district also demonstrated that self-esteem and class preparation tend to decrease as a result of entering a new school. In addition, student involvement with school activities and their perceptions of social support mechanisms also tended to

¹⁸ School membership was reported using the measure of school membership that Hagborg employed in his studies of Wehlage's theory (Hagborg 1994, 1998).

decrease. He also noted that the student faces the challenge of finding their identity within the social and academic spheres of school, and that “hassles” with authority figures increased during the transition year, indicating that the student is at greater risk of “falling in with the wrong crowd” as the student struggles to maintain old friendships and create new ones (Seidman et al 1994, Rumberger et al 1998).¹⁹ Neild also found that having anti-social friends in ninth grade was a significant correlate of high school dropout (Neild et al 2002).

The transition to high school also has a structural dimension that contributes to the psychological difficulties that transitioning students experience. Given the “ninth grade bulge” discussed earlier, it is not surprising that ninth grade classes usually have the highest pupil-teacher ratios within disadvantaged schools, further contributing to a sense of anonymity among transitioning students (NCES 2000, Neild et al 2002, Abrams and Haney 2004, Ready et al 2004). Neild and colleagues also found that students who characterize school as unsafe are more likely to be retained in ninth grade (Neild et al 2002).

These disadvantages are compounded by high teacher turnover rates and high percentages of uncertified teachers leading ninth grade classes. Neild’s examination of Philadelphia teachers demonstrated that teachers with seniority generally requested to be assigned to upper level classes, leaving the least experienced teachers to handle ninth grade classes that were large and had high amounts of mobility. This led to a high amount of teacher turnover, teacher shortages and continually low percentages of fully certified ninth grade teachers (Neild 2002a, 2002b). Several studies have pointed out that many students in disadvantaged schools enter the ninth grade

¹⁹ Willis (1981) would characterize this as a “subculture of resistance”.

considerably below grade level in several subjects, meaning that years of academic underachievement may come to a head (Roderick 1993, 1994, Abrams and Haney 2004, Neild and Balfanz 2006a). Considering that transitioning students struggle to find their self-identity, keep high self-esteem and meet new academic expectations within large, anonymous schools, the fact that these students are often provided the least experienced and qualified teachers upon entering an disadvantaged school exponentially increases this disadvantage.

RESEARCH ON NINTH GRADE INTERVENTIONS

School districts nationwide have begun to address ninth grade retention through reform measures such as interdisciplinary teacher teaming within grade level, orientation classes for incoming freshmen and Small Learning Communities (SLCs) for ninth graders. These reforms have the dual goals of cultivating academic engagement and eliminating the gap between the skills incoming freshmen possess and grade level skills. Kerr and Legters found that Maryland schools that implemented SLCs and interdisciplinary teacher teams and supplemented SLCs with practices such as employing weekly student-centered projects over a long period of time were much more likely to significantly reduce their school wide dropout rates over time.²⁰ SLCs and interdisciplinary teacher teaming were also correlated with lower ninth grade retention rates and improving scores on the Maryland Functional

²⁰ Schools that implemented these widespread reforms were also in greater peril in terms of dropout, while schools implementing fewer or no reforms generally had much less of a dropout problem. Schools with significant reforms made significant gains over the study period, closing the graduation gap between themselves and schools implementing fewer reforms.

Math Test (Kerr and Legters 2004). Chapter seven examines school reform measures targeted at transitioning students in greater detail.

Overall, it is clear that the transition year to high school is a crossroads for students within disadvantaged schools, as they are faced with a number of challenges. Psychologically, the student must learn where they “fit in” within their new social network, which may take a toll on self-esteem and self-identity. Students must adapt to new norms and expectations within large, anonymous and sometimes unsafe school structures with understaffed classrooms and underqualified teachers. Many times, they must adapt within the context of a social network of peers which have values and norms in contrast to the “student” identity standard school members may attempt to put forth. In many cases students also enter the ninth grade considerably below grade level in many subject areas (Roderick 1993, 1994, Neild et al 2002, Abrams and Haney 2004, Neild and Balfanz 2006a). Students who are retained after the transition year due to one or more of these challenges are at a much greater risk of eventual dropout. Because of this, the transition year to high school is a point in the student’s academic career where possessing or developing an internalized notion of school membership is a necessity.

FOR WHOM IS SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP MOST CRITICAL?

As the question of when school membership is most critical, an internalized sense of school membership should be considered an important goal or aspect of any student, at any academic level. However, as with the timing of school membership, there are certain groups for which school membership should be especially critical.

School membership is certainly critical among any individual or group who may be more likely to drop out of high school, whatever the reason for doing so may be.

However, the utility of cultivating a sense of school membership may be particularly clear among students who may have poor self-efficacy or an external locus of control.

Not every student who graduates high school may necessarily have a sense of school membership. In fact, it is possible that a substantial proportion of students who graduate high school every year do not have a sense of school membership, at least in the “ideal type”. However, it is likely that most of these students still have expectations about the value of a high school diploma, and the opportunities that it may afford them. Students without a sense of self-efficacy or internal locus of control will be less likely to believe that they are able to reap the benefits of a high school diploma, and therefore may not have the same academic or economic expectations which serve as motivation for academic achievement.

Carter has demonstrated that students from economically and socially disadvantaged groups tended to feel that despite the value of education, they will encounter more obstacles to success outside of their control (Carter 2006). In addition, Mortimer and Bandura’s studies have demonstrated that a primary source of adolescent self-efficacy and economic expectations is the achievements of adults to which they emulate, such as parents (Bandura 1977, Grabowski, Call and Mortimer 2001). Therefore, it is particularly crucial that school membership be examined and fostered among students from traditionally disadvantaged groups, as these students are less likely to feel that they will be able to reap the benefits of a high school

diploma due to either their own perceived shortcomings, or outside factors beyond their control.

SUMMARY

Now that I have defined school membership, examined educational policies and teaching methods that create an environment that is ideal for its creation, and examined the links between school membership and academic engagement, this chapter examined the “when” and “who” of school membership. Specifically, I posited that the transition year to high school, the ninth grade for most students in the United States, is a critical year that represents a last chance for school membership creation for disadvantaged students who have not already developed school membership.

There has been a litany of research that has examined the extent and consequences of ninth grade retention over the last twenty years. Analyses of school district data in cities such as Chicago and Philadelphia have indicated that 70 to 80 percent of first time ninth grade students who are retained eventually drop out of high school. Furthermore, the ninth grade is the most common grade level of high school dropout in large, urban school districts.

A variety of educational and social-psychological research has examined why transitioning students are at risk of dropout. Within large, disadvantaged schools, students are more likely to have uncertified teachers, experience changes in schedule, experience material shortages, and be assigned to very large classes, limiting the potential for teachers or school officials to provide positive interventions for

transitioning students. From a psychological standpoint, transitioning students have a difficult time creating social bonds and developing their self-identity within an anonymous setting like a large, comprehensive high school.

In response to the challenges of the transition year, educational practitioners have developed interventions such as Small Learning Communities in order to combat the anonymity of large, comprehensive high schools. Other interventions for transitioning students will be examined in greater depth in Chapter Seven. Overall, the transition year to high school is a critical year for developing or maintaining school membership, particularly within disadvantaged students who may not experience an environment conducive to developing school membership in their social networks outside of high school. Chapter six transitions to the methodology of this dissertation by stating my research scope, questions, and limitations.

CHAPTER SIX: RESEARCH SCOPE, LIMITATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Before moving on to the methodological description of this dissertation, I should acknowledge that in many cases, individual-level factors outside of the sphere of school such as parental support at home, student mobility, occupational or family obligations, or involvement in drug or gang activity effect the salience of a “student” self-identity, and consequently school membership. Studies have shown low levels parental support, student mobility, involvement with anti-social peers outside of school and involvement in criminal activity to negatively affect academic engagement and grade promotion (Pribesh and Downey 1999, Isakson and Jarvis 1999, Neild et al 2002). Furthermore, in the case of a student who has the expectations and means to attend college, school membership may not necessarily be an internal predecessor of academic engagement, as school may be viewed as a “necessary evil” in order to attain credentials for college and/or a specific occupation.

Given these caveats, this dissertation examines the extent to which the social and structural environment of high school affects levels of school membership and academic engagement within disadvantaged students, while acknowledging and examining the multiple challenges to developing school membership these students may face outside of school walls on a daily basis.

A few limitations of this study should be also addressed. Qualitatively, this project was an ethnographic case study of students from a single high school. While there were comparisons within this school between students who had internalized a sense of school membership and those who had not, the structural environment that

students experienced in school did not vary, and the social environment students experienced inside and outside of school varied less within the same school than it would between multiple schools. The scope of the project, as well as limited access to other schools within the study district precluded the inclusion of students from a comparison school in the qualitative portion of this research.

In addition, the district that our qualitative research site located in has a school choice policy for all of its high schools. Students and their parents are given the opportunity to list their top three choices of schools towards the end of their eighth grade year. The district then attempts to match students to their top choices of school, with a lottery determining placement in cases where demand exceeds supply of available seats at a given school. Students who do not fill out this form are assigned to their neighborhood high school. Therefore, it is possible that despite the deficiencies in math and English skills that many incoming freshmen to this school exhibit, students at this school may not necessarily be representative of all students in this district in terms of their motivational levels or the levels of academic support given by family members. Either the student or their parent would have to make the effort to fill out and submit a request to attend this school, and presumably do some sort of research in order to conclude that this school desirable. In addition, I was limited in my access to student academic and behavioral records from previous years. Because of this, I was forced to rely on student self-reports of their academic and behavioral marks prior to the 2007-08 school year.

Quantitatively, the dataset I used was unable to examine the specific effects of the transition year to high school, as it began its longitudinal examination of students,

their parents, teachers, and administrators in the student's tenth grade year. In addition, the question used to measure school membership was a reasonable, but imperfect measure of this internal construct. Unfortunately, no nationally representative longitudinal study exists that examines students before and after their transition year to high school and includes a valid measure of school membership. The reasoning behind my choice of dataset and measure of school membership is explained in greater detail within Chapter Nine.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Because the supplemental, quantitative phase of my dissertation is driven by the results of my open-ended, qualitative study of students' academic environment, school membership levels, and academic engagement, my quantitative hypotheses will be based upon my qualitative findings. However, the qualitative phase of my dissertation will be guided by the following questions:

Question 1: Is there a relationship between school membership and academic engagement?

Question 2: What aspects of a school's social or structural environment are most conducive to the formation or maintenance of school membership?

Question 3: If a relationship does exist, how does an internalized sense of school membership lead to academic engagement?

The quantitative portion of this dissertation provides support for the answers for questions one and two that my qualitative research unearthed.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE TALENT DEVELOPMENT HIGH SCHOOL MODEL

The previous chapters have examined a divergent base of literature from the fields of educational policy and social-psychology, much of which was dedicated to examining the social and physical environmental factors theorized to create a school atmosphere conducive to the formation of school membership: high amounts of meaningful student-teacher interaction, high teacher standards, and various structural components of school organization. From this, I've created a synergistic theory of school membership that takes into account the effects of a student's social and physical surroundings in creating school membership and subsequent academic engagement. Now that I have elaborated upon an "ideal type" of academic environment for the creation and sustenance of school membership, the question becomes whether there is a comprehensive school reform model currently being implemented that actively creates such an environment?

THE RISE OF COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM MODELS

Before the mid-1990s, implementation of a reform model that encompassed an entire school was practically unheard of. While the groundbreaking 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* raised consciousness both among lawmakers and the general public about the dire straits of public secondary education, particularly in urban areas, the prevailing wisdom policy-wise was to programmatically target students with the worst academic or behavioral problems within disadvantaged schools. This was done

through college preparatory programs, career preparatory programs, or alternative education programs. Another policy practice popular at the time and still today, was to create magnet or charter schools. Still, these interventions did little to address the needs of the majority of students in urban, nonselective neighborhood high schools.

While prevailing wisdom encouraged targeted interventions within troubled schools, during the 1980s and early 1990s a growing belief developed that disadvantaged students and impoverished schools could be better served through school-wide or comprehensive school reforms, as opposed to reform targeted at specific subgroups of students within schools. This belief was fostered through both informed opinion of educational practitioners and findings of research on effective schools. However, it was not until the standards-based reform movement of the mid-1990s that this belief was accompanied by the means through which comprehensive school reform could be implemented at a broad scale.

Since its inception in 1965, Title I funds have been the primary source of federal assistance to schools within high poverty areas. Many of the targeted interventions for impoverished urban high schools mentioned above were brought about with such funds from the 1960s through the early 1990s. Due to the rising tide of support for comprehensive school reform, and the emergence of standards-based reform, the 1994 reauthorization of Title I mandated states to raise academic standards, create new assessments, and hold schools and districts more accountable for their students' achievement and skill levels. This new legislation encouraged comprehensive school reform for schools where half or more of students were poor.

In addition to the reauthorization of Title I, the New American Schools Development Corporation (NAS), a government created private organization intended to support the creation of “break the mold” whole-school restructuring models was created in 1991. The NAS turned to the private sector for proposals for new school models that will aid in American students in achieving standards in line with those of other world powers. The NAS chose eleven of these proposals in early 1992, and provided these organizations with funding for start-up and research of their whole-school reform models. Between 1992 and 2002, NAS provided over \$150 million dollars in financial and technical assistance to reform developers.

As a result of promising initial research of these programs, congress has encouraged schools to implement “scientifically based” whole-school reform and in 1998 initiated the Comprehensive School Reform Program (CSRP), which awarded at least \$50,000 per year for three years for qualifying schools. This program was allocated \$145 million for the 1998 fiscal year, and saw its funding grow steadily to over \$200 million dollars annually from 2001-2005 specifically earmarked for Title I schools. Additional funds were allocated for any school that applied through the Fund for the Improvement of Education. Although CSRP funding all but ceased after 2005, CSRP and NAS helped to create a substantial market for whole-school reform nationally. The No Child Left Behind act of 2001 added to this market by mandating that schools identified as needing improvement must pursue strategies designed to improve achievement, including comprehensive school reform.

As a result of legislation and funding, the number of Title I eligible schools employing comprehensive school reform models expanded exponentially, as has the

number of privately developed comprehensive school reform models schools may select from. Roughly 10% of Title I eligible schools employed a comprehensive school reform model in 1991. This number rose to nearly 50% by 1996 (Borman et al 2002). Between 2000 and 2005, over 5,000 schools nationwide received comprehensive school reform funds from the government, as school-wide reform practices became the rule, rather than the exception in disadvantaged urban schools (Legters et al 2002, Tushnet 2004)

While comprehensive school reform has proliferated across schools nationwide in the last ten to fifteen years, the majority of comprehensive school reform programs specifically target elementary or K-8 students, as many have argued that by the high school years, it is too late to have meaningful interventions with underperforming students in high poverty schools. Many other comprehensive school reform models are not grade specific in their aim, and thus ignore the social, developmental and social contexts of the high school years. In 2002, Borman and colleagues examined twenty-nine of the nation's most prolific comprehensive school reform models. All of these models had received prior empirical examination, and were implemented in at least ten schools nationwide. Of these, only two comprehensive school reform models: the Talent Development High School Model and High Schools that Work were specifically targeted for high school students (Borman et al 2002). Overall, comprehensive high school reform models have been largely ignored in the broader discourse of comprehensive school reform.

With the proliferation of comprehensive school reform models clearly lagging at the high school level, my options for examining an urban, disadvantaged high

school with a specific reform model geared towards school membership were very limited. However, in contrast to the top down construction of many comprehensive school reform models, the Talent Development High School Model envisions comprehensive school reform with a bottom up approach. Within this reform model, creating positive student relationships with peers and school staff, and creating a pro-learning social environment is as much of a goal as academic growth, as this model posits that these dual goals work hand in hand.

In order to meet the goal of a positive social environment for students, the Talent Development High School Model molds a school's structural and social environment in a way that consciously created a cultural norm of fulfilling a student identity, called a "culture of success". This "culture of success" is equivalent to creating a student identity standard. As I will explain, in addition to a "culture of success", several other structural components of this model also overlap with the aspects of school structure theorized to aid in the creation of school membership, making a school with this model an ideal setting in which to examine school membership qualitatively. In a way, the Talent Development School Model shares traits with comprehensive school reform targeted at the elementary or K-8 levels in that the more holistic goals of comprehensive school reform for younger students are met through a specific focus on transforming the school's social, as well as academic and structural environment.

In contrast to this, the primary goals of many comprehensive school reform models geared to all grades, or to high schools encompass raising academic achievement in light of standards based testing, or building school capacity for self-

reliance. High Schools that Work, the other comprehensive school reform examined by Borman and colleagues, blended college preparatory work with vocational and technical studies, in essence attempting to build academic engagement by linking school with occupational outcomes (Borman et al 2002). While these goals are certainly essential parts of any comprehensive school reform model, these goals may not be realized without a focus on the social environment the student experiences on a daily basis inside and outside of school, as this environment directly relates to academic engagement. The Talent Development High School (TDHS) model repudiates the idea that it is “too late” to help students at the high school level, applying ideas that work at the elementary and middle school levels in order to engender academic engagement among students within disadvantaged high schools.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT HIGH SCHOOL MODEL

The Talent Development High School Model was created in 1994 through a partnership between Johns Hopkins University’s Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) and Patterson High School in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1998, CRESPAR and the Philadelphia Education Fund began a scaling up effort for several high schools in Philadelphia, marking the beginning of the nationwide expansion of the TDHS model (Kemple et al 2005). As of the 2007-2008 school year, 146 schools in fifteen states implemented part or the entire TDHS model (TDHS 2007).

The TDHS model was created as an authentic, systematic, and sustained response to the challenges of student “anonymity, apathy, and diversity” (McPartland

et al 1998, p. 340) in large, comprehensive urban high schools (Boykin 2000). The TDHS model emphasizes that ninth graders are adolescents undergoing the difficult transition from middle school to high school. These changes can lead to alienation, confusion, and frustration on the part of the student (Morrison and Legters 1998, Legters et al 2002). In order to respond to these challenges, the TDHS model reforms several aspects of the school: the school's physical structure, curriculum, professional development, and the attitudes and job descriptions of school officials. Many of these reforms specifically target the ninth grade as a response to the litany of research on the importance of the transition year to high school (McPartland et al 1998, Legters and Morrison 2000, Boykin 2000).

The Ninth Grade Success Academy

Transition year reform includes the building of a Ninth Grade Success Academy. This academy is guided by the principal that student-centered programs and skilled, caring adults working collaboratively are most effective in diagnosing student needs, and all students have the capacity to develop into productive adults. The academy has several social and structural features: a school-within-a-school, organization into interdisciplinary teaching teams, a block schedule, classes aimed at easing high school transition, and a "culture of success".

A school-within-a-school (SWS) is a self-contained small learning community often with its own entrance, its own teaching and administrative staff and walls physically separating the SWS from the rest of the building. This is intended to create a smaller, more focused school environment without the pressures of fitting

into the climate already established by upperclassmen. This environment also includes a leadership team that includes an academy principal, team leaders within interdisciplinary teams and a student leadership team which is intended to set a positive example for students and help establish closer relationships between students and teachers (Morrison and Legters 1998, Connell et al 2006).

Interdisciplinary teacher teams consist of four or more teachers in different subject areas who are responsible for the same group of students. These teams create an individualized learning environment where teachers respond to student progress, strengths and weaknesses throughout the student's school experience. This also builds a caring, supportive climate, provides a "united front" on discipline and attendance, and provides the student with academic self-esteem, social attachment to school and a "team identity". Block scheduling entails creating a schedule with fewer, longer periods (usually 80-90 minutes), allowing for more varied instructional approaches, more opportunity for increased student-teacher interaction and a more personalized learning experience (Morrison and Legters 1998).

The curriculum of the Ninth Grade Academy focuses on two challenges many disadvantaged ninth grade students encounter upon entering high school: adjustment to new academic norms and expectations, and being below grade level in one or more subjects. A Freshmen Seminar course during the first semester of ninth grade focuses on developing study skills, life skills such as goal setting and effectively communicating, exploring career interests, computer literacy, and learning school rules and regulations. Core ninth grade courses (Strategic Reading and Transition to Advanced Mathematics) focus on closing gaps in basic skills while preparing the

students for standards-based courses later in high school. These courses are taught using active, cooperative, student-centered techniques with grades based in part on projects and portfolios instead of being solely test-based (Morrison and Legters 1998, McPartland, et al 1998).

A primary goal of the Ninth Grade Success Academy is to ensure the promotion of all students, in part through building a “culture of success” that aims to instill self-efficacy and self-esteem within the student. The “culture of success” is created through “activities, ceremonies, and celebrations (that) encourage students to participate in and identify with the goals of the academy” (Morrison and Legters 1998, p. 3.1). The “culture of success” includes an emphasis on high attendance rates and fair, firm disciplinary measures that emphasize helping the student change their behavior as opposed to simply removing the student from school. The “culture” also extends to teachers, as teacher autonomy and collaboration is encouraged through group planning periods and opportunities to vary teaching methods.

In keeping with the theme of academies, the upper grades within the TDHS model are also broken into career academies that employ a school-wide core curriculum in addition to more specialized courses that prepare students for college level course content. These academies are also kept small in order to help foster the same type of social and structural environment that students experience within the Ninth Grade Success Academy (Morrison and Legters 1998, Connell et al 2006).

RESEARCH LINKING THE TDHS MODEL TO POSITIVE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

In the years since the creation of the TDHS model, there has been a growing base of research that has demonstrated its effectiveness. Initial studies of the TDHS model at Baltimore's Patterson High School demonstrated a strong impact of this model on the culture of the school and student behaviors despite the challenges TDHS implementers faced in terms of an anti-social school culture, a norm of chronic absence, crime both within and outside of school, a high dropout rate and widespread skill deficits. Attendance, standardized test scores, course passing rates, and promotion rates rose significantly after TDHS reforms were implemented and were favorable compared to other schools in the district without TDHS interventions. Students and teachers at Patterson described the climate as more relaxed with better facilities, fewer disruptions and school decorations undisturbed by students. Students and teachers also noted that interventions for improving attendance and discipline were more effective when they were carried out by the student's entire teaching team. Teachers also noted improvements in student motivation and student-teacher relationships (McPartland et al 1998, Morrison and Legters 1998).

Corbett and Wilson's qualitative studies of Ninth Grade Success Academies within two Philadelphia schools undergoing their first two years of TDHS reform demonstrated a noticeable change in the climate of these schools. Students seemed to be more goal-oriented, industrious, trusting in their teachers and trusting in the ability of the school to provide the support and knowledge necessary to attain a high school diploma. Students described a sense of familial care and trust between teachers and students as well as an increased number of academically engaged students within

their schools. Teachers noted that the block schedule allowed them to use more varied and interactive teaching methods. These changes persisted through the academy's second year, as high student expectations of themselves, teachers and other school officials became more commonplace (Corbett and Wilson 2000, 2001).

Studies examining the entire TDHS network have supported these findings. West found that Ninth Grade Success Academy students were 39% less likely to skip or cut classes than ninth grade students in similar schools not in a Ninth Grade Success Academy (West forthcoming). Kemple found that students who characterized their SLC as "cohesive" were less likely to have difficulties adjusting high school or become academically disengaged.²¹ He also found that teacher support and high standards promoted higher levels of student engagement (Kemple et al 2006).

Perhaps the strongest empirical support of the TDHS model came from a recent third party evaluation of five Talent Development high schools in the Philadelphia School District. This study confirmed that the TDHS model positively impacted ninth grade students in terms of academic engagement, attendance rates, credits earned and promotion for twenty cohorts of ninth grade students (Kemple et al 2005).

SUMMARY

As a result of the nationwide push towards comprehensive, as opposed to piecemeal school reform over the last fifteen years, several comprehensive school

²¹ Cohesiveness was defined the academy being in a separate area with its own name, teachers and leaders.

reform models have been implemented across a wide range of schools. Of those, the Talent Development High School Model is unique both because of its focus on students at the high school level, and because of its goal of creating a social and physical environment conducive to a “culture of success”. This goal goes hand in hand with this model’s other primary goals of closing skill gaps and preparing students for standards based testing, postsecondary education, and the workplace. An important part of this preparation comes through an expectation of success in future endeavors instilled through the “culture of success”. Ten years of empirical qualitative and quantitative research have produced an abundance of evidence indicating that the TDHS model is a catalyst for a positive academic environment, academic engagement. These studies also indicated that the TDHS model was a catalyst for school membership for students within Talent Development high schools. Chapter eight examines the place of the TDHS model within the context of comprehensive school reform models, and the recent history of the district in which I performed my qualitative research. This chapter also examines my qualitative research sample and methods.

CHAPTER EIGHT: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH SITE, RESEARCH SAMPLE, AND RESEARCH METHODS

The qualitative component of this dissertation entailed a yearlong instrumental, ethnographic case study of students within a high school that exhibited a school environment conducive to school membership. This school, which I call City High for the purposes of this dissertation, has operated under the Talent Development High School Model since its inception. City High is located in a large, urban district in the northeastern United States.²²

RESEARCH SITE

Similar to many large northeastern cities, the city where City High is located, which I will call Central City for this report, experienced a boom in manufacturing during the World War II era. The prosperity and job availability that came with this manufacturing boom attracted hundreds of thousands of working class whites and African Americans to Central City. However, in the decades following World War II, several of the large shipping and manufacturing companies that had provided thousands of blue collar jobs that paid a living wage and required little formal education were eliminated through massive downsizing and globalization of unskilled and semi-skilled labor. Along with a sharp decline in the availability of manufacturing jobs, Central City also had an accompanying loss of retail income and

²² The names of students, teachers, school, school district and city where this study takes place have been altered to protect their identities.

jobs, as Central City went from accounting for over 75% of the state's retail sales in 1950 to less than 20% in 1992 (Rusk 1996, Legters et al 2002).

With the steady decline in available jobs, Central City's population also declined as the city experienced the "white flight" pattern common to many cities that experienced a massive loss of job opportunities in the post World War II era. Central City experienced a population decline of over 30% between 1950 and 1990. During this same period, the suburban areas surrounding Central City gained nearly one million residents. While the overall population of Central City declined between 1950 and 1990, the African-American population of Central City nearly doubled during this period, resulting in the proportion of African-Americans in Central City increasing from 25% to 64%.

During the post-World War II period, the population of Central City grew increasingly isolated, minority, and poor. While the average annual income of a Central City resident was higher than the average annual income of a resident of a Central City suburb in 1950, Central City residents earned only 60% of the average annual income of suburban residents by 1990. Even those residents of Central City who were not poor were increasingly likely to be living in a neighborhood with a significant impoverished population. In 1990, more than 40% of residents are poor in one fifth of city neighborhoods. This increasing poverty disproportionately affected Central City's youngest residents, peaking in the 1990s, as one-third of school aged children in Central City lived below the poverty line for most of this decade.

As poverty became increasingly concentrated within Central City, other social maladies associated with poverty, such as rates of violent crime, teenage pregnancy,

drug addiction, and high school dropout all increased exponentially. However, Central City's leaders have had a steadily diminishing tax base since the 1960s, diminishing the pool of resources with which they city could tackle these increasing social needs, creating a fiscal squeeze and a cycle of debt for Central City. Despite a litany of efforts from government and private organizations to positively impact rates of drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, violent crime, and high school dropout over the 1990s, Central City still had one of the nation's highest murder rates in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as well as teenage pregnancy rates of nearly 10% for girls 15-17 years old, and a state reported average high school dropout rate city-wide of roughly 11% at the turn of the century (Rusk 1996, Legters et al 2002). Since the turn of the century, rates of teen pregnancy and child poverty have declined by three to five percentage points from their high points in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, deep budget cuts as a result of the recent recession have left city police without paid overtime, and violent crimes have spiked in early 2009 after two years of decline in the number of homicides in Central City.

Educational Policy in the Central City School District

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was an unprecedented amount of state-level action to in response to the marked decline in the quality of Central City schools over the 1970s and 1980s in comparison with other schools statewide. This included the commissioning of a 1989 report that called for a school accountability system which included school report cards, standardized state-level performance assessments, and provisions for failing schools to be "reconstituted", or taken over by

the state. The state's adoption of these recommendations set off nearly a decade of contention between the state and the Central City School District (CCSD). This included a 1992 lawsuit against the state filed by Central City and the American Civil Liberties Union that argued that these policies ignored a history of insufficient funding for Central City schools, due in large part to the city's dwindling, increasingly impoverished tax base. The state counter-offered with offers additional assistance to Central City schools over a five year period in order to avert the city's endorsement of the lawsuit. However, this proposed funding agreement was delayed and eventually defeated by legislators from wealthier districts across the state, leaving Central City schools with no additional funding, but increasingly high statewide standards, high stakes testing and a threat of reconstitution.

While the CCSD has been plagued by insufficient funding for decades, this district also was plagued by mismanagement throughout the 1980s and 1990s. An independent study of the Central City School District commissioned by an African-American state delegate in the mid-1990s found a widespread "culture of complacency" in the CCSD, as well as incompetence among many district employees, and a promotion system based upon personal relationships rather than work experience. According to this report, the combination of incompetence and favoritism led to maintenance of the status quo and a resistance to innovation within the CCSD. A massive restructuring of the CCSD bureaucracy, as well as an overhaul of CCSD personnel were recommended. State officials, acting upon the findings of this report, mandated as a part of the 1994 state budget for CCSD that the district act in accordance with the recommendations of this report. However, two years later in

response to a perceived lack of action on the part of the district, state legislators passed a provision in the state budget withholding funds from the CCSD contingent upon the district acting in accordance with state mandates for restructuring the district's bureaucracy.

This action by the state led to another lawsuit against the state by Central City, which was the impetus for an agreement hammered out in 1997 between the two sides before the lawsuit was heard in the state supreme court. In exchange for additional funding, Central City allowed an increase in state control and management of the CCSD. This included a school board jointly appointed by state and city officials, as well as the elimination of the superintendent position, instead having a management triumvirate of a Chief Executive Office, Chief Financial Officer, and a Chief Academic officer (Legters et al 2002).

In the midst of this battle between the Central City School District and the state, schools within the CCSD began to feel the effects of the standards based initiative implemented by the state; namely, reconstitution. Eighty-three schools in the Central City School District were named reconstitution eligible between 1994 and 2002. Many of these schools were named eligible for reconstitution not long after the standards based reform went into effect, indicating the dire straits of many schools within the district.

In 1995, the planning council of the CCSD, chaired by the assistant superintendant of the district outlined a plan to restructure Central City's comprehensive high schools, many of whom were either eligible for reconstitution, or on their way to becoming eligible, into Small Learning Communities that included

technology integration, professional development, and additional student support for transitioning to postsecondary education or the workplace. However, due to the tension between the city and state, this plan could not be implemented. The retirement of the associate superintendent the following year and replacement of the superintendent in 1997 left schools faced with reconstitution, in essence, on their own to seek externally developed comprehensive school reform models or to develop their own models internally (Legters et al 2002). In addition, the 1997 legislation that created a city-state partnership in running the CCSD did not directly address secondary school improvement, instead placing it under Objective One, “Increasing Student Achievement”. As a result of funding gaps, the initial school reforms from this new partnership occurred primarily at the elementary school level (MacIver and Dayton 2008).

The most expansive high school reform activities that were implemented between 1995 and 2001 were implemented through a pilot study of TDHS curriculum for ninth grades in a handful of CCSD schools eligible for reconstitution. However, the TDHS coaches and staff faced considerable resistance from department heads, state monitors and principals at these schools who were concerned that the TDHS curriculum would take away from the “test-prep” curriculum in place at these schools that was geared towards preparing students for the high stakes, statewide math tests that were administered to ninth grade students in the spring. Despite this resistance, students showed significant improvements in math and English on TDHS administered tests, and passed Algebra I at higher rates in each test school. However, these students’ state test scores were roughly equal to schools in the city that did not

implement the TDHS curriculum for ninth graders, and the TDHS curriculum was dropped from all city schools by the end of the 2001-2002 school year (MacIver and Dayton 2008).

By 2001, with the new regime and structure of the Central City School District finally entrenched, the district released a revamped blueprint for high school reform. Like the previous blueprint put forth by the district, this plan included an emphasis on academic rigor and Small Learning Communities, converting all nine of the district's large, comprehensive high schools into smaller neighborhood schools. In addition, the district planned to create eight new, smaller, "innovation" high schools, each with the autonomy to select their own technical assistance providers or outside operators. In addition to this movement towards Small Learning Communities, the Central City School District also planned to implement a city-wide school choice system with neighborhood school enrollment not determined by geographic boundaries in order to create a culture of competition and continual improvement between neighborhood schools.

Unlike the previous blueprint for district-wide high school reform, this plan had political and economic factors in its favor. Politically, this plan was not put forth during a time of outward city-state conflict over school funding and the performance of Central City schools. In addition, this plan had the advantage of twenty million dollars of support from a multitude of philanthropic organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Abell Foundation, many of whom began to offer large endowments for disadvantaged schools and school districts over the previous two decades in light of *A Nation at Risk*.

In the eight years since this blueprint was put forth, the CCSD has slowly reconstituted its schools, adding seven innovation schools between 2003 and 2009. In addition five of the nine comprehensive high schools in the CCSD were phased out during this time, with twelve neighborhood schools created in their place.²³ In 2005, the CCSD implemented a school choice policy where parents of ninth grade students city-wide submit their top three high school choices for their children to the school district at the end of their eighth grade year.

Of the four remaining comprehensive high schools in the city, one school is smaller than the other comprehensive schools, and has traditionally served a more academically and economically advantaged population. The other three remaining comprehensive schools have staved off reconstitution by joining the “Community Schools” movement and creating governing boards with community members in order to address the problem of low student achievement. However, these schools have still struggled mightily in terms of academic achievement, test scores, and attendance, exhibiting little sustained improvement this decade (Smerdon 2007, MacIver and Dayton 2008).

Because the restructuring process is ongoing within the district, there has been little district-wide empirical research examining the effects of restructuring on the reconstituted neighborhood and innovation high schools. However, a recent report by Becky Smerdon of the Urban Institute, using survey and school district data, indicated that student outcomes were better in the innovation high schools than in neighborhood or comprehensive high schools in terms of standardized test scores and

²³ Two additional neighborhood schools were created during this period, but were subsequently closed by the end of the 2008-2009 school year.

attendance rates. Innovation high school students' test scores and attendance rates only trailed the academic performance of selective high schools in the Central City School District. In addition, innovation high schools provided more supports for students and more positive teaching and learning environments than neighborhood and comprehensive high school students. Students within the new innovation or neighborhood high schools were also less mobile between schools than students in large comprehensive high schools. These findings controlled for the fact that the movement towards smaller schools left a concentration of students with lower test scores, greater economic need, and low skill levels within the remaining comprehensive high schools (Smerdon 2007).

It is at this point, given the context of ongoing school reform in the Central City School District, that I introduce the school in which my dissertation research took place, City High. This school opened as one of the six innovation schools created thus far by the Small Learning Communities inspired blueprint put forth by the CCSD in 2001. This school was created in partnership with Johns Hopkins University's Center for Social Organization of Schools, and was created using the Talent Development High School comprehensive school reform model. Researchers and educational practitioners from the Center for Social Organization of Schools have carte blanche in hiring school administration and staff. These organizers also have a great deal of flexibility in setting school rules and creating the physical structure of the school, and provide support to the school in terms of professional development, materials, and services such as test scoring. The school was funded through grants

obtained by the Center for Social Organization of Schools, as well as through philanthropic funds from the CCSD blueprint for reform.

City High

City High first opened its doors to a cohort of ninth grade students during the 2004-2005 school year, adding a cohort of ninth grade students every year. This school is a public, non-selective innovation school that admits students from across Central City. Cohort sizes for City High are kept between 125-200 students, with a lottery determining placement if demand for enrollment exceeds available slots. The school's population as of fall of the 2008-2009 school year was 529 students. As of the 2007-2008 school year the school's student-teacher ratio was 14.5:1, smaller than the majority of the city's non-selective public high schools (USDOE 2007).²⁴

City High is located in one of the Central City's most disadvantaged neighborhoods. The census tract City High is located in had a violent crime rate of 29.4 per 1,000 people and a vacancy rate of 23.2% in 2003.²⁵ According to the 2000 U.S. Census, this tract had an employment rate of less than 50% for adults ages 16-64 and a median household income just below \$19,000, with 63.6% of households earning \$0-\$25,000 per year. In addition, 68% of eighth grade students from this tract scored "basic" on the reading section of the 2003 state exams, while 84% of eighth grade students from this tract scored "basic" on the math section (BNIA 2006). The academic struggles of students in this area are not surprising given the low

²⁴ I was able to ascertain this student-teacher ratio using data City High allotted to me. Student-teacher ratios for other schools in this city were ascertained using USDOE data. However, this data was only available through the 2005-2006 school year.

²⁵ To put this statistic in context, New York City's violent crime rate was 6.7 per 1,000 people in 2005.

graduation rates Central City has historically produced. While the city's official graduation rate is around 60%, other studies have put this figure closer to 39% (McPartland et al 1998).

City High occupies a forty-five year old building that is roughly the size of a city block in width and length. This building also houses two middle schools as a result of a series of city-wide school closings, as well as a day-care center, and a city-wide school-to-work program. The physical plant of the school is by no means state-of-the-art (air conditioning is non-existent); however classrooms, halls and lockers remain clean and painted. Posters encouraging students and announcing progress towards school-wide goals line the hallways, classrooms, and the library. Towards the end of the school year, City High's principal also placed the college acceptance letters of City High's first senior class along the hallways. Teachers have indicated through a school-wide teacher survey that the problems of inadequate or insufficient classroom materials and problems with the physical plant of the school are practically non-existent.²⁶

Other structural aspects of the Talent Development High School Model have also been implemented at City High. Non-teaching aides and teachers patrol hallways and parking lot during and between periods. Recently, the school has also implemented a metal detector and student ID card scanner so that school safety, student tardiness and class cutting can be more effectively monitored. In addition, each grade occupies a separate wing of the building, with different school uniforms

²⁶ No teachers from this school that responded to the 2007-2008 TDHS Climate and Instruction Survey found unclean facilities, facilities in disrepair, lack of textbooks, or overcrowded classrooms to be a "serious problem". Only one found responded that a lack of chairs for students was a "serious problem".

and differing lunch and gym schedules, minimizing interaction between grade levels. The grades are also separated into academies, with the ninth grade being a “Success Academy”, and the upper grades being divided into the Arts and Public Service Academy and Science and Public Service academy. A block schedule is also implemented at all grade levels. According to a teacher self-reports, the majority of City High’s twenty-three teachers were also highly qualified, with seventeen holding at least a Masters degree and eighteen being fully certified.

While the structural environment of City High may be unlike most comprehensive neighborhood schools in high poverty areas, the school’s student population and neighborhood context are typical of many disadvantaged schools. During the 2007-2008 school year, nearly all of the students within City High were African-American (98%), with nearly four out of every five (78%) eligible for free or reduced price lunch. The majority of students had experienced academic difficulties at some point in their academic career. Nearly 20% qualified for some sort of special education service, above the city average of 15% (Toppo 2007). Standardized tests taken in the first month of school indicated that upon entry to City High, the first three cohorts of freshmen at City High’s vocabulary and comprehension skills were roughly at a seventh grade level, while these cohorts mathematics skills were roughly at a sixth grade level. Suffice to say, a significant amount of “catch-up” in math and English was needed for the majority of City High’s incoming freshmen.²⁷

²⁷ Freshmen at City High take the Gates-MacGinnitie Reading Test and the CTBS survey during the first week of school. A grade equivalent of six or seven does not necessarily mean that a student has mastered all skills taught through sixth or seventh grade. This refers to the score that would be theoretically equivalent to a typical performance of students in a norm group that had completed sixth or seventh grade.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Central City adopted a district-wide school choice policy in 2005. Students, their parents or their guardians listed their top three choices of school towards the end of their eighth grade year. The CCSD attempted to place as many students as possible in their top choices of schools, with a lottery determining placement if demand for seats exceeded the number of seats available in a given school. Students were assigned to their neighborhood high school if there were no preferences on the part of the student. In each of City High's first four years, there was either a lottery for a seat within the school, or there was nearly more demand for seats than there was a spots open in the school, meaning that most, if not all of City High's incoming cohorts listed this school as their first choice of high school at the end of eighth grade.

Despite the city-wide dropout epidemic, the first four years of data from City High indicate that the TDHS model has had a positive impact. Within the school's first two cohorts an extremely low number dropped out, as the school had a 4.5% dropout rate for the 2006-2007 school year. Considering that the majority of dropouts leave school when they are at the ninth or tenth grade level, this is very encouraging. The graduation rate of City High's first cohort, the Class of 2008, was 84%. Attendance rates for City High were around 90% for the school's first three years; well above the 82.6% average attendance rate for non-selective public high schools in this city for the 2006-2007 school year (MSDOE 2007). Given these positive outcomes, this school provides a perfect setting to examine relationships between academic environment, school membership and academic engagement.

RESEARCH METHODS: SAMPLE AND DATA ANALYSIS

As mentioned in chapter six, the qualitative portion of this dissertation is a case study of a single high school due to limitations in time and access. This means that I cannot perform a comparative case study that would allow me to compare and contrast the existence and nature of school membership across several sites. While this is undoubtedly a limitation of this study, the qualitative portion of this dissertation is instead an *instrumental* case study – a case study of a single site that is examined mainly to promote insight into an issue or draw a generalization. The nature of this case, specifically the historical, economic, and political background of Central City and physical setting of City High have several elements can be generalized to help examine an external interest – school reform and academic engagement.

Central City's post World War II history and economic situation is similar to several major northeastern and Midwestern cities, while the prevalence of an impoverished population within Central City is a situation that is unfortunately familiar to nearly every major city within the United States. The physical setting of City High within a large, aging building in a section of the city plagued with crime and violence is also typical, unfortunately, of many comprehensive neighborhood high schools in urban areas.

At the same time, this research site is also unique because of the comprehensive school reform model it employs. The Talent Development High School reform model has created a social and structural environment within this school that is quite unlike the social and structural environment of other schools with

similar physical settings and similar historical, economic and physical backgrounds. The “thick descriptions” or in-depth descriptions that an instrumental case study provides allows a more detailed, nuanced examination of the study school’s physical and social environment. This may not have been possible had I chosen to study several schools in a comparative case study, as critical aspects of City High’s environment may have been glossed over (Stake 2005). Given the importance I have assigned to a school’s social environment, a “thick description” of City High’s environment is essential to this study. Overall, the simultaneous uniqueness and generalizability of the study site makes an instrumental case study appropriate in light of limitations in access to additional schools in or around Central City.

Several qualitative methods were used to research City High students. I was a participant observer within two ninth grade and two tenth grade math classes for two days per week during the fall 2007 semester in order to examine the social and physical school environment and build a rapport with teachers and students at City High as a classroom assistant. I was especially attentive to teaching methods of the two study teachers, the ways these and other teachers in the school interacted with students, academic expectations, school leadership and the school’s general social and structural environment.

While an internal construct such as school membership may be difficult to observe externally, I was attentive to teacher or student actions that created or indicated the existence of a “culture of success” or “student” identity standard. Two examples of these actions would be students keeping other students on task during group activities or a teacher explaining how he or she had high expectations for their

class on an upcoming test, and he/she knew the students were capable of doing well on this test. I also observed behaviors consistent with engagement or disengagement, such as attendance, class participation and disciplinary issues.

Towards the end of the fall 2007 semester and beginning of the spring 2008 semester, I conducted tape recorded individual and focus group interviews with students. All but four students were interviewed twice: once individually, and once in a focus group with classmates whom they were friendly with. Four students were interviewed only once because they were not friendly with other study students, however these students were asked the one-on-one and focus group questions in their interview sessions. Students were selected for the study based upon my observations of students both within the class, and interacting with friends between classes, as well as teacher recommendations regarding two characteristics: academic skill levels and effort within class. Thus, study students were classified by their teachers into one of these four groups prior to their interviews: high skill/high effort, high skill/low effort, low skill/high effort, and low skill/low effort.

The goals of these interviews were to help discover underlying motivations behind classroom behaviors and examine whether a salient, socially constructed “student” identity standard was internalized by students of differing skill and motivational levels. I also prompted students to discuss social and structural environmental factors both inside and outside of school which inhibited or aided the formation of school membership and caused (or suppressed) the activation of a “student” identity. This was accomplished by asking students for their evaluations of several aspects of their social and physical in-school and out of school environments.

Inside of school factors such as block scheduling or extracurricular activities were mentioned, as were outside of school factors such as supportive parents, caretaking responsibilities at home, or “the streets”. These responses were obtained using open ended questions such as “In general, what things make kids care about school? Not you, but other kids you know?” Appendix A contains the open ended questions asked of students in their one on one and focus group interviews. In addition to the interview data, I was also provided with the student’s final grades, attendance rate, and number of days suspended over the student’s academic career at City High in order to examine the academic engagement levels of study students.

Overall, nineteen students were interviewed for this study. Thirteen students were in the ninth grade, five were in tenth grade, and one was in twelfth grade at the time of their interviews. The majority of participants were enrolled within the classes I observed, however I also chose three students who were a part of the school’s debate team to participate in this study in order to provide an additional comparison group of highly engaged students.²⁸ Nine African-American males and ten African-American females were interviewed.

Table one displays the student averages for final grades and attendance rates based on school membership levels and student skill level (according to their teachers). Only four students received any suspensions over the school year, all of whom did not have school membership. While the average attendance rate of students with school membership considered low skill was lower than that of high skill students without school membership, this was in part due to issues at home for at

²⁸ The debate team for City High placed second in the state finals in the 2006-2007 year, despite no students having any debate experience prior to joining the team.

least three of the five low skill students with school membership such as the death of a parent or caretaking responsibilities for younger siblings or older relatives.

TABLE ONE: AVERAGE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE FOR 2007-08 SCHOOL YEAR, BY SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP AND SKILL/EFFORT GROUP

	Has School Membership		Lacks School Membership	
	High Skill	Low Skill	High Skill	Low Skill
Average Attendance Rate	94.7%	86.2%	90.5%	73.0%
Average Final Grade	84.7	69.7	75.0	57.2

DATA ANALYSIS

I employed elements of grounded theory in coding interview data. The use of grounded theory in my dissertation allowed students to express themselves in their own words, and allowed me to develop my own interpretations of their words inductively. However, I did not employ grounded theory methods throughout the entire research process. While I based my questions for the end of year follow-up interviews on student responses during their initial interview at the end of the first semester, my goal in interviewing students was to test the applicability of a theoretical framework instead of building a theory through a constant process of interviewing, coding data, interpreting data and re-interviewing students. Student participation and attendance records, as well as informal teacher evaluations allowed me to verify links between students' social and structural academic (and non-academic) environment, school membership and academic engagement.

I analyzed the interview data using open coding, where I searched for patterns among student answers in order to discern emerging themes such as social bonding

between students and teachers, high academic expectations, salience of a “student” identity, and team leaders exhibiting a “student” identity standard. It is through the open coding process that I classified study participants as either possessing or lacking school membership.

Student possession of school membership was determined by the frequency and extent to which students mentioned a within-school identity in response to several questions, most notably:

“One of the things that sociologists look at is how peoples many different identities. By that, I mean that everyone has several identities that come out every day. For example, at work I am a researcher, that’s one identity. When I’m with my friends, I’m a friend, or when I visit my parents, I’m a son. *If you had to choose three identities in your life that are most important to you, what would those identities be? Why would you choose those identities?*”

Students with school membership mentioned identities activated within school more often than students without school membership in response to the above question.

These students also had patterns of responses such as phrases like “this is who I am” or “that’s not me” in response to questions about the frequency of behaviors that were either in line with a “student” identity, or opposite what an student with a “student” identity would do. Patterns of answers to questions regarding academic self-efficacy or feelings of self-esteem were also examined in order to determine whether study students possessed school membership.

I also engaged in axial coding, where I examined the contextual aspect of the student’s responses. Specifically, I focused on student responses dealing with the school’s social and structural environment, as well as student responses that indicate

student experiences outside of school. In more general terms, I focused my axial coding on internal and external to school factors that enhanced or prevented school membership. These themes allowed me to discern whether a student internalized a sense of school membership, explore a relationship between City High's social and structural environment and school membership, and detect a causal relationship between school membership and academic engagement. Appendix C presents a list of themes, such as students perceiving in-class discipline as fair or unfair, that I uncovered through participant observations, one on one interviews, and focus group interviews.

SUMMARY

This chapter examined demographic and economic trends within Central City, the city in which this dissertation is set, from the post World War II era onward in order to provide context for qualitative portion of my dissertation. As with many industrial cities in the northeastern United States, Central City has experienced a massive decrease in blue collar jobs that paid a living wage over the last fifty years. This loss of job opportunities led to a shrinking population within the city as its more affluent residents moved to the suburbs, creating an increasingly impoverished, minority population, an increase in crime, joblessness and single parenthood, and a shrinking tax base with which to confront the city's increasing needs.

These demographic and economic trends within Central City have directly affected the Central City School District, both in terms of educational policy and educational attainment. While many of the city's schools faced reconstitution in the

face of high stakes testing, low test scores, and shrinking funds, the city was embroiled with several battles with the state over school district funding and state takeover of the CCSD. Since the turn of the century, many of the district's large, comprehensive high schools have been split into Small Learning Communities. Over this time, smaller innovation high schools have been also opened, each implementing an externally developed comprehensive school reform model. Initial studies have indicated that students within the innovation high schools have performed better than students in neighborhood or comprehensive high schools in terms of attendance and test scores. One of these innovation schools, City High, is this dissertation's research setting.

City High was opened in the 2004-2005 school year, and has served a highly disadvantaged student body both educationally and economically. However, this school, using the Talent Development High School Model has seen dropout rates well below the city average over its first few years of existence. The implementation of the TDHS model and disadvantaged student population of this school created an ideal setting to examine relationships between academic environment, school membership, and academic engagement.

I examined these relationships by ethnographically studying students within City High throughout the 2007-2008 school year; specifically a group of nineteen, primarily ninth grade students with varying skill and academic engagement levels. I observed these students both inside and outside of class for a full school year in order to determine these students' levels of academic engagement. I also interviewed these students in a one on one setting, as well as a focus group setting in order to determine

whether these students possessed school membership, how they viewed the social and structural environment of City High, and how these students' viewpoints intersected with their experiences outside of school. The findings of the qualitative phase of this study are discussed in chapter ten. I now turn to an overview of the quantitative methods used in this dissertation.

CHAPTER NINE: QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

DATASET

The Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS) of 2002 is a longitudinal survey created by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a subdivision of the U.S. Department of Education. The ELS is designed to examine students as they progress through high school on to postsecondary education, the world of work or other outcomes. The ELS is a multilevel study. Researchers distributed questionnaires to students, their parents, teachers, librarians and school administrators during the student's tenth grade year. ELS researchers followed up by administering questionnaires to the same students during their twelfth grade year (2003-04), and two years beyond their expected high school graduation date (2005-06). The ELS sample is nationally representative with 16,252 students in 751 schools participating in 2002. Once study schools were selected, researchers randomly selected tenth grade students within each school, oversampling students from less numerous groups such as Native Americans (NCES 2004). With one exception, data from the initial wave of the ELS is used in this study. A categorical school-level variable examining the percentage of students receiving free or reduced price lunch was only available during the first follow-up year. However, I do not anticipate that many of the participant schools changed categories over a two year span. Variables came from two sources: the student and administrator questionnaires.²⁹ Of the 16,252 students in the first wave of the ELS, 927 students (just under 6%) were dropped due to substantial

²⁹ Certain variables in the administrator questionnaire, such as length of a typical class period and school type, were also verified by the NCES using publically available data.

amounts of missing individual-level data, for the variables used to create our measures of school membership giving us 15,325 students in our sample. Multiple imputation of missing variables for those 927 students was not possible due to these students' lack of individual level data.

Although the ELS surveyed students during their tenth grade (as opposed to ninth grade) year, other facets of this dataset made it preferable to other nationally representative educational datasets. The ELS included several questions which examined all three aspects of academic environment (student-teacher interaction, high standards, and structural aspects of school) theorized to help nurture school membership. The ELS also included a variable that, while not a perfect measure of school membership, was able to examine internal motivation towards acting in accordance to a "student" identity standard, which is as close as any question I considered for this study came to examining school membership. In addition, other available datasets that included ninth grade students were less desirable, as single waves of ninth grade data in available datasets were collected at different times during the ninth grade year. School membership data collected at the very beginning of the student's transition year may differ greatly from the data collected at the midpoint or end of the student's transition year. Ideally, I would have access to eighth grade data for my study sample that examined correlates of school membership; however this is not available in any dataset. In the absence of such data, the ELS allows for an examination the correlates and effects of school membership during a year where a sense of school membership should be established within the student.

Dependant Variables

Because this study was driven by qualitative, open-ended questions, the variables selected for this study's quantitative portion depended upon the qualitative findings. There were two relationships of interest in this study. The first model examined the contextual effects of various aspects of academic environment on the development of school membership. The second model examined linkages between school membership and academic engagement.

The primary dependent variable within the first set of models was a measure of school membership, based upon student responses to the statement "I go to school because I get a feeling of satisfaction from doing what I'm supposed to do in class". Responses ranged from one ("Strongly Disagree") through four ("Strongly Agree"). This variable was chosen from a large set of potential measures of school membership. These measures examined characteristics such as the engagement levels of students' close friends and the level of absorption students have in specific subjects. However, these variables did not specifically examine the internalization of a "student" identity – school membership, only its correlates.

The primary advantage of using this measure of school membership is that this question captured the essence of school membership: a salient student identity. By answering "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to this measure, the student indicated that he or she gained self-esteem through actions consistent with a student identity. This is a valid proxy of school membership, as self-esteem is a primary motivator of actions within salient, enacted student identities. Therefore, this measure examines whether a student identity exists in the individual, and whether this identity is salient

to the point of motivating specific behaviors. Furthermore, the words “doing what I’m supposed to do in class” in this ELS question imply that the student has internalized a socially constructed student identity standard, another critical aspect of school membership.

This measure is not without its weaknesses, however. While this measure of school membership examines internal motivation towards behaviors that encompass academic engagement, this measure does not examine social bonding between the individual and other members of the school’s social network. High levels of effective and interactional commitment are the mechanisms through which an identity becomes salient, and thus are essential components of school membership. Therefore, it bears to reason that an ideal measure of school membership would take social bonding between members of a school’s social network into account. More specifically, this measure should examine the extent and strength of social bonding between the student and other academically engaged school members with a sense of school membership. The power of a relationship between any independent variable and a dependent school membership variable may be underestimated in a model with an incomplete measure of school membership.

This measure of school membership also measures something other than school membership: academic engagement. The question I employ as a measure of school membership asks for students to respond to the statement “I go to school because I get a feeling of satisfaction from doing what I’m supposed to do in class”. This question not only examines motivation from enacting an identity, but also the behaviors that constitute the enacting of this identity: going to school and doing what

a student is supposed to do in class. This overlap between school membership and academic engagement introduces the risk of shared variance between the independent and dependent variables in a model examining academic engagement. In other words, the variable measuring school membership may predict academic engagement as an independent variable because it is, in part, academic engagement.

The primary dependent variable within the second set of models is a composite variable measuring academic engagement. This variable is comprised of seven questions examining the frequency of negative student behaviors, with responses ranging from one (“Ten or More Times”) through five (“Never”): “how many times did the following things happen to you in the first semester/term of this school year?” “I was late for school”, “I cut or skipped classes”, “I was absent from school”, “I got in trouble for not following school rules”, “I was put on in-school suspension”, “I was suspended or put on probation”, “I was transferred to another school for disciplinary reasons”.³⁰ There were few questions regarding positive student behaviors on the ELS, thus I used an absence of negative behavior as an indicator of academic engagement (or at worst, an indicator that the student is not disengaged) instead.

As with my measure of school membership, this construct of academic engagement contains strengths and weaknesses. My academic engagement variable measures the presence of several behaviors which most would consider academic disengagement. Without including these behaviors in a measure of academic engagement, students’ negative behaviors are ignored. In some cases, the presence of these negative behaviors may mitigate other measurable positive behaviors.

³⁰ The Chronbach’s Alpha of the variables making this composite measure is 0.835

Therefore, both negative and positive behaviors should ideally be included in a measure of academic engagement. Also, in the cases of attendance and behavior, asking a student about the number of times he or she was absent, or the number of suspensions he or she received serves the same purpose as examining these issues from a positive perspective (e.g., measuring the number of days attended or number of absences should still provide the same attendance rate).

On the other hand, this measure of academic engagement has the weakness of not including measures of positive behavior. The ELS did not include multiple measures of positive behavior in its first wave, necessitating my use of negative behaviors only within the composite measure of academic engagement. However, it is positive behaviors such as participation in class, participation in after-school activities, and high levels of effort that are at the root of academic engagement. It is possible for a student to not exhibit any of the negative behaviors or outcomes listed within my composite academic engagement measure, yet still be academically disengaged and indifferent to school. Without both sides of a student's in-school experience, any measure of academic engagement is not complete. As with school membership, my other dependant variable, the power of a relationship between an independent variable and academic engagement may be underestimated in a model with an incomplete measure of academic engagement. Appendix D contains descriptive statistics for both dependant variables.

Environmental Independent Variables

Within the first set of models, classroom and school level environmental factors will be the primary independent variables. These variables are based upon the two factors hypothesized to create an environment conducive to membership: high levels of student-teacher interaction and various structural aspects of the school's physical/social environment.

It should also be noted that the ELS provided a litany of potential variables that examined contextual aspects of a student's school experience. However, due to issues with colinearity between many of these contextual indicators, the variables with the most predictive power and least colinearity were included in the final models. With two exceptions, no two variables with a spearman's R above 0.22 were included in the same model.³¹ Sensitivity analyses were conducted to find the combination of variables with the greatest predictive power, as well as the greatest internal validity for composite measures. Variables measuring aspects of schooling such as teacher beliefs on students' ability to learn (teacher expectations), enforcement of school rules, and disciplinary issues school-wide were dropped from the analysis based on these restrictions; however, these variables still proved significant in many cases, or were highly correlated with significant predictors of school membership and academic engagement.

As with most datasets, the ELS did not examine pedagogy in great depth and was limited to a series of questions regarding in-class activities. However, I was able to create a composite variable that examined the extent of student-teacher interaction

³¹ The Spearman's Rs for English Language Learner and family income, and for private school and percent free-reduced price lunch were somewhat collinear, with Spearman's R's around 0.40.

within the student's math class using three questions with answers ranging from one ("Strongly Disagree") to four ("Strongly Agree"): "students get along well with teachers at this school", "teachers are interested in students", and "when I work hard on my schoolwork, teachers praise my effort".³²

In addition to student teacher interaction, I included one other student-level variable and five school-level variables in order to examine the effects of various aspects of school structure in the creation of school membership. A school safety variable based on student responses to the statement "I don't feel safe in school" (1 = "Strongly Agree", 4 = "Strongly Disagree") was included to examine the effects of a climate perceived as orderly on school membership.

The other five school structure variables all came from the version of the ELS given to a school administrator (typically, the school principal). A categorical variable for total school enrollment was included, as was a continuous variable for percentage of teachers certified in the area in which they teach is also included as a proxy for teacher quality.

A composite variable for facilities quality and material scarcity was included, based on administrator responses to the following five questions, each with a range of one ("Not at All") through four ("A Lot"): "In your school, how much of the learning of 10th graders is hindered by..." "poor condition of buildings", "poor heating, cooling, or lighting systems", "lack of instructional space", "lack of computers", "lack of text books and basic supplies".³³

³² The Chronbach's Alpha of the variables making this composite measure is 0.878

³³ The Chronbach's Alpha of the variables making this composite measure is 0.919

Finally, dummy variables for block scheduling and private schools were included. The dummy variable for block scheduling was based on an administrator question about the typical length of classes at his or her school. Answers at or above ninety minutes are considered block scheduling. Although block scheduling was not initially examined as a structural factor that engendered school membership, students positively characterized this aspect of City High, and the block schedule seemed to allow for greater amounts of social bonding within the classroom. For the private school dummy variable, any type of private school was given a value of one, while any type of public school was given a zero. Appendix E contains descriptive statistics for all environmental independent variables.

Control Variables

I also placed a set of demographic control variables within both models. This included dummy variables for gender and race (with African-Americans and males as comparison groups). In addition, I included a dummy variable for being an English Language Learner as well as a dummy variable for student age in order to identify students who were more than one year overage for their grade. A categorical variable for family income was also included. Furthermore, a dummy variable that examined students' perceived parental expectation was included, based on the question "what does your mother think is the most important thing for you to do right after high school?" "Go to College" was coded as one in this variable, while all other answers were coded as zero. At the school level, a categorical control variable for the percent of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch was included to examine the effect

of living within a poor area of membership formation. The percent free or reduced price lunch variable was only available for the first follow-up survey, two years after the initial wave of ELS. Appendix F contains descriptive statistics for all control variables.

The second model, which examined academic engagement, utilized the same key independent and control variables as the first set of models; however, the second set of models also included a second step in which the model was created with school membership as an independent variable in order to examine the strength of the effects of environmental factors on academic engagement with and without school membership as a mediating factor.

RESEARCH METHODS

Before I was able to employ any analytic models to the ELS data, it was necessary to impute missing data using multiple imputation (MI) techniques due to a significant amount of missing data for the school membership variables. In addition, the statistical techniques needed for analysis required no missing data. In order to impute missing data, I used the “ice” command in STATA’s software package. This command allowed me to create five datasets, each with imputed values for all missing variables. These imputations were created using regression modeling for a student’s missing data based on all valid observations of individual and school level variables used in the school membership and academic engagement models for a given student. The “ice” command selected variables in random order for this imputation, and future imputations for variables are based in part on the newly imputed values for a variable

that has already been imputed. Five datasets were created, each with a different order of imputing variables, and thus each with slightly different imputed values. For categorical variables, imputed variables outside of the range of valid observations were recoded to fit into the highest or lowest possible category. I allowed the regression models to impute non-integers for categorical variables as long as they fell within the range of valid responses. The differences in group means before and after imputation were minimal for all variables in which MI was necessary. Appendix G contains descriptive statistics before and after MI, as well as the percent of cases imputed for all variables. The five multiply imputed datasets were then combined in the final analyses, giving us five observations for each of the 15,325 students studied.

Once the ELS dataset no longer had missing values for any variables included in the study, I created bivariate descriptive statistics that examined the mean value of the dependent variable for students with a given value of an independent variable. This was done as a way to gather initial evidence of a relation between my key independent variables, as well as a way to help judge the substantive magnitude of any associations between the independent and dependent variables within my HLM equations.

I then employed hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) techniques within both the model examining school membership as an outcome, as well as the models examining academic engagement as an outcome. Using a multilevel technique such as HLM allows for a more sophisticated analysis of individual data that is nested within larger structures without the danger of aggregation bias (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). Treating variables, such as school size, as individual level factor within an

ordinary least squares or logistic regression model is likely to violate the assumption of independence of error terms, as errors would be correlated within schools if a school-level factor was correlated to an outcome variable such as school membership or academic engagement (e.g., aggregation bias). If a systematic error exists, the validity of the regression coefficients is compromised. On the other hand, only including school-level variables would severely limit my ability to examine student-level variation, something that is critical to understanding concepts such as school membership and academic engagement.

In this study, there are variables at two levels: the individual (student) level, and the school level (through administrator data). All HLM models created were random effects models and all independent variables were grand mean centered. Because student appeared multiple times in the HLM model, robust standard errors were used.

Both the models with school membership as the dependent variable, and those with academic engagement as the dependent variable were performed in two steps. The first step was to create an ANOVA, or null model that examined the outcome variables without controls in order to divide the variation in each model into two parts: the proportion of variance that was between students within schools and the proportion of variance that was systematically between schools (called “interclass correlation”). While both the percentage of total variance within schools and between schools are of interest, it is the systematic variance between schools (called contextual effects) which display the magnitude (or most of the magnitude, as we will

see) of the effects of school environment on school membership and academic engagement.

The second step of each model was to include both the environmental and control independent variables into the model in order to determine the specific relations between academic environment, school membership, and academic engagement. In the model examining school membership as the dependent variable, this was done in a single equation that included all environmental and control variables. In the model examining academic engagement, the HLM was done in a stepwise manner. First, all independent variables with the exception of school membership were included within the HLM equation. In the second step, school membership was also included.

Figure two displays the HLM equation for the model examining the school membership. The following equation was used for continuous variables, and categorical variables with several categories. Multilevel logistic regression models were used for binary variables. Within this HLM notation, Y_{ij} refers to the outcome for observation i in unit j . β corresponds to the coefficient (with β_{0j} as the level one intercept), while r_{ij} refers to the residual term specific to observation i in unit j , and the u refers to a residual term specific to unit j (our school level). Because the level two variables are grand mean centered, γ refers to the grand mean across schools.

FIGURE TWO: HLM EQUATION FOR MODEL WITH SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP AS THE DEPENDANT VARIABLE

Level One

$$\begin{aligned}
 Y_{ij} = & \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} (\text{School Membership})_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_{2j} (\text{White})_{ij} + \beta_{3j} (\text{Asian})_{ij} + \beta_{4j} (\text{Latino})_{ij} + \beta_{5j} (\text{Other Race})_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_{6jk} (\text{Overage})_{ij} + \beta_{7jk} (\text{Female})_{ij} + \beta_{8jk} (\text{ELL})_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_{9jk} (\text{Family Income})_{ij} + \beta_{10jk} (\text{Parental Expectation})_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_{11jk} (\text{Student-Teacher Interaction})_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_{12jk} (\text{Feels Safe})_{ij} + r_{ij}
 \end{aligned}$$

Level Two

$$\begin{aligned}
 \beta_{0j} &= \gamma_{00k} + u_{0k} \\
 \beta_{1j} &= \gamma_{01j} \\
 \beta_{2j} &= \gamma_{02j} \\
 \beta_{3j} &= \gamma_{03j} \\
 \beta_{4j} &= \gamma_{04j} \\
 \beta_{5j} &= \gamma_{05j} \\
 \beta_{6j} &= \gamma_{06j} \\
 \beta_{7j} &= \gamma_{07j} \\
 \beta_{8j} &= \gamma_{08j} \\
 \beta_{9j} &= \gamma_{09j} \\
 \beta_{10j} &= \gamma_{10j} \\
 \beta_{11j} &= \gamma_{11j} \\
 \beta_{12j} &= \gamma_{12j}
 \end{aligned}$$

Figure three examines the HLM equation for the models with academic engagement as the dependant variable. For estimates examining the academic engagement outcome variable, the following equation was used for continuous variables, and categorical variables with several categories. Multilevel logistic regression models were again used for binary variables. The model below applies to the second step of the stepwise HLM equation. The notation in the first model is

identical, save for the school membership variable. The HLM notation in this model remains the same as the model examining school membership.

FIGURE THREE: FULL HLM EQUATION FOR MODEL WITH ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AS THE DEPENDANT VARIABLE

Level One

$$\begin{aligned}
 Y_{ij} = & \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} (\textit{Academic Engagement})_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_{2j} (\textit{White})_{ij} + \beta_{3j} (\textit{Asian})_{ij} + \beta_{4j} (\textit{Latino})_{ij} + \beta_{5j} (\textit{Other Race})_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_{6jk} (\textit{Overage})_{ij} + \beta_{7jk} (\textit{Female})_{ij} + \beta_{8jk} (\textit{ELL})_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_{9jk} (\textit{Family Income})_{ij} + \beta_{10jk} (\textit{Parental Expectation})_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_{11jk} (\textit{Student-Teacher Interaction})_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_{12jk} (\textit{Feels Safe})_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_{13jk} (\textit{School Membership})_{ij} + r_{ij}
 \end{aligned}$$

Level Two

$$\begin{aligned}
 \beta_{0j} &= \gamma_{00k} + u_{0k} \\
 \beta_{1j} &= \gamma_{01j} \\
 \beta_{2j} &= \gamma_{02j} \\
 \beta_{3j} &= \gamma_{03j} \\
 \beta_{4j} &= \gamma_{04j} \\
 \beta_{5j} &= \gamma_{05j} \\
 \beta_{6j} &= \gamma_{06j} \\
 \beta_{7j} &= \gamma_{07j} \\
 \beta_{8j} &= \gamma_{08j} \\
 \beta_{9j} &= \gamma_{09j} \\
 \beta_{10j} &= \gamma_{10j} \\
 \beta_{11j} &= \gamma_{11j} \\
 \beta_{12j} &= \gamma_{12j} \\
 \beta_{13j} &= \gamma_{13j}
 \end{aligned}$$

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I described the data and methods I employed to examine relationships between academic environment, school membership, and academic engagement across a nationally representative set of students and high schools. I utilized the Educational Longitudinal Survey of 2002 in this dissertation. The ELS was the best available dataset to test these relationships for a number of reasons. Primary among these are the multitude of questions within the ELS that allowed me to include measures of student-teacher interaction levels, several structural aspects of school such as school safety and block scheduling, school membership, and behavior consistent with academic engagement within my hierarchical linear models. While my measures of school membership and academic engagement did not capture every aspect of these constructs, the variables I used were the best available within a nationally representative dataset.

I performed HLM techniques in analyzing the ELS data, enabling me to examine the effects of individual and school-level factors without the danger of aggregation bias. This method also allowed me to disaggregate individual and school level variance within the hierarchical linear models. I employed two sets of HLM equations, one with school membership as the outcome variable, and a second, stepwise equation with academic engagement as the outcome variable. Although this analysis was limited by an imperfect measure of school membership, as well as lack of pre-ninth grade baseline data on school membership through which we could examine the effects of ninth grade social and academic environment through growth models, the HLM techniques did generate relevant findings, which I present in

chapter eleven. Now that I have examined the quantitative and qualitative methods of this study in depth, chapter ten reveals the results of the qualitative phase of my dissertation research.

CHAPTER TEN: QUALITATIVE RESULTS

PROLOGUE: BECOMING PART OF CITY HIGH

“Who’s the white guy?” Without fail, this was the question both study teachers were greeted with as students filed into the classroom, took off their earphones and loudly greeted students they knew from their neighborhood during my first day of observing classes at City High. I introduced myself as a graduate student at the University of Maryland interested in studying what made students want to come to City High, and what made students not want to come to school. I also let them know that I would be around a lot this year as a classroom assistant, and if they needed any help at all in class that I would be there. The first week was filled with nervous looks and lots of “excuse mes” and “sirs”, from the students who were brave enough to ask me a question in the first place (and these students would only ask if the study teacher was busy helping another student). I was deeply concerned that I would never get through to these students and connect with them on anything other than a superficial level. After all, I was an outsider, someone who never set foot into their section of the city until I visited their school, someone who dressed, looked and sounded different from anyone most of these students had met that wasn’t an authority figure. How was this ever going to work?

As it turned out, all that I needed to do was help the students. It was just that simple. There was never any sort of breakthrough moment where students suddenly gravitated towards me or began to take an interest in my work (or, take an interest in the \$10 students received for participating in interviews). It happened gradually as

the students realized that “Mr. B” knew what he was talking about and he could help you understand what the teachers were talking about. The “sirs” and the “excuse mes” gradually became “hey Mr. B, can you come over here?”, sometimes to ask a question about class work, sometimes to ask me about things like who my favorite rapper is or what the University of Maryland is like. It didn’t matter that I couldn’t necessarily relate to their life experiences; as long as I was considered a legitimate source of knowledge, students were willing to open up to me.

At the same time that students started to warm up to me, I noticed something else. Students also were saying “hi” to me in the hallway. Not just students in the study classes, but other students as well, many of whom I’d never met, but knew me by name. I thought this was remarkable enough on its own, but before I got too big of a head, I noticed that this wasn’t just happening to me. My colleagues at the Center for Social Organization of Schools, many of whom had not been to the school more than once or twice got the same sort of treatment from many students. I realized that these students were welcoming guests into a place they considered their home; something they owned and felt responsible for. This realization inspired me to set out to find out why these students felt as though City High was a second (or in some cases, first) home and why every student in City High did not feel the same way. As the school year neared its midpoint, I recruited students that I had been observing all year with a wide range of effort levels and academic achievement in order to examine the differences in how they perceive themselves and experience their world both inside and outside of school.

As I set out to find students willing to share their experiences inside and outside of school with me, I found one of my most difficult tasks was one I had expected to be rather simple. I spoke to two study teachers about categorizing a selection of their students into one of the four categories based on two axes: academic engagement and motivation. What I found was that teachers had no problem selecting students who had high levels of motivation. However, teachers had a much more difficult time finding students who they believed were not motivated. Given the high dropout rate of this school district, particularly within the neighborhood in which City High's students primarily resided, this was no small feat. Despite being a relatively small group, the subset of students that were not motivated, highly disengaged in school, attended school rarely, and often transferred out of City High quickly were also of great interest to me. There seemed to be very little middle ground. While this contributed to an orderly, positive school environment, or a "culture of success", it also made finding, selecting, and scheduling interviews with disengaged students difficult.

After expanding my selection of study classes and rescheduling several interviews, I successfully recruited seven students that were disengaged and twelve students that were highly engaged according to their teachers to participate in this study. Although the students were selected for the study based on their observed skill and motivation levels, I ultimately classified study students as possessing or not possessing school membership based upon their one on one and group interviews and my own classroom observations. Only one student, Spade, had high skill and

motivation levels according to initial observations, but was subsequently classified as not having school membership after being interviewed.³⁴

In order to the three research questions of this dissertation, the remainder of this chapter is broken into four parts. The first part answers the question of whether there is a relationship between school membership and academic engagement by examining students' most salient self-expressed identities, which was the primary criterion in classifying students as possessing or lacking school membership. This section shows how behavior (what I consider academic engagement) was only the first, most apparent layer of difference between students with membership and those lacking it. Peeling back this external layer of difference revealed the root of the differences in these behaviors: students' most salient self-identities.

While this study may not be able identify every causative factor of school membership and how these factors interplay, the remaining three parts of this chapter examine relations between school membership and student perceptions of themselves and their environment. The second part of this chapter explores the process of school membership formation and the ways in which school membership creates academic engagement through examining student perceptions of themselves in terms of self-esteem, locus of control, academic self-efficacy, and post-school aspirations. According to identity theory, these aspects of self-perception should serve as motivators for student behavior consistent with student engagement or disengagement. These aspects of self-perception also allowed me to verify students' school membership levels, as these aspects of self-perception are a product of an

³⁴ Spade was a senior on the debate team, and seemed to have a case of "senioritis", as he expressed little interest in school activities outside of debate.

individual's self-identity. The last two sections of this chapter examine student perceptions of their social and structural environment inside and outside of school in order to compare and contrast student perceptions of these two environments by levels of school membership and answer the question of whether there are social or structural environments that aid in creating or maintaining school membership.

PART ONE: STUDENT IDENTITIES, IN THEIR OWN WORDS

After analyzing twenty-four interviews with nineteen students, it was clear that the primary difference between students with high motivation levels and those with low motivation levels was a highly developed, salient self-identity as a student. In other words, highly motivated students possessed and embodied school membership. All but one of the students whom I interviewed that teachers classified as high motivation answered questions about their self-identity and behaved in a way that demonstrated that they had salient student identities. All student responses are from their one-on-one interviews unless otherwise noted by a (G):

Nicole: My favorite teacher would have to be Ms. Davis for the simple fact that I love history, I love politics, I love government so that makes me who I am.

Chris: What identities are the most important to you?

Ron: The first identity...is my identity as a student and that's important because...being able to learn is the most important tool that you could ever take with you in the world.

High skill levels were not essential for students to have a well-developed student identity, as five study students who entered high school with a C average or below in eighth grade had developed or developing a senses of school membership:³⁵

Bubbles (G): It's not just about the honor role, I want to do my best at anything that I do no matter what it is, if I don't feel like it or if I do feel like it.

Tweety: One of my identities is being a student, and that identity is important because I have to get out of here. I can't act like I act in the street in here and expect to pass.

Nine of the eleven students with school membership answered nearly all of my questions in a manner consistent with school membership. The other two students answered the more than half of my questions in a manner that indicated that the student possessed school membership. My examination of these students' academic engagement levels through year-long in-school observations, observations by the students' teachers, and student attendance records were also consistent with these classifications.

Through interview responses, classroom observations and examinations of student grades, attendance records, and disciplinary records, I classified eight study students as lacking school membership. Students without school membership were much more likely than students with school membership to receive a suspension for violent or insubordinate behavior, be absent from school, fail one or more courses during the study year, or be disengaged in class according to my own and teacher observations. At the same time, these students were also much less likely than students with school membership to prioritize academic goals or activities:

³⁵ Eighth grade scores were self-reported.

Chris: How would it make you feel personally if you made the honor role this semester?

Rock: I feel regular because I don't really care as long as I pass school with good enough grades to get where I gotta go.

Chris: What identities are most important to you?

Flair: At school, I'm hyperactive, don't listen, and insubordinate...if it ain't the way I want it to be, then I ain't gonna do it – or if I do it I be doing it my way.

Crystal: The friendships that I got we'll laugh and joke at each other like ha ha you failed two classes or something, a lot of my friends do that...I like this school because most school start all early, this (one) don't.

Wayne: My main motivation to come to school is my education and then it's the girls. The girls is my motivation for real, that's why I come to school.

All seven of the study students who I classified as being academically disengaged did not possess a salient student identity.

If these students' student identity was not highly salient, or non-existent, what identities were salient among this group? The most common identities that students in the low motivation category had were a "street" or "out of school" identity, "themselves" as three students called it. When prompted, these students described these identities as being enacted "in the street", where several students boasted that they did whatever they wanted to, including selling drugs, fighting, or other types of anti-social behavior.

Chris: If you had to choose two identities that you deal with on a pretty regular basis...tell me what those identities are and why those are most important?

Darnell: Darnell inside of school and Darnell outside of school...Darnell outside of school is wild and he does what he wants basically.

Ray: The first one is the school one. Like I got to change the way I act on the streets to the way I get in school. Like, if I'm with my home boys or something, we talking all inappropriate or whatever when I get in school I got to change the language.

Chris: (later in the interview) It's tough to get a job in this city.

Ray: It is, if you try to, like if I got a job I always try for a long time, I was on the computer from the time I got home from school until 10, 11 o'clock at night filling out applications...only thing left is to sell drugs or whatever because ain't nobody going to give you no money for free unless you do something for them, What are you going to do with \$10 (from a minimum wage job), you can't even get no shoes. It's all about the fashions or whatever that make me want to sell.

Crystal: I've gotten in fights in middle school, I got chased in the subway by some girls, if that went on in (the neighborhood where Crystal lives), that would get took care of.

Flair: Mr. H (the assistant principal) says he's from Robinson Street. Now that's two blocks from where I live. Now the way I act and the way he acts, nothing alike, no comparison, so he needs to stop acting like he's hood (a slang equivalent to a thug or "hard" person) because he's not and he doesn't fit that character at all.

Flair, who had perhaps the longest list of suspensions of any student at City High, described the one teacher he seemed to connect with as his "thug motivation", taking a line from a popular rap song. However, by using this terminology, he also insinuates that he sees himself as a "thug".

FIGURE FOUR: LIST OF STUDENT ALIASES, BY SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP LEVEL AND TEACHER CLASSIFIED SKILL LEVEL

Has School Membership		Lacks School Membership	
High Skill	Low Skill	High Skill	Low Skill
"Mikey"	"Bubbles"	"Darnell"	"Crystal"
"Nicole"	"Lynee"	"Rock"	"Day Day"
"Raspberry"	"Pooh Bear"	"Spade"	"Flair"
"Ron"	"T"	"Wayne"	"Ray"
"Sero"	"Tweety"		
"Zalrrah"			

PART TWO: SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP AND STUDENT SELF-PERCEPTIONS

The rest of this chapter attempts to answer the question: are there relationships between school membership levels and the ways in which students perceive themselves and the world around them? My search for correlates of school membership uncovered several differences between students with school membership and students without school membership. These differences are subdivided into three areas: perceptions of self, perceptions of in-school environment, and perceptions of out of school environment.

Although I observed student behavior and analyzed student academic records in order to triangulate my interview findings, skeptics may still point out that a student speaking about an identity and a student enacting an identity are two different things (debate about the roles of language in identity formation aside). In order to address this issue, I also was attentive in my coding to internal motivators of identity formation. One of the fundamental theorems of identity theory is that individuals experience an internal motivation such as self-esteem or self-verification for acting in accordance to the identity standard of an activated identity. This is why humans actively seek opportunities to enact their most salient identities. Therefore, students who have a sense of school membership should experience some type of internal motivation to enact their student identities. This brings to light four psychological characteristics I observed within every student with school membership: self-esteem, an internal locus of control, high aspirations and self-efficacy.

Self-Esteem and Self-Verification

Students that possessed school membership also clearly possessed at least one of two types of motivation for identity activation: self-esteem and self-verification.

All eleven students who displayed school membership indicated that they received a boost of self-esteem from acting according to how a student is expected to act at City

High:

Chris: What kinds of things go on inside of school that make you want to try harder in class?

Nicole: ...a lot of people know me and they know me because I came to this school as a good student, I came in taking higher courses and people really like that about me.

Ron: It's the encouragement the teachers give you and the encouragement your friends give you. That's what I think motivates me the most...the teachers and my friends, the way they push me to do better and encourage me to do better, that motivates me.

Pooh Bear (G): For me it's a lot of activities that go on in school and if you're not doing the right thing you're not going to get picked...so I want to do good anyway, it makes me feel happy.

Zalrrah (G): I know I'm passing; you should see my grades!

In addition, four of the students who had school membership also answered questions in a way that indicated their actions were motivated by a need to maintain consistency between themselves and the identity standard of "student":

Chris: Are there things going on inside the school on a daily basis that make you not want to try harder?

Sero: Sometimes here, like the insults from other people or other students...I feel like if I try too hard they are going to call me a nerd...but then I know I have to be me so I'm just going to do what I do and they're going to do what they do

One of the things I found most interesting during my classroom visits occurred whenever Mr. S, the ninth grade study teacher asked a difficult question and nobody raised their hand. Often, one or two of my study students with low skill levels would look back at me for a clue to help answer of the question. If the question covered something I had worked on with the student, I would discreetly remind the student of the mathematical rule needed to solve the problem. This often led to the student figuring out the answer. Without fail, the student, some of whom would otherwise raise their hand only if they wanted to use the restroom, would raise their hand, many times calling out loud for the teacher to call on them. It seemed that no matter what the skill or motivation level of the student, the student felt a boost of self-esteem from demonstrating the ability to successfully answer a teacher's question.

However, for students with low skill levels that lacked school membership, these experiences were few and far between. This is perhaps why these students had more salient "street", or other non-student identities, as low skill students may have found acting according to the identity standard of a "street" or other non-student identity was a more accessible source of self-esteem. All four low skill students without school membership demonstrated that low self-esteem in terms of academics:

Flair: I'm not one of the most organized people...I've got a bad memory.

Day Day: I just don't use my mind all the time, like sometimes (it) just be that I'm tired of being here, things like that. But then my mind ain't wandering in the right way.

At the same time, six of the eight students without school membership mentioned at some point in their interviews that they did whatever they wanted to do in "the streets", or in the case of Flair, that he had a great deal of power because of his violent friends who would assault someone if he asked them to.

Locus of Control

Every student who had school membership discussed their in-school performance and future goals in a way that indicated that they believed they were in control of their future outcomes. In other words, these students exhibited an internal locus of control:

Chris: On a scale of 1 to 10, if you had to evaluate yourself, how motivated do you think you are as far as being a student and why would you give yourself that grade?

Lynee: I think I'm motivated like an eight...because in my family I'm gonna be the first one to graduate high school because everyone else in my family either dropped out or got kicked out and never went back, so it's like I'll be the first one to graduate high school and stuff like that.

Pooh Bear, Zalrrah & Bubbles (G): I'm gonna graduate from this school someday.

Nicole: In school I have my own identity because I don't like to be known as the girl that hangs with this person. I want to be myself, like, I have my own name and I have my own personality and I know who Nicole is inside and I know how she operates so it's like I don't want to be a part of that person who hangs with this crowd or person who hangs with that crowd or do certain things...

While discussing their most important identities, students who exhibited school membership often characterized their favorite teachers as encouraging or causing an internal locus of control. Several students noted that their teachers helped them believe that goals such as passing courses or going to college were within their reach as long as they put in the necessary effort:

Raspberry: Mr. S, he makes (going to college) seem easy, like you could do it without having you stress over it, he makes it seem easy. Like, all the other teachers do that too.

Bubbles (G): I communicate with my favorite teacher, Mr. S, I communicate with him well cause like, you never could go wrong. There's no way you could ever, you can't get no bad grade on no test or no assignment if you ask for help if you don't understand because he explains everything.

Six of the eight students without school membership exhibited an external locus of control. Students without school membership often expressed the feeling that several teachers at City High did not like them and had prematurely formed a negative impression of them. Because the way they believed certain teachers perceived them, these students felt that it was hopeless to put any effort into these classes:

Chris: Are there things going on here that make you not want to try hard in class or not want to be here in the first place?

Darnell (G): When I have a teacher that constantly, constantly not helping me and make me feel like I'm wasting my time doing work.

Chris: Talk about your least favorite teacher. How do you feel that teacher communicates with you?

Ray (G): In Ms. W's class I be clowning around a lot, I like I don't want to hear this, she ain't even going to help me with it. She not going to help me, well, I might as well not even try to do it.

I should note that the majority of ninth grade study students felt this way about one teacher in particular:

Chris: What grade would you give you least favorite teacher, and why?

Pooh Bear (G): I would give Mr. C an "F", because it seem like you never succeed in his class, like you can't, it's like he always do something to make you mad.

However, students with school membership seemed to confine these attitudes to that single class, whereas students without school membership tended to characterize several of their teachers as disliking them and believe that most or all classroom efforts were futile.

Aspirations

Going hand in hand with an internal locus of control was clear, high aspirations in terms of occupational and educational attainment. The academic environment at City High was very encouraging of high academic aspirations. Mr. S' classroom was lined with books about taking the SAT and applying to college. Also, acceptance letters from colleges lined the ninth grade hallway celebrating the college admissions of several students from City High's class of 2008; the school's first graduating class. While no students explicitly mentioned these aspects of their academic environment (perhaps this was taken for granted), City High's environment clearly expressed the high expectations and standards its students would be held to.

Of the eleven study students with school membership, eight believed that in a few years they would be employed in a field that required a college education such as psychology, government, journalism, and medicine. Students who displayed these aspirations described them in great detail:

Nicole: I like politics and government. My cousin, she works downtown and I really liked her job I had went to work with her...and I had fun. I said you better move over because I'm going to be the next...cause that's her, she like the leader over her whole section and she also has these other programs in her group called leadership programs and I just love the way she operates, I love her job.

Tweety: In ten years from now, hopefully, I will be working at the hospital as an OBGYN because that's what I really want to do. I love babies, I would like to deliver them, I think it's so fascinating delivering a baby...

This finding supports to the research of Mortimer and Bandura linking academic performance, self-efficacy and academic aspirations.

Students without school membership had a predominant sense that their future included a blue collar job or a life of crime, if they had any clear sense of where they would be in five years. Of the eight students without school membership, only one displayed a desire to go to college or obtain a job one day that required a college education. Two students without school membership spoke of their current involvement in drug or gang activity, predicting that they would continue this after they leave school:

Chris: You were saying that (selling drugs) kind of makes kids not care about school so much because if you're getting money then...

Ray: Yeah they be like all the teachers be like you need knowledge, knowledge is everything, for real, you'll be like oh, I ain't gotta worry, I can sell (drugs) for the rest of my life as far as I care. I'm going to make more money selling than working.

Four of the other five students aspired to jobs that required only a high school education, with one student responding "I don't know" when asked about where he saw himself in five or ten years. Six of the eight students without school membership also spoke of their desired jobs in very abstract terms, and required much more prompting on my part to discuss their aspirations than students who strongly exhibited possessing school membership:

Chris: Where do you see yourself in the future after you leave this school?

Flair: I don't know

Chris: You're still in the 9th grade, you don't have to have a life plan at this point.

Flair: (after a long pause) I want to be an architect. I like drawing. I can draw really well.

Students who did not possess school membership also spoke about receiving respect from peers and teachers as a primary goal both inside and outside of school. The goal of respect from peers is in line with a "street" identity, as case studies of students living in high crime areas have demonstrated that respect is paramount, and often necessary for survival in these environments (Dance 2002). Seven of the eight students without a sense of school membership repeatedly mentioned the fact that some of their least favorite teachers did not show them respect, and that they would not show a teacher respect if they felt disrespected:

Chris: If you had to choose two identities that you deal with on a pretty regular basis...tell me what those identities are and why those are most important?

Crystal: At school I'm just Crystal, if you don't show me respect, I can't show you none.

Rock (G): Sometimes like, teachers that don't want to have a student just make a student not want to come to school, like if you want respect you have to give it back.

Chris: What is your least favorite teacher doing that to you is being a bad communicator?

Darnell: All she doing is get smart and talk to us like our opinion and our points don't matter at all. She seems as though she just going to say what to do, when to do it, and you're supposed to jump to do it.

Ray: I feel the same way.

Self-Efficacy

A fourth psychological commonality among students with school membership was a sense of academic self-efficacy. Every student with school membership also displayed a strong sense of academic self-efficacy:

Chris: On that first morning when you woke up and went to school, were you worried at all about the work?

Zalrrah (G): Like I didn't even want to come, I was so worried about it, but it's easy, like it's too easy.

Mikey (G): I didn't know if I was going to be ready for the (state-wide standardized test), but when I glanced at it looked like it was easy enough that most of us...could just take it.

In several cases, students who internalized school membership indicated that one or more of their teachers played a role in their gaining confidence in their ability to handle the demands of high school and fulfill their life goals. These teachers used

varying teaching styles to meet this goal. One teacher, Mr. J, who ninth grade study students unanimously characterized as very caring, helped instill this self-efficacy in students through caring interaction. The ninth grade study teacher, Mr. S, who ninth grade study students unanimously characterized as very knowledgeable, instilled a sense of self-efficacy in his students through daily class time spent on mastering specific skills:

Bubbles (G): I communicate with my favorite teacher, Mr. S, I communicate with him well cause you never could go wrong. There's not way you could ever, you can't get no bad grade on no test or no assignment if you ask for help or you don't understand because he explains everything.

Chris: Think about your favorite teacher you've had this year, you can say who if you want, but you don't have to...

Pooh Bear (G): Mr. S is my best teacher because it's like you need help in his class you can always depend on getting help and you don't have to worry about you not understand nothing like at the end of the day when you go home you won't have to worry about "oh I never learned this in class" because he'll make sure you know it.

Chris: For your favorite teacher, what grade you would give your teacher and why?

T (G): I would say I give my science teacher, Mr. J a 100 because, it's a lot of reasons why, like he stood up there and he talked to us and told us the right and the wrong things we shouldn't do...and how we shouldn't give up and how we should just try and never let somebody else come in between you and your education because you're there for you to have to strive for the best and do what you have to do and don't let nobody else bring you down...so I really like Mr. J. (All my teachers) teach us and they have one on one conversations with us that help us, like build our confidence up about us being in school.

While every student with school membership exhibited a strong sense of self-efficacy, some students went so far as to indicate that a sense of self-efficacy helped to create school membership:

Zalrrah (G): I used to hate math, (now) I could not wait to get to second period when I come to school. Like, I love math because I understand it.

Chris: If a teacher is really setting a good example in class, is that really going to affect how hard kids work in school or are there going to be other things either in school or outside of school that you think matter more?

Nicole: I think it does help them with school and out of school because when you continually practice something, you get better at it and unknowingly you do it, you reflect it wherever you go so if like, somebody wants excellent from you they always gonna practice the excellence then it's not like a practice any more it's a habit.

In contrast, students who did not have school membership also had much lower levels of academic self-efficacy in comparison to students possessing school membership:

Chris: What happens in school that makes you not want to try hard in your classes?

Flair: It's just sometimes the work...it just keep piling up, too much. I'm not one of the most organized people...I've got a bad memory.

Day Day: I'm smart I just don't use it all the time

Chris: What happens in school that makes you want to try hard in your classes?

Ray: Well, I be sad when people get better grades than me, I be like, man did that make me mad and I know I did bad then.

At times, these students clearly linked a lack of self-efficacy with behaviors that oppose a "student" identity (e.g., academic disengagement):

Chris: What kinds of things are going on outside of school that makes you not want to come to school?

Day Day: Not really too much of nothing...if I know we had to take a test and I wasn't there (during the study session), I wouldn't go because I know I'm going to fail it anyway; even trying it would make me look like I'm stupid because I wasn't

there, looking like I didn't know what I was doing so that would make me not come to school too.

Wayne (G): If you make somebody feel like they're dumb then they ain't going to want to try.

One limitation of this part of my study is that I was not able to obtain students' academic and behavioral records from previous years from the CCSD. Instead, I was forced to rely on student self-reports of their previous academic and behavioral performance. By extension, I had to rely on student self-reports that their academic or behavioral performances improved (or didn't improve) during the study year in comparison to previous years.

PART THREE: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF IN-SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Although all of the study students attended City High and many shared the same block schedule, students with school membership viewed the social and structural environment of school in radically different ways than students without school membership.

Social Networks

Students with school membership perceived the social environment of City High in dramatically different ways than students without school membership. Students with school membership perceived City High as a home, and developed high levels of commitment to teachers:

T: This school sticks together as a family and I really really love this school and it's like you can go to any teacher, adult, administrator and talk to them about any problem that you have and they will sit down and talk to you because they understand and that shows you how they care and how they love you because they're taking their time out to talk to you about a probably you have in your life and make you feel better so you won't feel that no one in the school cares.

Nicole: It's a nice environment, that's why I continue to go to this school no matter what, it's like you can't find this environment in every school, and the principal, he knows you by name, the vice-principals know you by name, the teachers know you by name, it just make you feel good. Instead of you just being amongst the people in school, you *are* the people in school. You make that number, so it's like you really feel good and you feel special about that because you don't get that all the time...

All eleven students with school membership indicated that they felt close to at least three of their four teachers and these teachers truly cared about their well being. In seven cases, students felt that all four of their teachers cared about their well being and put forth a great amount of effort on their behalf.

Students with school membership consciously acted in ways that adhered to a "student" identity standard. When discussing aspects of City High that made them want to come to school, six of these students indicated that a "student" identity standard was actively created by teachers:

Chris: When you see teachers asking you questions...do you think it's just Mr. J or are other teachers caring a little about that?

T: Ms. H really cares...she likes to be realistic with you. She don't ask you why, why you just don't. She just say "why you don't come to school, why don't you want to do your work, why you making yourself seem like this", cause if you do something like that, then everybody is going to look at you as a bad person or a student that don't like to do your work because you act the way you act or you do the things you do because your grades tell it all.

Pooh Bear (G): I communicate with Mr. S well and he communicates with me well, like if I come in there or if I'm off track a little bit and he know that's not how it's supposed to be, he don't yell at you, he asks you to step outside if you need to, he

don't yell at you like get out...and I never saw Mr. S have a bad day either, he doesn't show that side of him. If he has a bad day or when we come in there not right the whole class, he don't yell at just he just says "get it together". That's it. He don't yell or nothing, I think that's the way you talk to him because if you don't get no student's respect they're not going to give you respect.

Quotes and observations of students without school membership paint a picture of City High's teachers that is the polar opposite of the descriptions shared by students with school membership. While five of the eight students without school membership mentioned a close relationship with any of their four teachers, all five of these students felt close to just one teacher. In these cases, a close relationship with a single teacher was not enough to foster a sense of school membership within disengaged students, as their positive feelings towards teachers ended when they exited the classroom door. In addition, all eight students without school membership believed that at least two of their four teachers did not like them, did not care about their welfare as a student, or simply were not good teachers:

Chris: How well do you feel that your favorite and least favorite teachers communicate with you, like how are they good or bad at communicating?

Ray (G): Ms. W, she's not trying hard because she just gives us the work and she she's like do it or whatever. She don't be trying to help you out or whatever, she don't be trying to give you extra credit or nothing.

Darnell (G): All Ms. W doing is get smart and talk to us like our opinion and our point don't matter at all. Everyone tries to do their best in school but they feel as though the teachers...give them too much work and like some teacher make their kids not want to come to school because they always want to argue with the kids.

Day Day: Mr. C will only listen once every blue moon...you really have to catch an attitude at him and fuss him out for him to pay attention to you. He make it like certain peoples got the right of way (in class).

Ray: These teachers, they keep on you (about) talking or whatever...the whole class can be talking, but they say your name.

Consequently, these students did not take time or effort to interact on a meaningful level with their teachers and develop any sort of commitment:

Chris: How well do you feel that your favorite and least favorite teachers communicate with you, like how are they good or bad at communicating?

Flair: Mr. C try to talk to you after class, but he really doesn't say too much. Ms. H, if she likes you like that, she'll try to talk to you, but with me she tried to talk to me a couple of times and it didn't work...I listen with Mr. J; I may look like I'm listening with other teachers but I'm not.

Chris: What happens when Ms. W asks you to be quiet? Not you personally, but the class?

Ray: We just be doing whatever we want to do. We talk and all, she just say your name or whatever and you'll forget she even said it. You finish what you was doing, or get smart with her...see me personally, I don't listen because she don't help me so I can't help her.

Peer Groups

Nearly every student with school membership repeatedly mentioned how close they were with many other students at City High. Half of students without school membership also mentioned that they had several friends in school. However, the key difference between students with school membership and those without school membership was the context of these connections, as students with school membership clearly had developed affective and interactional commitment with students who possessed highly salient "student" identities:

Ron: It's the encouragement that the teachers give you and the encouragement your friends give you. That's what I think motivates me the most...for me within the beginning of the bell and the end of the bell, the teachers and my friends, the way they push me to do better and encourage me to do better that motivates me.

Nicole: ...it's just really my friends also motivate me to move on (to college). They be like "come on I know you can do it" and "can you help me out" and all that, so you know it makes me feel good, like people want me to help them.

Four study students with school membership also spoke of their close friends actively setting and maintaining an identity standard of "student". These students discussed how one motivating factor in their behavior was to fulfill the expectations of their peers:

Chris: For each of your identities, how would people react to you not doing well?

Ron: The debaters, they probably be like mad, but they'll probably be disappointed because I could have did better, but they'll encourage me to step it up. The students, me being a student, the group of people around me would probably be in shock because I'm always on point, so they'd probably slap you (verbally), do little jokes about it.

Chris: Would you say your friends in general are kind of more motivated in school or less motivated in school, or somewhat in the middle?

Raspberry: Some of them are in the middle, some of them are just like me. Like, there is one girl in my class, she real outspoken and stuff but she still like to learn, if people is like extra loud she be like "y'all got to quiet down because I want to learn just as much as the next person". Even if the next person don't wanna learn, she still makes sure that people be quiet so she can learn.

Six of the eight students without student membership consistently mentioned that the people in City High they have commitment with as part of their "street" identities acted in ways that disregard for the identity standard of "student". In other

words, other members of these students' social group in City High had poor grades, consistently broke school rules, and do not place a high importance in school:

Chris: Let's say the people in school you hang out with found out that you failed a class, would they react to that at all? How would they react if they found out?

Wayne: They ain't going to care. They gonna get together and try to say something, but they really don't know what to say because they probably are in the same position as I am.

Crystal: They like, I don't know, because the friendships that I got we'll laugh and joke at each other like "ha ha, you failed two classes" or something like that. A lot of my friends do that.

Darnell: People in school would be like I did too, they would agree with me like I did too, I'm glad I ain't the only one.

Four of the eight students without school membership mentioned that they had few students at City High with whom they shared high levels of commitment. In one case, the student appeared to be very introverted, while in other cases the student had a network of close friends that went to other schools, or had dropped out of school altogether:

Chris: What things would you say are going on inside of school that make you look forward to coming to class, if anything?

Rock: I guess the students, they good a little bit, but I don't really know a lot of em, but as far as I seen it's kinda good.

Chris: So you can make a lot more money selling than you can working, flipping burgers or you doing something like that?

Ray: Say I got a job, my homeboy's got a job...I just got my paycheck, "he like you want to go to the mall?" We go to the mall, he pull out nothing but hundreds and the whole time you only got two hundred. You try to copy off him, dress like him. He get like four or five pair of shoes that's like \$150 a piece and you go like "dag how

you get that?” He going to tell you, you going to be like “well I want to do it”...he tell them, and you go sell (drugs) then.

Flair: The people I hang out with at here, I don’t hang out with at home, never.

Chris: Would you say your better friends are here or at home?

Flair: At home...I know me, I mess with a lot of people. I don’t mean if I see you and I start picking on you, not like that, I mean with a lot of people like, who really mess with me, I say “wassup” to (slang for challenging the person to a fight). Like, if I need someone (outside of school) to do this for me, they’ll do it because I’m Flair.

Five of the eight students without school membership that had poor grades repeatedly mentioned students “hating on” each other (slang for being mean or rude to each other), and that they felt that there was a lot of division between students at City High. Five of the eleven students with school membership also mentioned students “hating on” each other. However, hating was emphasized much less by students with school membership, and in most cases was described from a third person viewpoint, instead of from personal experience.

School Membership and School Structure

School membership was not only correlated with and viewpoints of City High’s social environment, but also with viewpoints of City High’s structural environment. The structural environment of City High was largely shaped by the Talent Development model, which students with membership characterized positively. Students discussed the Talent Development model positively on four distinct levels: interactive curriculum, course content, school rules, and school structure. Students also implied that each of these elements of the TDHS model helped nurture school membership.

Every student with school membership repeatedly discussed how they felt close to their teachers. In several cases, these students linked their commitment to their teachers directly to their teachers' interactive teaching methods:

Chris: How hard do you feel that your favorite teacher tries to make sure you're actually learning what's going on in class?

Zalrrah (G): I really love what we're doing now...it's like he's really trying to make sure we all pass because like some students don't do their homework...and even if (everyone turns in their homework) he'll give us a problem, somebody come up there and get the answer, he'll still make them explain how they got it and everything you did before he took the paper away. With the overhead notes he be like "going, going, gone" before he take it off so we can ask questions, and I like that about him. He has very good teaching skills...I used to hate math, I could not wait to get to second period (math was first period), like (now) I love math because I understand it. I know that's how I feel in my heart like I know that he definitely doing something right...

Despite the best efforts of Talent Development facilitators, most students experienced one course that was taught using a direct instructional style with little student-teacher interaction.³⁶ However, when discussing courses that had this style, students with school membership seemed to be more reserved in their criticism and in many cases noted that these teachers still expended a great effort in teaching:

Chris: Are there things going on in school that want to make you try hard in school?

T: The way the students don't appreciate teachers, like teachers come to school and in bad weather, it could be anything, like as far as Mr. C I think he is one of the most dedicated teachers...Mr. C actually came to work when he had a hoarse voice and he like came to work and graded his papers, it wasn't a day Mr. C wasn't at work...I think most teachers need to get more praise.

Sero (G): He's like...sometimes he tries hard, sometimes he doesn't care

³⁶ My only extended observations were within two classrooms, with limited observations of three more classrooms. This observation is also based upon student reports.

T: I think sometimes, it's just certain students in class knows him off his concentration without him giving our assignments to make it more clear.

Lynee: All the teachers have good intentions for all the students, but it's like certain teachers have in their own mind what they think is helping.

On the other hand, students without school membership saw their non-interactive teachers as a force pushing away from school:

Chris: Are there things going on in school that want to make you not want to try hard in school?

Crystal: Ms. H don't try hard because if you want a student to learn then you're supposed to be like if they ask you for directions you're supposed to give it to them. Some students may not hear you she just like "I'm not saying it over".

Ray: Ms. W always want to be boring and don't want to help nobody...she want to keep doing all these drills, I mean the drills be alright but she wants to keep checking them and if you miss out one word or whatever then the whole thing wrong...

Every student with school membership characterized the content of at least three of their classes positively. In some cases, students with school membership explicitly linked course content and structure with their commitment to teachers:

Zalrrah (G): (Transition to Advanced Math) is everyone's favorite class because we don't do just one subject. We just do different things, we get like...we don't always get worksheets, worksheets, worksheets. We go through different subjects on math which is really good, sometimes we play games, but it's benefiting us because it's math so we understand it. We go in little groups and if we need help on something everybody helps on this subject or this group and we're there to help each other.

Pooh Bear (G): I think Mr. S tries really really hard to make sure that all of us understand that all of us is getting the right education...when we came in here we wasn't all on the same level and I guarantee now that all of us are probably on the level where it's equal because of him, and I think our education is important to him because he just makes sure that we are doing the right things.

Students without school membership were less likely than students with school membership to positively characterize course content at City High. However, in some cases, students without school membership actually pointed to certain courses or projects as a motivating factor to come to school:

Chris: What do you think is going on in this school that makes kids want to come here?

Wayne: Ms. H (Wayne's Strategic Reading teacher) give out like little, little projects that go over a couple of days and you don't want to miss that project so that's motivation to come too...In Mr. S's class they're all like real close, we all be doing our work together so that do make me want to try harder...

Spade: Tech class, Mr. O's class, is really interactive, he don't really talk a lot (except) what we have to go over, but other than that it's a lot of things going on in your life. He have to show us things, he let us actually help him with it so we get a good understanding; like in Chemistry class, instead of drawing on the board we actually do it together so we can actually know...

Overall, four of the eight students without school membership noted that one of their courses was a motivating factor in school attendance. Unfortunately, this motivation in one class was more than offset in every case by a lack of commitment to their other teachers and courses.

Regardless of school membership levels, every student mentioned in their interviews that certain aspects of City High; its uniforms, traditions, courses, and even its strict enforcement of rules made it different than any other school they have ever attended. Students were cognizant that these aspects of City High's created a "culture of success", which City High's staff worked to actively maintain. Ten of the

eleven students with school membership characterized this culture positively and seemed to buy in to its norms and its ideals:

Chris: If tomorrow morning City High didn't exist and you had to go to another school, how would you feel?

Ron: I would be upset because even though...this is my first year, I feel like I've been here forever like I couldn't even begin to think about being introduced to a new school, following new school rules, like I'm so used to the traditions that's here, it would be difficult for my mind to open up to anything else.

Chris: Do you think the things that you're learning in class are going to help you get to where you want to go in life?

Raspberry: Like how to carry yourself in a certain way...like how to control yourself.

Chris: Are there things going on in school that want to make you try hard in school?

Pooh Bear (G): For me it is just that there is a lot of activities that go on in school and if you're not doing the right thing then you're not going to get picked or not be able to participate...I would like to participate in school activities so I know in order to do that I got to get good grades and continue to do well in school.

Nicole: Once I came to this school I knew this was the school I wanted to be a part of. The environment was just, it was just so special, it was like they had a passion for you even though (the principal) comes down hard on you...he's only doing it out of love. It's like how your parents used to spank you, but he just punishes you by giving you days (of suspension) and it just makes you know that he loves you for that, and he wants to see you do good and it hurts him to see you do bad...so when I first came and we had those gold shirts, I hated those gold shirts but once I got the understanding of City High I was proud to wear their shirt.

Ron's comment embodies the active effort of City High's teachers and staff towards creating a "culture of success", as City High is only four years old, yet new students speak of its "traditions". The above quotes also demonstrate how the "culture of success" creates an environmental structure that supports the "student" identity standard. It is through the "culture of success" that the Talent Development model's

aim towards engendering school membership and academic engagement through creating a synergistic relationship between the social and structural aspects of school is apparent.

Students without school membership also spoke with me at length about the unique structure of City High. However, while students with school membership believed that the rules, uniforms, and traditions of City High existed for their benefit, students without school membership did not understand why many of these rules and traditions were in place:

Chris: Are there things going on at school that make a kid not want to come to school?

Wayne: Yeah, sometimes they real strict at this school and make people not want to come to school. Like you get suspended for five days for not tucking in your shirt, they be doing some petty stuff. I got suspended for having a jacket on and I thought that be real petty and uncalled for.

Crystal: In middle school like when you get into a fight or something they protect you. In this school they take one person's side...the assistant principal always come up to me and my sister like "if you all fight I'm going to suspend you or I'm gonna get city police".

Ray: What I don't like about Ms. K is she like to call your house early in the morning, like if you don't be there, if you're like five minutes late she'll call your cell phone or call your mother's phone...she'll leave a message on all of them and be like "is you coming to school today" or something like that, like getting on your nerves.

It was also very telling that only one student without school membership spoke of involvement in a school sponsored activity despite active efforts by nearly all school staff to encourage students to participate in one of City High's many after school activities, such as choir, band, sports, fashion or dance clubs, or debate. In

contrast, eight of the eleven study students with school membership participated in at least one extracurricular activity.

Not only was the social structure of City High unique according to its students, but the organization and physical structure of the City High was different than anything that most had experienced in elementary or middle school. Students mentioned that the small school size and low student to teacher ratio of City High, its block schedule, its support staff of counselors and teaching aides, and its high levels of school security were very different from any other school they had attended in the school district. For students with school membership, these structural aspects of City High were characterized positively and in some cases helped create commitment between students and teachers:

T: I think the teachers can really know when we're going through something... that's why they give us social workers we can talk to cause some students in this school go through problems that some of the teachers would never believe.

Chris: Does it mean something different to you to be going to City High instead of a different school in the city?

Sero: To me it feels like I'm going somewhere where I can have, where I can express myself and at the same time I be learning something and not have to worry about getting into a lot of fights or whatever.

Chris: So how long do you say it took you to adjust to what was going on her, was that something that was pretty quick for you or was it kind of a struggle?

Lynce: It was quick for me because it was like this school...it's like middle school because you follow the same classes, you follow the same students and it's not as difficult as other high schools as you got to do all this transferring with other students at different grades so it's like easy for me...we only had four or five classes.

While not every student with school membership specifically mentioned that City High had a low student-teacher ratio or block schedule, ten of the eleven students with school membership did mention that they had a group of close friends whom they attended classes with, providing indirect evidence that small class sizes and block scheduling are correlated with school membership.

While students without school membership also recognized these structural components of City High, six of the eight students without school membership saw these elements as useless or an additional factor pushing them out of school:

Chris: What sort of things make kids not want to come to school?

Ray (G): It's about the long hours or whatever, that's why so many people be trying to leave, because they make school so long and they won't let you out at 3:00, they make you go on to that A and E thing (Arts and Expression is an elective arts class most ninth grade students have at the end of the day) sometimes and you don't even get no grade for this for real, it's pointless...it's not going to help you in life or whatever. All they want is so you could stay here longer.

Flair: Some of the rules, and then like some of the teachers be trying too hard...I mean, not the teachers, other people who try to help the teachers (teacher aides and coaches) and try to take their place.

Chris: Does it mean something then to be a student at City High? Does it mean something different then if you were at any other school in the city?

Ray: I don't think so, the only reason why (is) cause you have to stay in the same class with the same people all day. That get annoying, like you're in high school, you want to go and experience new things and meet, like being in class with 12th graders and all that and like other school, you go get your own schedule.

Spade: That's the only thing in high school I'd change, like you get to choose which classes you want, that's actually going to help you out in the future...you know, name one thing that learning about photosynthesis did for you?

In addition, four of the eight students without school membership also felt that school safety was a problem at City High.

In sum, students with school membership felt that the social and physical structure of City High created an institution that would actively help them achieve their goals in life. In other words, City High was a legitimate institution:

Chris: Does it mean something then to be a student at City High? Does it mean something different then if you were at any other school in the city?

Raspberry: Yeah I mean I think it's, when people just hit a name, City High. They think that you in there and you not playing no games and you doing what you gotta do...I would be mad if I had to leave this school, you're supposed to get a scholarship from (the university affiliated with Talent Development) so like this is a good school. I think if you had this on your college (transcript) you could get into a good college.

Bubbles (G): I like being a City High student because you learn more things than at a regular high school because number one we're a college prep school so we freshmen but they're teaching us the other stuff about college, that's why I like this school, we got a lot of chances, a lot of good opportunities for life.

On the other hand, students without school membership shared a pessimistic outlook on what, if anything, City High provided them that would be useful in their lives:

Ray: Just because you come to school doesn't mean (you're smart). You could be street smart and then in-school smart. Just because you come to school every day don't make you smart. You could come to school one day out of 180 days and could be the smartest person coming to school and score the highest on the test. Like your basic knowledge that you already know so I don't think that you got to come to school to be smart, it's just what type of person you is, if you want that knowledge or you don't.

Day Day: What could change for the better is more of the advisory period. We need more things that got to do with our future, things like that. Like, the ones we have

right now are pretty good...but we would like more, like to get us ready for the real future and what's really ahead of us.

Chris: Is there anything specifically going on in school that makes you not want to come here on a daily basis or not want to try hard in classes?

Spade: Not really, other than just being long as hell. I just feel like I just want to go home sometimes, it is boring...I don't see what certain things, I mean I'm not going to do, I'm not going to use it after I graduate so I don't see the point in us having it. I ain't going to be caring nothing about Hamlet in four years!

PART FOUR: "THE STREETS" - STUDENTS' OUT OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

In many ways, it would be both unfair and inaccurate to compare and contrast the viewpoints of students based upon school membership levels solely in the realm of relationships and experiences at school. Identity theory is based upon the idea that students develop a hierarchy of identities based upon all of the social groups that they inhabit. Therefore, it bears to reason that students' social groups outside of school have a significant influence their identity hierarchies. For nearly every student of City High, their lives outside school contained daily encounters with poverty, violence, a lack of social services, and single parenthood. As T said, "some students in this school go through problems that some of the teachers would never believe". These issues within students' families and their community undoubtedly had profound effects on student identity formation.

While all of the study students experienced the effects of poverty and its correlates, some commonalities in student lives outside of school could be gleaned based upon school membership levels. Two major issues in students' out-of-school lives that came up in our interviews time and time again were students assuming

caretaking roles within the family for older relatives or younger siblings, and student involvement in “the streets”.

Single Parenthood and Caretaking

One issue that was prevalent among students of all membership levels at City High was single parenthood. Six of the eleven students with school membership were being raised by a single parent at the time of their interviews; or in one case by grandparents due to the death of both parents. Of the eight students without school membership, at least five were being raised by a single parent. The other three students declined to speak about this issue, or it did not come up in their interview. Unfortunately, I was not able to gather extensive information about students’ family backgrounds or parental relationships, with the exception of information gathered tangentially through student answers to questions not directly related to family relationships. A number of the study students were reluctant to provide in-depth responses to direct questions about their family background. However, students with school membership tended to share high levels of commitment with their parent(s) and other family members:

Chris: Is there anything going on outside of school that makes you want to come to school?

Sero: Sometimes my family will make me want to go to school cause they like encourage me and say I can do real good in school and I’m probably gonna be a game designer someday...most of the time my parents make me want to do it.

On the other hand, students without school membership tended to have lower commitment levels to family members. Some students openly discussed disobeying their family members:

Chris: I'm going to give you another scenario. For whatever reason you end up failing two classes. Would (the people at home) have a reaction either way you think? What would they say?

Flair: (pauses)...nothing I guess. I mean, my aunt would talk to me, my grandmother would talk to me but like I said, it just go in one ear and out the other. My father died when I was a couple of weeks old, in 1992, so I never really had a father figure or like a brother figure. I was always on my own.

Although all but one student responded that the identity of son or daughter was one of their most important identities, students with school membership discussed their identity as a son or daughter more often and in greater detail than students without school membership. Nine of the eleven students with school membership seemed to have a close relationship with their parent or parents, as opposed to three of the eight students without school membership.

Going hand in hand with the issue of single parenthood is the issue of caretaking roles within the family. Interestingly, four of the students who possessed school membership were also largely responsible for taking care of younger siblings or older relatives at home while none of the students without school membership had these responsibilities. This seems counter-intuitive, as students with a caretaking role would seemingly have less time to participate in school. However, for these four students with school membership, caretaking roles actually helped shape their student

identity, as they wished to set good examples for their siblings or please their older relatives:

Tweety: Another identity that I have is being a sister. I love being a sister and that's really important to me because my sister looks up to me, she really looks up to me even if she don't look up to my mother, she looks up to me. She expects me to do what I say I'm going to do, even if she don't expect her mother or father to do it, she always expect me to do it.

Three of the four students with school membership and caretaking roles had roughly a C average in their classes and attended school less frequently than other students with school membership due to their responsibilities at home. This demonstrates how school membership goes beyond simple intrinsic motivation. While these "C" students with caretaking roles may not seem to be intrinsically motivated based upon a simple review of their attendance and school performance, their willingness to come to school and complete as much work as possible despite a heavy burden of caretaking responsibilities at home clearly demonstrates these students' motivation towards academic engagement.

Poverty

Although students were generally reluctant to discuss their families' financial situations, student responses to open ended one on one interview questions indicated that many study students were living near or below the poverty line. Considering that roughly seventy-eight percent of City High's students were eligible for free or reduced price lunch, it is likely that most of the study students fit this category. For some students, their economic situations necessitated that they join the formal or

underground labor force during the school year, inhibiting the chances of a student identity becoming salient:

Chris: Why is it that some kids don't want to come to school?

Ray: Because if they see that somebody they know got a lot of money, they go oh I'm going to sell drugs...I always tried for a long time, I was on the computer from the time I got home from school until 10, 11, 12 o'clock at night filling out application. That don't work sometimes and you call them and getting on their nerves and that don't work sometimes so you go fill out applications in person and that don't work sometimes so the only thing left is your mother, even though your mother isn't going to give (money) to you. Only thing left is to sell drugs or whatever.

Tweety: I think what makes a lot of children not want to come to school is that there's a lot of things going on out in the streets...they think they can go out there and make money and all that, and don't have to do nothing else.

Unfortunately, I did not ask specific questions to students on the issue of after-school employment in either the initial or follow-up interviews, a mistake on my part.

However, it was apparent that many of the students with school membership did not have time to work many hours during the school year due to their commitments inside and outside of school with academics and family, whereas at least four of the students without school membership were involved in the formal or underground work force after school.

"The Streets"

The epidemic of crime, violence, and gang activity that has gripped the neighborhood where City High is located also inhibited student identity development. While the majority of City High's students characterized City High as a relatively

safe school, every study student characterized “the streets”-- the world outside of chain link fences surrounding City High as anything but safe:³⁷

Lynee (G): My neighborhood, it ain't bad but sometimes it's bad because you got like little kids in the 5th grade or going to the 6th grade in gangs and stuff like that.

Chris: Is there anything going on outside of school that makes you not want to come to school?

Crystal: Kids getting snatched on their way to school...I've been chased in the subway by some girls with knives.

Chris: If you had to choose two or three identities that are most important to you, what identities would you choose and why?

Ray: There's the street one, it's like I watch out for myself a little and watch who I see and what I say.

While many students characterized “the streets” as dangerous regardless of membership, only three students with school membership mentioned fear of crime outside of school as a factor in students at City High not coming to school. In contrast, six of the eight students without school membership mentioned this as a reason why students do not come to school. The same six students without school membership that mentioned fear of crime as an issue pushing students out of school also mentioned (either on tape or off) that they, or a close friend or relative were involved with criminal or gang activity. While fear of crime in “the streets” seemed to be an issue that potentially inhibits the formation of a “student” identity in all of City High's students, it was within students with the most experience in criminal

³⁷ Roughly three-fourths of students at City High characterized the school as “somewhat safe” or “very safe” in the annual climate survey distributed to the school's students during the 2007-08 school year.

activity (and with the most developed “street” identities) that this fear of violence outside of school was the greatest.

Overall, family responsibilities and “the streets” were both aspects of students’ out of school environment with the potential to pull students out of school. However, the study students who had family responsibilities were insulated from this threat by their possession of school membership, while students pulled out by “the streets” did not.

Previous School Experiences

Unfortunately, many public elementary and middle schools in Central City have been underfunded, understaffed, overpopulated, and mismanaged for longer than the study students have been alive. This has led to a situation where some of City High’s students have only known an in-school environment that can be best described as chaotic, actively dissuading students from developing school membership. Study students who had never experienced a “legitimate” elementary or middle school expected City High to be similar to their previous schools, and had a much more difficult adjustment to City High’s norms and responsibilities:

Chris: Your transition, the way things were in middle school and high school; was the transition pretty smooth for you, or do you think it wasn’t smooth?

Flair: It was hard really...basically for me it was the rules, I thought the rules applied the same but they don’t. Basically like the middle school I went to, all the ones I went to was bad, so basically it was more like the students ran the school and not the principal.

Day Day: It was difficult at the beginning...you have to know what’s right and wrong; you always knew what was right and wrong but it was different rules from

middle to high school and you have to realize that middle school wasn't that big of a deal.

Of the eleven students with school membership, only two characterized their middle school as a chaotic environment, while seven mentioned specific teachers or schools they had attended that prepared them well for City High. On the other hand, five of the eight students without school membership responded that their middle schools were out of control while only one student mentioned that his middle school helped him prepare for City High.

SUMMARY

My ethnographic, instrumental case study of students at City High was intended to answer three questions. The first question I attempted to answer was: is there a relationship between school membership and academic engagement? Of the twelve students classified by myself and teachers as academically engaged based upon having high levels of effort and attendance, and in some cases high course marks, eleven displayed school membership. All of these students self-identified as a student, discussing how being a student was “who they were” and answering questions in a manner consistent with this identity.

All seven study students at City High that were disengaged according to my own and teacher observations, attendance records and suspension records had weak or nonexistent senses of school membership. Most of these students' most important identities revolved around “the streets”, as they bragged about their lack of adherence to school rules and illegal behaviors such as selling drugs or gang activity. Students

without school membership were not motivated to act in accordance with a “student” identity standard.

The second question this research addressed was: what aspects of a school’s social or structural environment are most conducive to the formation of school membership? In order to answer this question, I compared and contrasted student viewpoints of their academic environment within City High based upon levels of school membership. Student responses indicated that several aspects of their social and structural environment created by the Talent Development High School Model, such as high levels of commitment to teachers, teachers actively setting a student identity standard, strict discipline, a safe, familial environment, small class size, block scheduling, and an overall “culture of success” helped create an environment that was both “legitimate” and conducive to student identity formation.

Students who did not possess school membership felt quite differently about City High, complaining about its discipline, uniforms, non-interactive teachers, and block schedule. Several students without school membership also openly questioned the legitimacy of what they were learning at City High. Students’ out of school lives, in what they called “the streets”, their commitment to family members and responsibility levels at home also had profound effects on identity formation, regardless of school membership levels.

After determining that there was a relationship between school membership and academic engagement, the third question I attempted to answer was: how does an internalized sense of school membership lead to academic engagement? In order to answer this question, I searched for clues as to students’ internal motivation towards

(or against) academic engagement through my coding of the interview data. In addition to verbal displays of school membership, students with school membership also derived a sense of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and internal locus of control from enacting their “student” identities. These students had lofty occupational aspirations as well. In contrast, many of the students without school membership derived a sense of self-efficacy or self-esteem from acting “hard”, in accordance with a “street” identity. In addition, these students generally had an external locus of control in terms of academics, and had lower, if any occupational aspirations. Chapter eleven examines the next step of my examination of school membership; my attempt to quantitatively verify the findings of my ethnographic, qualitative research.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT AND SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP

The instrumental case study of City High demonstrated that several aspects of students' in-school and out of school environment affected their levels of school membership. Specifically, the components of school environment from Figure One: high levels of student-teacher interaction, high academic standards, and various aspects of school structure (safety, strong leadership, availability of materials, physical plant of the school, and small class size) were all strongly related to school membership. In turn, school membership was a predecessor of academic engagement for nearly every study student who had school membership. Using nationally representative data from the ELS of 2002, I attempted to examine these observed linkages quantitatively in an ad hoc manner with the data available to me. This examination began by looking at academic environment and school membership.

Descriptive Statistics – Academic Environment and School Membership

In order to establish some prima facie, descriptive evidence for linkages between school environment and school membership, I examined mean values of the school membership measure based upon a given value of an independent variable.³⁸ These variables were broken down by the aspect of school environment hypothesized to create an environment conducive to school membership: student-teacher interaction, and school structure. The variable measuring high academic expectations

³⁸ Univariate descriptive statistics for all variables are available in Appendices D-F

was collinear with teacher certification, school size, and student-teacher interaction, and thus was dropped from this analysis. This was done across all five datasets created through multiple imputation techniques, giving us a sample size of 76,625.

An additional reason for creating a bivariate descriptive examination of the independent variables and school membership has to do with the issue of substantive versus statistical significance. Because HLM software combines the multiply imputed datasets used for each model, the sample sizes in these models are very large. With this large sample size comes a declining degree to which systematic differences needed for there to be statistical significance for a given variable, as well as a declining standard error that comes with taking the average of five observations for each variable. It is because of this lowering threshold that I included bivariate description so that the substantive significance of each independent variable can be put into proper context.

Breaking down the mean value of the school membership measure by values of each key independent variable provided suggestive evidence that student-teacher interaction and a safe school environment are related to school membership formation. The mean value of the school membership composite variable was 2.08 for students who had the lowest levels of student-teacher interaction, rising to 2.49 for students with low to middle levels of student-teacher interaction, and 2.84 for students with high levels of student-teacher interaction. The gain in school membership, while not as large based on the school safety variable, still rose from an average of 2.49 for students who did not feel safe in school to 2.67 for students who felt very safe in school. For the other five measures of school structure, the

differences in mean school membership were within one-tenth of a point across different values.

TABLE TWO: SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP MEAN BY VALUE OF KEY INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	VALUE*	SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP VARIABLE MEAN	NUMBER OF CASES
Student-Teacher Interaction (High Levels)	Strongly Disagree	2.08	3,036
“	Disagree	2.49	33,774
“	Agree/Strongly Agree	2.84	39,815
ASPECTS OF SCHOOL STRUCTURE			
Feels Safe at School	Strongly Disagree	2.49	2,084
“	Disagree	2.64	6,307
“	Agree/Strongly Agree	2.67	68,234
School Size	1-799 Students	2.65	27,782
“	800-1,599 Students	2.65	30,345
“	1,600+ Students	2.72	18,498
Block Schedule	No	2.66	60,255
“	Yes	2.71	16,370
Certified Teachers	0%-85%	2.70	18,996
“	85.1%-100%	2.66	57,629
Poor Facilities	Strongly Disagree	2.66	50,916
“	Disagree	2.67	22,247
“	Agree/Strongly Agree	2.71	3,462
Private School	No	2.67	60,125
“	Yes	2.67	16,500
FULL SAMPLE SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP MEAN		2.67	76,625

*Values are approximate, as I allowed non-integers to be imputed for categorical variables.

Our prima facie evidence indicated that at least a couple of my academic environment variables seemed to be correlated with school membership, giving me probable cause to attempt a more complicated HLM equation taking all key independent and control variables into account. In this HLM model, I aimed to test

the effects of students' social/physical academic environment on levels of school membership.

HLM Equations-Academic Environment and School Membership

The first step in creating a HLM equation to examine this relationship was to create an ANOVA, or null model, only including the outcome variable, school membership, in order to partition the variance in the outcome variable into variance within schools (individual level, or level one variance), and systematic variance between schools (school level, or level two variance). Specifically, I was interested at the level of variance between schools in order to test my instrumental case study findings on a much broader population. Table three shows the results from the partitioning of this variance:

TABLE THREE: VARIANCE COMPOSITION FOR NULL MODELS OF SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP

VARIANCE LEVEL	SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP
Level 1 Variance	0.1369
Level 2 Variance	0.0187
Percent of Variance at Level 2	12.04%

Surprisingly, the partitioning of variance between the individual and school levels showed that the vast majority of variance was at the within school level, as opposed to between schools. However, two individual level variables: student-teacher interaction and feeling safe at school are directly affected by teaching methods, school structure school and policies. These two variables were the strongest

predictors of school membership within the descriptive models. In fact, *student-teacher interaction was the largest predictor of school membership*. Therefore, it is not wholly accurate to characterize the effects of academic environment and school membership as minimal.

There are several other possible reasons why this lack of variance at the school level occurred. The first and most obvious reason is simply that the majority of differences in school membership are based on internal to the student factors, and come from the student's out of school life, or experiences in prior schools. Given that "the streets" were integral in creating students' senses (or lack of) school membership, this is certainly possible.

Another reason why so much of the variance in school membership was within schools has to do with the sample size within each sample school. Figure six shows that more than half of the schools in this sample had twenty or fewer students sampled, with special attention paid to maintain racial and gender representativeness. As our later models show, race and gender were significant predictors of school membership levels. Therefore, it is safe to say that a majority of schools in the sample had a small sample size, and a sample size that was intentionally diverse in ways that may affect school membership levels, creating a large amount of variance within schools.

TABLE FOUR: FREQUENCY OF STUDENTS WITHIN SCHOOLS*

NUMBER OF STUDENTS SAMPLED	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS
1 - 10 Students	49	6.52%
11 - 20 Students	329	43.81%
21 - 30 Students	341	45.41%
31 - 40 Students	29	3.86%
41 - 50 Students	3	0.40%
Average Number of Students	20.35	

*751 schools participated in the ELS of 2002 Survey. These frequencies are based upon the number of students included in my analysis, not the number participating in the ELS survey. A small number of students did not have a sufficient amount of data to be included in this study (see Chapter Nine).

A final reason why the amount of systematic between school variance may be low is that four of the six school-level variables (school size, percent free or reduced price lunch, percent of teachers certified in subject area taught, and school facilities quality) were provided by a school administrator. In particular, an administrator may be hesitant to admit that his or her school employs a substantial percentage of unqualified teachers, or has inadequate facilities or school materials. This bias may have reduced the amount of variance between schools in these variables, reducing the standard error and heavily skewing these variables, making a significant amount of systematic variance between schools difficult to find.

Given that a noticeable portion of the variance in school membership was at the school level, and there were several potential reasons for the skewed distribution of variance, I went forward and performed the second step of the HLM analysis in order to examine individual and school level correlates of school membership.

Four of the six key independent variables that examined aspects of academic environment; student-teacher interaction, feelings of safety in school, school size, and block scheduling were positively related, statistically significant predictors of school

membership. As with the descriptive examinations of school membership, student-teacher interaction was the strongest predictor of school membership, as a one point gain in student-teacher interaction meant nearly half of a point gain in motivation on average, accounting for all independent variables. Feeling safe at school was also a statistically significant, positively related predictor of school membership at the .001 level. Block scheduling was not as strongly predictive of school membership, but was significantly associated with school membership, as a one unit increase in school membership increased the odds of a student having block scheduling by nearly 4%. School size was a fourth statistically significant (at the .05 level) environmental predictor of school membership; however, in this case a positive relation to school membership meant that school membership was associated with larger school size. With a coefficient under .01, this association was not as substantively significant as the other statistically significant academic environment variables.

Most of the demographic control variables were also predictive of school membership. Interestingly, African-American students were more likely than students of other races to have school membership. Their levels of motivation as a group were roughly one to three-tenths of a point higher in comparison with other racial/ethnic groups. With African-American students as the comparison group, every other racial group had a negative, statistically significant coefficient. Asian-American students had the second-highest levels of motivation to attend school, followed by Hispanic students, students of other race, and finally white students. Females also had higher motivation levels than males, by roughly one eighth of a point on average, a statistically significant difference. In other words, a one unit

increase in school membership increased the likelihood of a student being female by nearly 18%. Being overage in the tenth grade was the only control variable that was not statistically significant.

Other control variables such as being an English Language Learner and family income were also statistically significant predictors of motivation to attend school. However, the directions of these associations were different than what might be expected. Being an English Language Learner was actually predictive of slightly higher motivation levels compared to native English speakers, with a one unit increase in school membership increasing the likelihood of being an English Language Learner by over 11%. In contrast, having a higher family income was predictive of slightly lower levels of motivation to attend school. The percentage receiving free or reduced price lunch control variable was also statistically significant in an unexpected direction. This variable was positively related to school membership, with an expected difference in school membership of roughly three hundredths of a point for every category increase in percent receiving free or reduced price lunch at the student's school. Finally, the dummy variable for parental expectation of attending college positively related to school membership, and was statistically significant at the .01 level.

TABLE FIVE: HLM ESTIMATES OF THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT ON SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	COEFFICIENT
Student-Teacher Interaction	0.493*** (0.013)
Feels Safe at School	0.023*** (0.009)
School Size	0.007* (0.003)
Block Schedule	0.039* (0.018)
Certified Teachers	-0.001 (0.034)
Poor Facilities	-0.000 (0.011)
Private School	0.042 (0.022)
CONTROL VARIABLES	
White	-0.264*** (0.019)
Hispanic	-0.151*** (0.024)
Asian-American	-0.139*** (0.026)
Other Race	-0.191*** (0.030)
Female	0.175*** (0.012)
Overage	0.016 (0.016)
English Language Learner	0.113*** (0.019)
Family Income	-0.007** (0.003)
Parental Expectation	0.044** (0.015)
Percent Free/Reduced Price Lunch Eligible	0.029*** (0.005)

Standard errors are in parentheses, N=76,625

*- Significant at the .05 level (2 tailed)

** - Significant at the .01 level (2 tailed)

*** - Significant at the .001 level (2 tailed)

SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

Another main finding of the qualitative portion of my dissertation was that students who possessed school membership were academically engaged, as evidenced through these students effort and attendance levels. The first step in verifying the relationship between school membership and academic engagement quantitatively was to create bivariate descriptive statistics in order to examine the mean values of the academic engagement measure (frequency of negative behavior), based upon a given value of an independent variable. In addition to the environmental variables used in the models examining school membership, the bivariate models examining academic engagement also included school membership as a primary independent variable.

Table six indicates that there is suggestive evidence of a link between school membership and academic engagement, as hypothesized. The mean value of the academic engagement composite variable was 3.13 for students with low school membership scores (two or below), rising to 3.31 for students with moderate levels of school membership (above two, but below or equal to three), and 3.4 for students with high levels of school membership (above three). Keep in mind that I allowed STATA to impute non-integers for the school membership measure, necessitating a breakdown of scores into tenth or hundredths of a point.

Bivariate analyses also uncovered links between the measure of academic engagement and the variables measuring student-teacher interaction and school safety. In the case of student-teacher interaction, the mean value of the academic engagement variable was nearly half a point higher for students experiencing the

highest levels of student-teacher interaction compared to those students experiencing the lowest levels of student-teacher interaction. The differences of academic engagement between students who felt the lowest levels of safety at school and those who felt extremely safe were nearly four-tenths of a point, in the predicted direction.

For the other four measures of academic environment, the differences in mean academic engagement were within one-tenth of a point across different values. However, school size was negatively related to academic engagement, as students in schools with less than 800 students had an average school membership score eight-hundredths of a point higher than students in schools with 1,600 or more students. Also, students in private schools had an average academic engagement score nine-hundredths of a point higher than students in public schools. Once again, in this case the prima facie evidence in our bivariate examinations of school membership and academic environment with academic engagement gives us probable cause to examine these links in a more sophisticated HLM method.

TABLE SIX: ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT MEAN BY VALUE OF KEY INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	VALUE*	ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT VARIABLE MEAN	NUMBER OF CASES
School Membership	1.0-2.0 (Low)	3.13	29,298
“	2.01-3.0(Moderate)	3.31	39,029
“	3.01-4.0 (High)	3.40	8,298
STUDENT-TEACHER INTERACTION			
Student-Teacher Interaction (High Levels)	Strongly Disagree	2.86	3,036
“	Disagree	3.17	33,774
“	Agree/Strongly Agree	3.35	39,815
ASPECTS OF SCHOOL STRUCTURE			
Feels Safe at School	Strongly Disagree	2.90	2,084
“	Disagree	3.11	6,307
“	Agree/Strongly Agree	3.27	68,234
School Size	1-799 Students	3.28	27,782
“	800-1,599 Students	3.25	30,345
“	1,600+ Students	3.20	18,498
Block Schedule	No	3.25	60,255
“	Yes	3.25	16,370
Certified Teachers	0%-85%	3.24	18,996
“	85.1%-100%	3.25	57,629
Poor Facilities	Strongly Disagree	3.27	50,916
“	Disagree	3.21	22,247
“	Agree/Strongly Agree	3.22	3,462
Private School	No	3.23	60,125
“	Yes	3.32	16,500
FULL SAMPLE ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT MEAN		3.25	76,625

*Values are approximate, as I allowed non-integers to be imputed for categorical variables.

HLM Equations-Academic Environment and Academic Engagement

Again, the first step in creating a HLM equation to examine this relationship was to create an ANOVA, or null model, only including the outcome variable, academic engagement, in order to partition the variance in the outcome variable into variance within schools (individual level, or level one variance), and systematic variance between schools (school level, or level two variance):

TABLE SEVEN: VARIANCE COMPOSITION FOR NULL MODELS OF ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

VARIANCE LEVEL	ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT
Level 1 Variance	0.1156
Level 2 Variance	0.0134
Percent of Variance at Level 2	10.39%

As with the school membership outcome variable, academic engagement, the dependant variable in this model had a small percentage of systematic variance between schools. However, based upon the reasons outlined earlier in this section, I thought it worth examining further through stepwise HLM equations.

As with the models examining school membership, nearly all of the independent, academic environment variables were significantly related to our outcome variable, academic engagement within the first step of the HLM equation. Student-teacher interaction levels had the largest coefficient within step one of this stepwise HLM equation, with an expected jump of over one-fifth of a point in school membership for every unit increase in student-teacher interaction. Feelings of safety at school also were equated with an expected 0.05 point increase in the engagement variable for every unit increase in feeling safe at school. Two other variables; school size and percentage of certified teachers teaching in their area of certification were significant predictors of academic engagement at the 0.01 level as well, both in the predicted direction. Interestingly, while school size had a significant, positive relation to school membership, it had a significant, negative relationship to academic engagement. In addition, block scheduling had a suggestive, positive relationship to

academic engagement, while poor facilities had a suggestive, negative relationship to academic engagement. Both of these variables were statistically significant at the .05 level.

Demographic control variables were also statistically significant predictors of academic engagement in the first step of the equation. Interestingly, African-American students, while scoring highest on school membership, scored significantly lower on measures of academic engagement than white, and especially Asian-American students. Hispanic students were significantly less engaged than African-American students in the models. There was not a statistically significant difference between African-American and student of “other” race in this model. Being overage for tenth grade was a significant negative predictor of engagement, with a one unit increase in academic engagement decreasing the likelihood of being overage by more than 10%. Interestingly, this variable was not a significant predictor of academic engagement. Females were also more likely than males to be academically engaged, with a one unit increase in academic engagement increasing the likelihood of being female by just over 5%.

Among the other control variables, family income and parental expectation of going to college were highly significant, positive predictors of academic engagement. Like school size, the coefficient for the family income variable changed directions from being a negative relationship with school membership to being a positive relationship with academic engagement. The parental expectation of going to college dummy variable was highly significant, as a one unit increase in academic engagement increased the likelihood of parental expectation of college by 7.5%.

Being an English Language Learner was also somewhat predictive of academic engagement. A one unit increase in academic engagement increased the likelihood of being an English Language Learner by 2.8%. Percentage of students receiving free or reduced price lunch was not predictive of academic engagement. This finding was interesting, as one might expect a school that has a significant proportion of impoverished students to have a significant proportion of students dealing with behavioral issues. However, controlling for school-level characteristics such as facilities, percentage of teachers teaching in their area in which they're certified, and school size renders the percent receiving free or reduced price lunch variable insignificant.

HLM Equations- School Membership and Academic Engagement

The second step of the HLM equation included the same key independent variables of academic environment, as well as the same control measures. However, the school membership measure was added to examine the link between school membership and the dependent variable: academic engagement. The coefficient for school membership had the second largest coefficient of any key independent variable, and was a highly significant predictor of academic engagement. Every one unit increase in academic engagement raised the expected value of school membership by .12 points.

Of the seven academic environmental variables, the same six variables: student-teacher interaction, school safety, school size, block schedule, teachers certified in the area in which they teach, and poor facilities that were statistically

significant predictors of academic engagement in the first step of the HLM equation were also statistically significant predictors of academic engagement in the second step. The direction of these associations remained the same as well. Only the student-teacher interaction variable had a substantial change in its coefficient between the two steps, from nearly .21 to .15. While student-teacher interaction was still highly predictive of academic engagement, school membership seemed to be a mechanism through which student-teacher interaction was correlated with academic engagement. This is promising evidence of the salience of school membership, as it seemed to be an interaction term between student-teacher interaction and academic engagement.

The coefficients of four of the five remaining academic environment variables were either unchanged or slightly less predictive within the second step of this HLM equation. School size actually became slightly more predictive negative indicator of academic engagement once school membership was included in this model. While the increase in this coefficient was only from -.008 to -.009, this increase in predictive power pushed the school size variable over the .001 threshold of statistical significance. The slight changes in the predictive power of these key independent variables also indicate the potential salience of school membership.

While the changes in coefficients of these school-level academic environment variables may not be substantial, it is also important to keep in mind that while the physical aspects of school, such as small class size, safe environment, block schedule, etc. help set the stage for an academic environment conducive to school membership and academic engagement, without the social aspects needed for school membership,

such as student-teacher interaction, school membership, and academic engagement that stems from school membership will not take place. As I stated earlier in this piece, school membership may not be the only way through which students may be academically engaged, especially for students with expectations that are linked to receiving a high school diploma. However, for students may do not have those expectations, many of whom may attend a disadvantaged school, school membership is especially important to ingrain. Therefore, it makes sense that school membership wouldn't substantially change the power of the structural environmental variables in predicting academic engagement, but would substantially change the power of the social environmental variable in predicting academic engagement.

The predictive power of the demographic variables was not significantly impacted by including school membership in the HLM model, however the inclusion of this variable did somewhat alter the predictive power of race. In comparison to African-American students, the predictive power of being white or Asian-American actually increased, as a one unit increase in academic engagement increased the odds of being white by 8% and the odds of being Asian-American by 14.4%. Again, this plays into the theory that school membership is most important for historically disadvantaged groups. Hispanic students still were less engaged than African-American students, but the coefficient of this variable was reduced from -0.059 to -0.042. There were still no statistically significant differences in academic engagement between African-American students and students of "other" race. Females were still more likely than males to be academically engaged, although the predictive power of gender was somewhat reduced. A one unit increase in academic

engagement increased the odds of being female by 3.2%, as opposed to a 5.3% increase in the odds of being female within the model without school membership, indicating the importance of membership for males. The negative predictive power of being overage actually increased slightly, and was still highly significant.

Of the four other control variables, only family income and having parental expectation of college were statistically significant once school membership was introduced to the model examining academic engagement. Both of these variables were still significant at the .001 level, and their coefficients did not appreciably change. Being an English Language Learner, while statistically significant in the first step of this HLM equation, lost statistical significance once school membership was introduced within the model.

TABLE EIGHT: HLM ESTIMATES OF THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT/SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP ON ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	EXCLUDING SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP	FULL MODEL
School Membership	----	0.119*** (0.005)
Student-Teacher Interaction	0.208*** (0.008)	0.149*** (0.008)
Feels Safe at School	0.049*** (0.006)	0.046*** (0.006)
School Size	-0.008** (0.003)	-0.009*** (0.003)
Block Schedule	0.032* (0.013)	0.028* (0.013)
Certified Teachers	0.065** (0.025)	0.065** (0.025)
Poor Facilities	-0.022* (0.009)	-0.022* (0.009)
Private School	-0.015 (0.020)	-0.020 (0.020)
CONTROL VARIABLES		
White	0.050*** (0.014)	0.080*** (0.014)
Hispanic	-0.059*** (0.017)	-0.042* (0.017)
Asian-American	0.129*** (0.019)	0.144*** (0.019)
Other Race	-0.032 (0.020)	-0.010 (0.020)
Female	0.053*** (0.008)	0.032*** (0.008)
Overage	-0.101*** (0.010)	-0.111*** (0.010)
English Language Learner	0.028* (0.013)	0.015 (0.013)
Family Income	0.010*** (0.002)	0.011*** (0.002)
Parental Expectation	0.075*** (0.013)	0.069*** (0.013)
Percent Free/Reduced Price Lunch Eligible	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.004 (0.004)

Standard errors are in parentheses, N=76,625

*- Significant at the .05 level (2 tailed)

** - Significant at the .01 level (2 tailed)

*** - Significant at the .001 level (2 tailed)

SUMMARY

In order to quantitatively test the results of my year long instrumental case study of students at City High, I used data from the ELS of 2002 to examine relationships between aspects of students' social and physical school environment and school membership, as well as relationships between school membership and academic engagement. These potential links were examined first through bivariate models examining the mean value of the dependent variable for students with a given value of independent variables. Then, more sophisticated HLM equations were created employing all key independent variables, as well as various demographic, family background and economic control variables.

Both sets of models provided some initial support for my qualitative findings. Although there was a minimal amount of systematic between-school variation within the models examining academic engagement, two individual-level variables that examined the school's social environment; student-teacher interaction and school safety were highly correlated with school membership and academic engagement. Two other measures of a school's structural environment: block scheduling and school size, were weaker, but statistically significant predictors of school membership, although school size worked in the opposite direction than expected.

Within the models examining academic engagement, school membership was one of the single most powerful predictors of academic engagement. Student-teacher interaction and school safety were also strongly predictive of academic engagement in both models, although school membership accounted for some of the predictive power of student-teacher interaction, as the coefficient for this variable was lower

within the full model. Four other variables that measured school structure: block scheduling, school size, poor facilities, and percentage of teachers certified in the area they teach were also statistically significant predictors of academic engagement. However, these variables were somewhat less predictive of academic engagement than school membership, student teacher interaction or school safety.

DISCUSSION

As I discussed within the methods section, the ELS of 2002 is not an ideal survey for measuring school membership for several reasons. The fact that the base year of the ELS was the tenth grade year for survey participants meant that I was not able to examine school membership or academic engagement levels during or before the transition year to high school, nor could I compare school membership or academic engagement levels longitudinally with a base year prior to high school.

Another limitation of this phase of my research was the imperfect measures of school membership and academic engagement I employed in my analyses. Although my measure of school membership encompassed a feeling of self-esteem from acting according to an internalized student identity, this measure did not examine the extent of social bonding between the individual and other members of school, nor did it measure whether the social bonds the individual possessed within school were with students that were academically engaged or possessed school membership. My qualitative analysis of City High's students demonstrated that students with school membership not only had salient student identities which motivated actions consistent with academic engagement, but also had high amounts of both affective and

interactional commitment to teachers and other students who exhibited academic engagement.

Ideally, the ELS would have included an agree/disagree question based on the statement: “being a student is one of my most important identities”, or “if I had to describe myself, I would say that being a student is an important part of who I am” with a follow-up question measuring the approximate proportion of friends the student has through school who do what a student is “supposed to do” in class (“All”, “Most”, “Some”, “None”) and another follow-up asking the student whether their closest friends in school do what a student is “supposed to do” in class. In the absence of these questions, a question examining the student acting upon a “student” identity based upon the internal motivation of self-esteem was the best, if imperfect option available to measure school membership within a nationally representative survey.

My measure of academic engagement was also incomplete. While this measure examined the extent of negative student behaviors such as skipping school, or being suspended, it did not examine the extent of positive student behavior such as participating in class or participating in an extracurricular activity. Therefore, this measure examined a lack of academic disengagement more than it did the presence of academic engagement.

Because of these limitations with the construct of my dependent variables, the estimated links between these outcomes and environmental and control variables could be considered conservative within the HLM equations. This is because the outcome variables were incomplete, only measuring a part of the constructs of school

membership and academic engagement. The predictive power of my independent variables (with the exception of school membership in the models examining academic engagement) may well have been stronger than I found in the above models had I been able to include more complete measures of school membership and academic engagement in a HLM equation.

As discussed in chapter nine, the ELS question that I used to measure school membership also included a measure of academic engagement through the phrases “I come to school”, and “doing what a student is supposed to do in class”. As such, there is a strong possibility that the strength of the association between school membership and academic engagement was due in part to the fact that my measure of school membership included a measure of academic engagement as well.

Given these drawbacks, my findings in this section provide an initial measure of support for my qualitative findings; specifically the salience of school membership, and the links between academic environment, school membership, and academic engagement. At the very least, these findings suggest that more in-depth studies of school membership, using an instrument more appropriate for measuring school membership may yield statistically and substantively significant results.

Although many of the quantitative findings of this study provided some level of support for the qualitative findings from my interviews and experiences with City High students, there were a couple of findings which were not entirely expected as well. In particular, the findings that being African-American and an English Language Learner were predictive of school membership, as well as the findings that students in schools with higher percentages of free/reduced price lunch and students

with lower family incomes were predictive of school membership surprised me. However, it is possible that this finding supports an assertion I made earlier in this piece: school membership may be particularly critical for the most disadvantaged students, for whom the extrinsic benefits of high school; college opportunities or increased job opportunities, may not seem realistic, even with a high school diploma. Considering that the ELS surveyed tenth grade students, and the majority of students in districts and schools with a large number of non-graduates drop out in the ninth grade, it may be that the students surveyed in these schools represented a more motivated subset of students from that particular school.

In examining this question further, I found, as one might expect, that African-American, ESL, and low income students experienced some aspects of academic environment, such as block scheduling, more often than high income students and students of other races. However, this was offset by disadvantages in student-teacher interaction and feelings of safety in school for African-American and low income students. Without a comparative qualitative study of school membership, or a quantitative school membership study including ninth grade students, the question of why African-American, ESL, and to a lesser extent low income students seemed to have higher levels of school membership remains open.

While the four measures discussed above were statistically significant predictors of school membership, none were predictive of academic engagement. While these findings are somewhat puzzling to me, an answer for this question may come from my interviews of students without school membership. At first, what I asked many of these students about their academic experiences at City High, they

claimed to be doing well in school and enjoying class. It was only when I observed them further in class, socially bonded with them, and asked them more in-depth questions that they opened up about their academic struggles. In a setting such as answering an impersonal survey, it may be easy for there to create discrepancy between how a student may want to be perceived as feeling, and how the student actually feels. Considering that the magnitude and direction of the effects of race, ELL status and percent of students receiving free or reduced price lunch changed drastically in the quantitative models examining behavior compared to the quantitative model with school membership as the dependant variable, this idea may be worth exploring further.

CHAPTER TWELVE: CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has examined educational policy using a social-psychological perspective. Specifically, I introduced the concept of school membership, defined as the possession of social bonds with a social network of school members, through which a highly salient self-identity and high levels of commitment as a member of the school are internalized. I posited that school membership is a mediating factor between the student's social and structural academic environment and academic engagement, which I defined through behaviors such as regular attendance and high effort levels in class.

This study of school membership began with an examination of existing educational policy research concerning several aspects of students' social and structural environments within school. This body of research provided indirect evidence that the student's academic environment has the potential to create or cultivate school membership. These environmental aspects included high amounts of student-teacher interaction, high academic expectations, and structural features of school such as school and class size, school safety, strong leadership, block scheduling, and a staff of highly qualified teachers. Existing research concerning the importance of the transition year to high school towards academic achievement led me to identify the ninth grade as a "make or break" year for developing or maintaining school membership.

From this theoretical framework, I then set out to examine the relationships between academic environment, school membership, and academic engagement through a year-long ethnographic case study of mostly ninth grade students attending

“City High”, a small urban high school with roughly four-fifths of its students living below the poverty line. The academic environment of this school, created by the Talent Development High School Model, was characterized by several social and structural aspects such as high levels of student-teacher interaction that I identified as conducive to the creation of school membership within students. I posited that this academic environment aided in creating school membership, a core reason why the dropout rate of City High was much lower than the dropout rates of other schools citywide over the four years since the school’s opening. Using survey data from the Educational Longitudinal Survey of 2002, a nationally representative dataset, I supplemented my qualitative research by examining the relationships between academic environment, school membership, and academic engagement quantitatively using multilevel modeling techniques in order to verify findings from my ethnographic qualitative research.

My qualitative results were framed through my three research questions. First, I examined whether there is a relationship between school membership and academic engagement. My ethnographic research provided evidence of the existence and salience of school membership within academically engaged students. Overall, eleven of the twelve students who were academically engaged possessed school membership. Students with school membership self-identified as students much more often than students without school membership. In several cases, students discussed particular teachers or classes that helped develop a sense of confidence and interest in increasing their efforts (and subsequently their grades) within school, even if they had not performed well in school previously. In contrast, students without school

membership rarely if ever self-identified as a student, instead self-identifying through a “street” identity in many cases. It was also more difficult for me to find academically disengaged students within City High, particularly at the ninth grade level. Furthermore, all but one of the study students who did not possess school membership predominantly exhibited behaviors inconsistent with academic engagement.

Given this suggestive evidence for the existence of school membership in academically engaged students at City High, I examined whether there were aspects of a school’s social or structural environment that were most conducive to the formation of school membership. Students with school membership indicated through their interviews that there were several social and structural aspects of City High that aided in their development and maintenance of school membership. These aspects included structural factors such as block scheduling, school safety measures and small class size. Students with school membership also characterized social aspects of City High such as familial relations with students and teachers, a “culture of success” and interactive course content in an overwhelmingly positive manner, indicating in some cases that their relationships with students and teachers were a primary motivating factor in their academic engagement. Students without school membership, who were the minority in City High, tended to characterize structural aspects of City High such as block scheduling or school uniforms negatively, were less likely to have close relationships with their teachers or other students at City High and in several cases indicated that the social and academic environment of City High dissuaded them from attending school more often.

The third question the qualitative phase of my research intended to answer was: if a relationship does exist between school membership and academic engagement, how does an internalized sense of school membership lead to academic engagement? School membership led to academic engagement through internal motivators such as a sense of self esteem, self-verification and self efficacy, which students with school membership derived from actions consistent with a student identity standard. Students with school membership also exhibited an internal locus of control-- a belief that they could accomplish their goals through their own actions-- in terms of academic performance. Students without school membership derived self-esteem from behavior consistent with a “street” identity standard and had an external locus of control in terms of academic performance.

Finally, within the ethnographic portion of this dissertation, I examined students’ out of school environments. Students without school membership were more likely than students with school membership to be involved, or have family members involved with criminal activity outside of school. In addition, students with school membership tended to have closer relationships with their family members, additional caretaking responsibilities at home in some cases, and more positive experiences in their elementary and middle schools.

The advantages for students with school membership helped them withstand the pressures of “the streets” – the omnipresent poverty and criminal activity that characterized students’ out of school social and structural environments regardless of their level of school membership. These out of school pressures, particularly caretaking responsibilities, contributed to lower attendance rates and lower, but still

passing grades among some students that possessed school membership. Many of these students had failed a number of courses in middle school, and may have continued their trend of failing courses or dropped out of school entirely without their development of school membership.

Both of my hierarchical linear models; one with school membership as the outcome variable and one with academic engagement as the outcome variable provided initial quantitative support for my qualitative findings. Two aspects of students' academic environment: student-teacher interaction and school safety were highly correlated with school membership. Two other measures of a school's structural environment: block scheduling and school size, were weaker, but statistically significant predictors of school membership. Interestingly, attending a large high school, being African-American, and attending a high school with a large percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch were all related to higher school membership levels. I hypothesized that this was because school membership was essential for students within disadvantaged high schools, and because the ELS surveyed students during their tenth grade year. The modal grade level of high school dropout in many urban districts is the ninth grade, meaning that within large high schools with a large percentage of impoverished, minority students, the ELS surveyed a subset of relatively motivated, skilled students who avoided ninth grade retention unlike a disturbingly large number of their peers.

Within the stepwise HLM equations examining academic engagement, school membership was one of the most powerful predictors of academic engagement. Student-teacher interaction and school safety were also strongly related to academic

engagement in both steps of this equation, although school membership accounted for some of the predictive power of student-teacher interaction. Four other variables that measured school structure: block scheduling, school size, poor facilities, and percentage of teachers certified in the area they teach were also statistically significant predictors of academic engagement. In sum, this dissertation has uncovered prima face evidence supporting the existence of school membership as a mediating factor between academic environment and academic engagement for students, particularly within the academic experiences of disadvantaged students.

Given that the qualitative evidence was from an instrumental case study of a single high school, the quantitative evidence was from a survey not specifically designed to measure a psychological concept such as school membership, and the quantitative data was unable to examine school membership levels before and after high school entry, the results of this dissertation should be treated as a first, promising step towards a new perspective in comprehensive high school reform. This dissertation demonstrates that the concept of school membership and the links between academic environment, identity formation and academic engagement are deserving of additional in depth, longitudinal, and comparative research. This research should be both qualitative, in order to examine the micro-level process of school membership formation, and quantitative in order to examine questions such as “to what extent to which academically engaged students internalize school membership?” on a broad scale. While we wait for such studies to occur, I conclude this dissertation by examining the sociological and educational policy implications of this initial exploration of school membership.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Discovering school membership as a psychological mediating factor between academic environment and academic engagement introduces a multitude of questions and implications in the realms of social psychology and educational policy.

Sociologically, this study provided a dynamic examination of identity theory within a disadvantaged, minority population, a population largely absent from existing identity theory research. Considering the extent to which school membership was present in this population in comparison to more advantaged groups, and considering the positive effects of school membership upon disadvantaged students, further research on the identity hierarchies of disadvantaged populations may yield results that are sociologically salient and politically actionable.

This study also provided an examination of identity theory within a social setting that is almost universally experienced among Americans, yet not widely examined by identity theorists: high school. With the exception of studies of adolescent identity change that acknowledge the social sphere of high school, research specifically searching for or examining a “student” identity is minimal. By examining students’ within school and out of school identities, this study provided a vivid description of how these identities often conflicted with each other, and how students dealt with these conflicts. This study also provided evidence supporting the existence for four motivators of behavior within an enacted identity: locus of control, self-esteem, self-verification and self-efficacy.

This research also provided support for the research of Prudence Carter on Ogbu’s “acting white” thesis and the active nature of self-identities. Like Carter, I

found that cultural identity alone was insufficient to explain the actions of the “involuntary minority” students studied in City High. While some study students without school membership might consider students who attended class, participated in class, and had close relationships to teachers as acting “white”, or apply some other negative label to these students, students with school membership tended to prioritize their student identities, and not necessarily consider acting “white” a negative connotation. Other students with school membership mentioned both their cultural and student identities as most important to them, and did not find these identities to be at odds with each other. In addition to these sociological implications, my findings on the importance of student self-identities in motivating behavior consistent with academic engagement also lend themselves to practical applications within comprehensive school reform models.

A New Framework of Comprehensive School Reform

While this dissertation has provided support for identity theory as well as a potential avenue for future identity theory research, the most far reaching implications of my dissertation are in the realm of educational policy. An emphasis on school membership has the potential to fundamentally transform how comprehensive school reform models are constructed, implemented and evaluated at the high school level.

This dissertation lends itself to several general and specific implications within the realm of educational policy. The most basic implication of my research findings is that a comprehensive (as opposed to piecemeal) model of school reform is most effective for disadvantaged students within disadvantaged schools. In the main,

the TDHS model was effective in creating school membership and subsequent academic engagement because the students of City High were completely immersed within a social and structural academic environment that encouraged the formation and maintenance of school membership. Without a complete immersion in an environment created by a holistic comprehensive school reform model that focuses on students' social and academic experiences, students may be more likely to experience cues to enact identities other than a "student" identity within school. For example, a single classroom characterized by disruptions and fighting among students would be a cue for a student to activate a "street" identity, even if the remainder of the school provided a positive academic environment.

While this finding is encouraging in the wake of a national push towards developing and implementing comprehensive school reform models over the last fifteen years, this also debunks a commonly held belief of educational practitioners: if a student develops a close relationship with just one teacher, this can cause a disengaged student buy in to school norms and become engaged. Every study student without school membership, no matter the extent of their academic disengagement, developed close social bonds with one teacher. This commitment encouraged academic engagement within that class, but did not affect student identities and academic engagement within the students' other classes. Clearly, for students like Flair, Crystal, and Ray, one teacher was not enough.

Another basic, but important implication of this research is the necessity of listening to student voices when creating and implementing comprehensive school reform models. All too often, these models are created or implemented without

sufficient regard to how the student experiences high school structurally and (especially) socially, as well as how these experiences affect student motivation levels. Even more importantly, many comprehensive school reform models do not take student *identities* into account. It is the student's identity hierarchy that is a determinant of how the student reacts to environmental cues and subsequently whether he or she exhibits the types of behaviors which comprehensive school reform models strive to create. Without examining students' social milieu, their experiences, and their identities within a given school, it will be difficult, if not impossible to create or implement a comprehensive school reform model that meets the needs of the student and encourages the formation or maintenance of a salient student identity. The nineteen students I interviewed and observed for this study displayed a broad spectrum of self-identities and identity hierarchies. The complex matrices of student self-identities that exist within a school necessitates that practitioners take students' identities, experiences, and voices into account when implementing a comprehensive school reform model.

Along these same lines, another important implication of this research is that basing evaluations of academic engagement on academic performance alone is not sufficient, especially within schools such as City High where students are "going through things their teachers would never believe". On the surface, students like Tweety, Lynee, and Bubbles may not seem to be academically engaged, as all three students' attendance rates were around 85-90%, and all three students averaged roughly a C in their courses during the study year. However, all three of these students bore the heavy burden of caretaking for younger siblings or older relatives at

home, and had to balance their schooling with these responsibilities, leading to their average, at best academic performance. It is precisely for these types of students that comprehensive school reform models must provide academic and social supports, as these students clearly were academically engaged to the greatest extent possible given their circumstances. These three students clearly had the potential to graduate high school. However, given their academic performance, these students could easily slip into course failure and eventual dropout.

On a more specific level, the findings of my dissertation have demonstrated that it is not too late to effectively intervene in students' academic careers at the high school level, particularly during the transition year to high school. In fact, the transition year to high school is critical for the development and maintenance of school membership, as students indicated that they sometimes struggled to develop or maintain their self-identities while transitioning to high school, a new social network with new norms and expectations. Without an environment with strong social norms of academic engagement that is conducive to social bonding between students and school staff, students are at risk of developing or maintaining a self-identity based on opposition to school norms and goals. More simply, transitioning students risk "falling in with the wrong crowd".

Despite the volumes of recent research indicating the importance of the transition year to high school, the majority of the most widely implemented comprehensive school reform models do not specifically target grades nine through twelve.³⁹ Instead, these models target the elementary and middle grades, or are not

³⁹ This statement does not reflect upon "home grown" comprehensive school reform models, which are also prevalent among high schools given the large amount of CSRP funds appropriated to schools with

grade specific. Without effective comprehensive high school reform models available to disadvantaged high schools, it is possible that much of the positive accomplishments of comprehensive school reform models at the elementary and middle school levels could be lost as students transition to high school.

While this dissertation asserts that the transition year to high school represents a critical time in student identity formation, *it is both the timing and content of comprehensive school reform that is crucial to creating and maintaining school membership and academic engagement.* Borman and colleagues' 2002 study indicated that the majority of the most widely implemented comprehensive school reform models do not explicitly mention the school's social and structural environment in their mission statements or primary goals. Instead, the most common goals included improved student test scores/achievement, teacher autonomy, lessons that inspired critical thinking and connecting school to the workplace. While these are all worthwhile goals of any comprehensive school reform model, these goals cannot be affectively achieved without a sustained, systematic focus on the social and structural environment of the school.

In order to affect academic engagement among the very students comprehensive school reform models aim to reach, a more holistic model of comprehensive school reform must be implemented in order to address student contexts both within and outside of school. My research has vividly demonstrated in ways in which many disadvantaged students' social and structural environments outside of school inhibit school membership. These environments included crippling

such models in the early 2000s. It is perhaps in part because of the dearth of comprehensive school reform models specifically targeted at high schools that these "home grown" models have become so prevalent nationally. Very little research exists on the effectiveness of such models.

poverty, single parenthood, gang activity and violence, lack of occupational opportunities, caretaking responsibilities, and “the streets”.

In order to meet this challenge, this dissertation, or more specifically the students of City High have identified specific structural and social aspects of comprehensive school reform that are vital to creating an environment conducive to the creation and maintenance of school membership and academic engagement. These structural aspects of academic environment include a strong security presence within school, a physically separate ninth grade wing, small school and class sizes, a block schedule, and the availability of social workers for students.

In addition, this dissertation identified social aspects of school environment such as social bonding between teachers and students, high academic expectations, strong, effective leadership, and an overall “culture of success” as vital to school membership formation. These social and structural aspects of comprehensive school reform are sorely needed within disadvantaged schools, in addition to the mainstays of many comprehensive school reform models such as curriculum that cuts skill gaps and emphasizes higher level thinking. Without more holistic reform models that prioritize the social and physical environment encompassing the entire school, standards based comprehensive school reform models will not fulfill their potential to promote academic engagement and ultimately improved levels of student achievement.

While the Talent Development High School Model was effective in creating or maintaining school membership within the majority of its transitioning students, it was also clear that students such as Flair, Crystal, and Ray were in need of stronger,

more sustained supports due to their well established “street”, or anti-school identities. These students enacted their “street” identities through behaviors such as (self-reported) gang involvement, poor attendance, and poor behavior within school. To an extent, these “street” identities were fostered through the crippling effects of poverty in Central City, which includes poor previous school experiences, but also much more that is outside of the school’s direct control.

Despite the assertion by sociologists and educational theorists such as Wilson, Rothstein and Anyon that educational equity cannot be achieved without broad economic, political, educational transformation, high schools cannot and should not abandon attempts to fulfill their obligation to engender school membership and academic engagement in all students. The voices of students such as Flair, Crystal and Ray help provide a starting point for systematic reform targeted at creating academic engagement within the most disadvantaged, disengaged high school students. Two of the tenets of identity theory are: 1) individuals are motivated to fulfill the identity standards of an enacted identity, and 2) individuals enact a given identity in part through situational cues. Within a school with a limited number of disengaged students without a student identity, it may be possible to foster this identity through placing one or two disengaged students within classes with a strongly established student identity standard and a majority or all students displaying school membership through acting to fulfill this identity standard.

However, for schools such as City High, it may not be a case of one or two disengaged students, but rather a case of widespread academic disengagement and lack of school membership. In these cases, more extensive and focused interventions

are necessary. The Talent Development High School Model already has created one potential intervention for students like Flair, Crystal, and Ray: the Twilight Academy. The Twilight Academy is an alternative school setting created for students with severe academic or disciplinary problems. These academies usually run in the late afternoon or early evening hours on school grounds and focus on core course basic skills in a small classroom environment with a small number of teachers and extensive services provided by staff, social workers, and guidance counselors (Legters et al 2002).

Within an academically intensive environment such as a Twilight Academy or a similar alternative setting, it is possible that a charismatic teacher such as Mr. J, who developed close bonds with many disadvantaged students like Flair by sharing his own life experiences, may help create an environment where a disengaged student may begin to develop school membership, and by extension self-esteem and feelings of self-efficacy within the classroom. Ultimately, based on the student's individual situation, the Twilight Academy could be used (as it is in the TDHS model) as a program designed to eventually transition highly disengaged students back into the mainstream of high school.

While the Twilight Academy may be a great help to students with the greatest needs, this study has shown that students' most salient identities are usually those for which the student experiences the most environmental cues to enact. In other words, a Twilight Academy or other alternative setting for students will ultimately fail if school cannot coordinate with other agencies to help transform the student's out of school environment to coincide with a transformed in-school environment. This

coordination may have several aspects, such as a concerted effort by staff to increase parental involvement in students' academic lives. Alternatively, if this is not possible or desirable, the school may coordinate with a nonprofit organization such as Big Brothers or Big Sisters in order to provide the student with positive mentorship outside of school.

This coordination should also examine a primary cause of academic disengagement within disadvantaged areas: poverty. Specifically, schools with highly disadvantaged students in a Twilight Academy would be well served to help the student find some sort of employment or paid vocational training to attend during the daytime hours for course credit. This would provide students with a legal means of making money, keep students off of "the streets", and perhaps provide motivation for students to become academically engaged and obtain at least a high school diploma. One theme I uncovered in my analysis was a desire on the part of several students, regardless of school membership levels to have some sort of vocational training course within school, indicating the potential for such a program to draw students who are disengaged or have dropped out back into school. Schools with highly disengaged, highly disadvantaged students may also need to coordinate with social services or even private companies such as an electric or phone company in order to provide avenues for the student to obtain necessities such as light, heat, food, and caretaking support at home that allow these students to place a greater focus on academics and link these necessities with academic performance.

While it may be asking a lot of resource starved, comprehensive urban high schools to create a social and structural support system or environment that enables

the creation and maintenance of a salient student identity that is readily activated inside and outside of school, this is precisely the challenge that many such schools overcome to create lasting student engagement and gains in academic achievement. However, both sociologists and educational theorists have posited that educational equity between students like those at City High and students in more advantaged areas will require movements outside of the scope of simple educational reform.

Reconceptualizing School Reform

The unfortunate cases of many of this study's most disengaged students provide support to the arguments of educational theorists and sociologists such as William Julius Wilson, Richard Rothstein and Jean Anyon. Rothstein and Anyon, from an educational standpoint, and Wilson, from a sociological standpoint, have examined social class as a driving factor in educational inequality, specifically between African-American and white students. Their works have indicated that educational reform alone is insufficient to bridge the educational divide between race and class, and that ameliorating the effects of class is the only way to create educational equity.

Wilson placed this divide in a historical context, detailing the creation of the urban "underclass" due to the decline in the number and availability of manufacturing occupations that paid a living wage and required little formal education in several urban neighborhoods after the World War II era. This lack of occupational opportunity not only created widespread impoverishment within these areas, but also a lack of education, a lack of community safeguards and resources (such as reliable

public transportation), and social isolation that precluded social connections to a network of employed individuals who can aid in the process of becoming employed among its inhabitants. Wilson argued against the idea of a “culture of poverty”, instead arguing that “culture is a response to social structural constraints and opportunities” (Wilson 1987, p. 61). In order to remedy this structural racism, Wilson posited that structural barriers to urban development must be dismantled (Wilson 1987, 1996).

Rothstein also examined class inequality through the lens of student performance on standardized tests. Rothstein posited that even with an identical within-school experience, students from disadvantaged backgrounds (what he calls “lower – class” students) would not score as well as more advantaged students due to correlates of economic class, such as poor health, higher rates of mobility, and households that may have not placed an emphasis on the types of skills that education rewards. Therefore, improvements in curriculum can only be effective if they are accompanied by coordinated efforts to reduce the impact of poverty within disadvantaged neighborhoods (Rothstein 2004).

Jean Anyon took this concept one step further, reconceptualizing educational reform in terms of social movements. Anyon, through his examinations of social movements from the union movements of the nineteenth century to the civil rights and women’s movements of the twentieth century, posited that it is through grassroots social movements that bring together a number of related causes and organizations that the greatest shifts in educational policy (such as desegregation, bilingual education, and the development of public schools) have historically taken

place. Social movements, as opposed to smaller-scale educational reform, involve collective, conflictual relationships between groups who seek control of the same stake, whether it is economic, political, cultural, or some other type of power. These movements are not isolated events, but sustained efforts that involve multiple coalitions attempting to transform, rather than work within a system. Anyon believes that it is only through these sorts of multi-front social movements that gaps in educational equity between classes can be eradicated through eliminating economic, political, and social inequity between classes as well (Anyon 2005, 2009).

While it is hardly the stated goal of any comprehensive school reform model to be a catalyst of a broad social movement, the Talent Development High School Model, more so than any other existing comprehensive school reform model at the high school level, incorporates the ideals of Wilson, Rothstein and Anyon by acknowledging students' out of school contexts, and providing social workers as a support system for students should they need it. Through additional reform measures such as a Twilight Academy, comprehensive school reform models can take the next step in facilitating a complete transformation of students' within school and out of school environments. In order to reach the most disengaged, disadvantaged students, like Flair, Crystal and Ray, nothing less than this level of intervention will ultimately succeed.

Roadblocks to Implementing Holistic Comprehensive School Reform Models

The results of my dissertation beg the question of why we have not seen more holistic (e.g., taking social and structural environment into account) comprehensive

school reform models implemented on a national scale, especially at the high school level. The implementation of any comprehensive high school reform model takes a great deal of time, effort and buy-in from staff members, as well as a large amount of teacher training (or turnover). This is especially true when implementing a holistic comprehensive school reform model that aims to transform a school's social and physical environment. Even within schools with the financial means to implement comprehensive school reform models through Title I funds, private grants, or otherwise, these other necessary components of effective comprehensive school reform may be lacking for a number of reasons, reducing the chances of such a comprehensive reform model being successfully implemented, or implemented at all.

Of the essential components to effective comprehensive school reform, time is the one luxury in shortest supply for leaders of disadvantaged high schools and school districts, especially in the wake of No Child Left Behind. Often, comprehensive school reform is undertaken as a result of a school needing improvement or corrective action as a result of low test scores or graduation rates. For a large, urban, disadvantaged school in such dire straits, its social and physical environment may need to undergo a radical transformation to achieve an environment approximating the environment I observed at City High. This environmental transformation must be total in order for norms to be established that significantly affect student engagement and achievement. However, this type of transformation is not likely to be complete within one or two school years. Therefore, comprehensive school reform models that emphasize both holistic and standards based goals may not appeal to school districts as much as a strictly standards-based comprehensive school reform model that may

only require materials and teacher coaching, can be implemented within a year or two, and places a premium on skills needed for student improvement in standards based testing.

Within disadvantaged school districts, the rates of teacher and administrator turnover are higher than in more advantaged school districts. This turnover rate also makes time of the essence when implementing any comprehensive school reform model. The roster of teachers and staff at a school during the baseline year of implementing a comprehensive school reform model may look radically different only one or two years later. High rates of teacher turnover mean additional time training new teachers and difficulty in establishing and maintaining a climate of support for a comprehensive school reform model among teachers. Administrator turnover is also potentially damaging to the implementation of any type of comprehensive school reform model. If a new administrator does not buy in to an implemented comprehensive school reform model, or already has his or her own vision of reforming a disadvantaged school, the comprehensive school reform model currently in place is likely to be discontinued.

In addition to time, disadvantaged schools implementing a comprehensive school reform model, especially one emphasizing academic environment, also face the challenge of buy-in from staff members for a variety of reasons. Staff members may need a great deal of professional development. This is particularly so within disadvantaged schools, as many teachers consider positions in such schools undesirable or untenable, leading to a great deal of teacher turnover and a less qualified teaching staff within these schools. For staff members who have been

teaching for a number of years, there may be some resistance to adhering to a comprehensive school reform model that does not synch with their established beliefs about teaching responsibilities and best practices.

Holistic comprehensive school reform models also emphasize the creation a strong student identity standard and social bonding within the classroom between teachers and students, something many teachers may be unable or unwilling to do. Whether it is fair to teachers or not, much of the responsibility for transforming the social environment of a disadvantaged high school is placed upon teachers. This responsibility can compound the burdens teachers within disadvantaged schools already face, such as maintaining classroom discipline, preparing students for standards based testing, and dealing with deficits both in terms of classroom resources and student skill levels.

My instrumental case study of City High also demonstrated that there is no one best practice that engenders social bonding and a clear student identity standard within the classroom, as evidenced by the divergent, yet largely effective styles of “Mr. S” and “Mr. J”. The social bonding created within these classrooms was highly dependent upon the efforts, personalities and identities of teachers and students within that specific classroom.

Although high amounts of teacher effort seemed to be the common thread between the teachers at City High that created the most successful classroom environments, these teachers also had an ability to create social bonds with and among students. This study demonstrated that teachers who tried hard but did not possess the “people skills” to create social bonding and a student identity standard

within the classroom generally did not affect students who were in most need of school membership positively. In the case of “Mr. C”, his lack of patience at times negated his ability to create an environment conducive to school membership, as students without school membership did not socially bond to him, and at time interpreted his lack of ability to socially bond with students as not caring or not trying hard. It is these “people skills” that may not come naturally to a number of teachers, and are difficult to teach as a best practice.

For these reasons, among others, there is also no guarantee that the majority of a school’s teachers or administrators will necessarily buy in to a comprehensive school reform model that emphasizes academic environment along with academic achievement. These difficult tasks laid at the feet of teachers within disadvantaged high schools may eventually lead to resistance and resentment, even among teachers who initially buy in to this model. If a number of influential staff members do not fully buy in to the implementation of a comprehensive school reform model, that model is doomed to fail.

In addition to problems with time and buy in, schools may also face a lack of resources with which to implement a holistic comprehensive school reform model. A comprehensive school reform model such as the TDHS model requires additional staff, such as social workers and non-teaching aides that other, more strictly standards-based models may not include. In addition, a comprehensive school reform model may require an increase in the number of teachers in order to decrease class sizes. In an overcrowded school, this may also mean physically remodeling the school or otherwise finding additional space to hold classes. For a school with a

significant number of highly disengaged students, a Twilight Academy or other alternative setting may need to be provided. The increased resources necessary to effectively transform a school's social and structural environment may make more holistic comprehensive school reform models less desirable or feasible to implement for disadvantaged schools.

Because of the multiple roadblocks schools face in implementing any comprehensive school reform model, let alone a holistic comprehensive school reform model, program evaluations of comprehensive school reform models have been somewhat mixed. However, these program evaluations have not always accounted for the context of comprehensive school reform implementation within a specific school. Borman and colleagues posited that these contextual effects of comprehensive school reform implementation are a major reason why there were small effects of comprehensive school reform components such as professional development or measurable goals and benchmarks for student learning within their meta-analysis of program evaluations of comprehensive school reform models (Borman et al 2002).

My examination of comprehensive school reform models and the implementation of the TDHS model at City High demonstrate why it is essential for any evaluation of a comprehensive school reform model to take contextual factors into account. These factors include material supports, buy in to the model within the school, the extent to which a comprehensive school reform model is actually implemented and the level of academic and personal needs students within a school experience. Without accounting for these factors, researchers and funding agencies

will not get a complete picture of the effectiveness of a comprehensive school reform model, particularly a holistic model such as the TDHS model.

The generally mixed results of program evaluations have contributed to recent federal cuts in funding for comprehensive school reform programs. In 2005, the Comprehensive School Reform Program, which contributed hundreds of millions of dollars annually to schools for the purpose of implementing comprehensive school reform models, was virtually eliminated. In addition, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the nation's largest philanthropic contributor to comprehensive school reform, has recently moved away from funding Small Learning Community implementation within large, urban school districts after making the creation of these SLCs a funding priority in the early part of the 2000s (Shaw 2005). This was due in part to largely mixed results from these schools in terms of attendance rates and gains in math and English test scores. Without support from funding agencies, research that better accounts for school context in evaluating comprehensive school reform programs, and a measure of patience from funders, state officials and school district officials, comprehensive school reform models, particularly those that aim to transform the social and structural environment of a high school, cannot flourish within the schools most of need of transformative, comprehensive school reform.

STUDENTS ON THE BRINK

I end this study by going back to a fact that struck me during my observations of City High's students, particularly when interacting with City High's ninth graders. It was clear to me that school membership was critical in the academic engagement

process of these disadvantaged students, as extrinsic motivators such as college admission or a high salary occupation at first did not seem easily attainable in their minds. However, the possession of school membership was also the most fragile within this group of students, even those students with the strongest student self-identities. This was particularly so for ninth grade students struggling to fit in among other ninth grade students and find their niche in City High.

In many ways, students at City High were on the brink of developing or losing school membership. Many of the study students without school membership still had one teacher or adult figure in school with whom they developed close ties with. As Flair, perhaps the ninth grade student with the worst behavioral problems in City High said, “Mr. J just gives me good advice; for some reason everything he says I listen to. I never had a person like that, where you could sit me down...” It was clear through his interviews that he considered Mr. J somewhat of a father figure and that at times felt genuinely remorseful for his anti-social behavior inside and outside of school. Flair was not alone in displaying remorse at times for poor grades and poor behavior inside and outside of school. However, despite close bonds to teachers such as Mr. J., and a seeming potential for academic engagement, one teacher was not enough for these students, as Flair and other students without school membership instead displayed behavior that typified academic disengagement.

At the same time, despite the strong sense of school membership that many of the ninth grade study students displayed, their student identities had to be constantly supported through their academic environments in order to remain salient. Students at City High faced many challenges to maintaining a salient student identity, both

outside of school in “the streets” and through the presence of students at City High without school membership. Students with school membership did this inside of school through surrounding themselves with other students that possessed school membership, attending school regularly, participating in after-school activities, and attempting to ignore the “knuckleheads”, as one student called them, that displayed behavior not consistent with academic engagement inside or outside of school. These “knuckleheads” often “hated on” students who displayed school membership and academic engagement. The fact that this “hating” went on most often at the ninth grade level demonstrates how student identities were most fragile at this stage of their academic careers.

Even within a setting like City High with an “ideal” implementation of the TDHS model, it was difficult to create an academic environment where students were completely sheltered from the realities of “the streets”. Because of this, a consistent reinforcement of student identities and student identity standards by school staff and other students was essential to maintaining school membership and academic engagement. This was especially so for students like Bubbles, Lynee and Tweety who had caretaking responsibilities for younger or older relatives at home, as their families could not afford or access reliable child or elder care. The responsibilities these students were given at home led to average, at best attendance rates and grades. However, it was the school membership and social bonds that these students possessed within City High that kept them attending school when possible despite a strong force pulling them out of school. Indeed, the implementation of the TDHS model at City High demonstrated the potential for academic engagement, or academic

disengagement within nearly all of City High's grade students, especially those transitioning to high school.

Undoubtedly, disadvantaged students such as those that City High serves have myriad, complex identity structures based upon their social, economic, and familial statuses. While it is not possible to recognize every self-identity within every student, recognizing the integral role that academic environment and identity formation plays in student trajectories through high school is a crucial first step in creating successful comprehensive high school reform models and lasting academic engagement and achievement across a broad spectrum of students, especially within students from the schools and districts in greatest need.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Open-Ended Questions Asked of Study Participants

One on One Interview

1. If you had to grade your motivation this year in school on a scale of 1 to 10, what would you grade it, and why?
2. Think about some of the things that are going on with you on a daily basis at City High, like interactions with teachers and other students. Are there things going on inside of school make you want to try hard in some or all of your classes?
3. On the flip side of that, are there things going on inside of school on a daily basis that make you not want to try hard in class or even come to school at all?
4. Think about some of the things that are going on with you outside of City High with your family, your friends, or just with your neighborhood in general. Are there any things that are going on that make you want to come to school?
5. On the flip side, are there any things going on outside of school make you not want to come to school?
6. In general, what things make kids care about school? Not you, but other kids you know?
7. What makes them not care about school?
8. Generally, do the ways your teachers act in front of the classroom set an example for students, either positive or negative?
9. Do you think it really affects students if a teacher is setting an example in class – you only have so many hours with the teachers, so can they really affect how kids act in school or how hard they try in school? If so, how?
10. One of the things that sociologists look at is how peoples many different identities. By that, I mean that everyone has several identities that come out every day. For example, at work I am a researcher, that's one identity. When I'm with my friends, I'm a friend, or when I visit my parents, I'm a son. If you had to choose three identities in your life that are most important to you, what would those identities be? Why would you choose those identities?

11. For each identity – what if people that you deal with as part of that identity found out that you failed a class this semester? How would they react, if at all? How would they react if they found out that you made the honor roll, if at all?
12. Does being a student at City High mean anything different than being in another school? If so, why?
13. Think about where you see yourself in five or ten years. Would you say that the things you are learning in class at City High are useful to you? Why or why not?

Focus Group Interview

1. I want to talk to you a little bit about your favorite teacher you have this semester, and your least favorite teacher you have this year, if you have one. Do you have a favorite teacher this year? If you had to give your favorite teacher a grade, what grade would you give him or her, and why?
2. Do you have a least favorite teacher this year? If you had to grade your least favorite teacher, what grade would you give him or her, and why?
3. Talk for a little bit about the way you interact with your favorite teacher. How well do you feel like this teacher communicates with you? Why? How close do you feel you are to that teacher?
4. Talk for a little bit about the way you interact with your least favorite teacher. How well do you feel like this teacher communicates with you? Why? How close do you feel you are to that teacher?
5. How hard do you think your favorite teacher tries to make sure you actually learn the things that he or she teaches in class? How can you tell?
6. How hard do you think your least favorite teacher tries to make sure you actually learn the things that he or she teaches in class? How can you tell?
7. When your favorite teacher is in front of class, do you think the other students respect him or her? How do they act? Does the teacher do anything that makes them act that way?
8. When your least favorite teacher is in front of class, do you think the other students respect him or her? How do they act? What does the teacher do that makes them act that way?

9. In general what do your favorite teachers have in common in terms of how they teach or talk to students?
10. In general, what do your least favorite teachers have in common in terms of how they teach or talk to students?

**Appendix B: Demographic and Grade Level Data for Qualitative Study Students
(All Students were African-American)**

Males (9 Total)	Females (10 Total)
“Darnell”	“Bubbles”
“Flair”	“Crystal”
“Mikey”	“Day Day”
“Ray”	“Lynee”
“Rock”	“Nicole”
“Ron”	“Pooh Bear”
“Sero”	“Raspberry”
“Spade”	“T”
“Wayne”	“Tweety”
	“Zalrrah”

9 th Graders (13 Total)	10 th Graders (5 Total)	12 th Graders (1 Total)
“Bubbles”	“Darnell”	“Spade”
“Crystal”	“Lynee”	
“Day Day”	“Nicole”	
“Flair”	“Ray”	
“Mikey”	“Tweety”	
“Pooh Bear”		
“Raspberry”		
“Rock”		
“Ron”		
“Sero”		
“T”		
“Wayne”		
“Zalrrah”		

Appendix C: Qualitative Themes Uncovered During the Open and Axial Coding Process

STUDENT'S OUT OF SCHOOL LIVES	ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT
Personal Single Parent/Parental Drug Issues Single Parent/Drug/Caretaking Prevalent in Community Caretaking Role in Family Parent/Guardian's Education Levels Relationship with Parents Low Economic Bracket/Welfare Status Social Bonding in Previous Schools Student's Previous Anti-Social Behavior Anti-Social Friends Anti-Social Peers School's Dropout Rate School Safety Issues Fear of Crime Around School Drug Trade in Community Personal Experience in Drug Trade	Student-Teacher Interaction Levels Low Student-Teacher Interaction Critical Thinking Pedagogy Work is too Difficult Caring Pedagogy Teacher Effort Levels School/Class Size Classroom Organization Facilities Quality School Organization Material Shortages Teachers are Fair Principals are Fair Principals are Unfair Discipline in Class is Fair Discipline in Class is Unfair Teacher is too Strict Teacher is Skilled Teacher is Unskilled Teacher is Experienced Suspension/Discipline Issues in the Class Students "Hating On" Each Other 9th Grade Transition Easy "Putting Kids Out" of Class is Bad Facilities Quality
MEMBERSHIP	ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT
Closeness to Teacher Closeness to Students Students Setting Examples for Each Other Mental Engagement to Commitment Perceived School Legitimacy Why Students Act Out In School Reciprocity Between Students and Teachers Teacher Sets Identity Standards Self-Identity As a Student Self-Esteem from Enacting Student ID Self-Verification from Enacting Student ID I Feel "A Part of School" Self-Efficacy Lack of Self-Efficacy Personal Motivation to Come to School Socialization in Class to Not Act "Ghetto" Teachers do NOT Make Difference in Motivation	Attendance Class Participation Grades/Grade Promotion Behavior Homework Completed Participation in Activities Classes are Fun/Boring
TALENT DEVELOPMENT MODEL	GOAL SETTING
Noted TD Reforms as Positive Noted TD Reforms as Negative	Academic Goals Most Important Non-Academic Goals Most Important

Appendix D: Descriptive Outcomes for School Membership and School Engagement Variables (N=76,625)

VARIABLE	DESCRIPTION	MEAN	SD
School Membership	Student response to statement “I go to school because I get a feeling of satisfaction from doing what I’m supposed to do in class”. 1=“Strongly Disagree”, 4=“Strongly Agree”	2.667	0.746
Academic Engagement	Composite, based on averaged answers to the statements “how many times did the following things happen to you in the first semester/term of this school year?” “I was late for school”, “I cut or skipped classes”, “I was absent from school”, “I got in trouble for not following school rules”, “I was put on in-school suspension”, “I was suspended or put on probation”, “I was transferred to another school for disciplinary reasons”. 1=“Ten or more times”, 5=“Never”	3.250	0.483

Note: Survey questions taken from the base year ELS student survey.

Appendix E: Descriptive Outcomes for Environmental Independent Variables (N=76,625)

STI VARIABLE	DESCRIPTION	MEAN	SD
Student-Teacher Interaction	Composite, based on averaged answers to the statements “students get along well with teachers at this school”, “teachers are interested in students”, and “when I work hard on my schoolwork, teachers praise my effort”. 1=“Strongly Disagree”, 4=“Strongly Agree”	2.811	0.523
SCHOOL STRUCTURE VARIABLES	DESCRIPTION	MEAN	SD
School Safety	Student response to statement “I don’t feel safe in school”. 1 = “Strongly Agree”, 4=“Strongly Disagree”	3.274	0.726
Poor Facilities	Composite, based on averaged administrator responses to the questions “In your school, how much of the learning of 10 th graders is hindered by...” poor condition of buildings, poor heating, cooling, or lighting systems, lack of instructional space, lack of computers, lack of text books and basic supplies. 1=Not at All, 4=A Lot	1.694	0.621
Private School	Dummy variable. 1=Private school, 0=Public school	0.215	0.411
School Size	Total school enrollment as of October 2001. Categorical. 1=Under 400 Students, 9=2,500 or More Students	4.662	2.454
Certification	Percentage of teachers in school certified in the subject area in which they teach. Continuous.	0.873	0.221
Block Schedule	Dummy variable. Length of class periods in school. 1=90 Minutes or More, 0=Less than 90 Minutes	0.214	0.410

Note: Survey questions taken from the base year ELS student and administrator surveys.

Appendix F: Descriptive Outcomes Control Variables (N=76,625)

VARIABLE	DESCRIPTION	MEAN	SD
Gender	Dummy variable. 1=Female, 0=Male	0.502	0.500
White	Dummy race variable. 1=White, 0=Other Race	0.570	0.495
African-American (excluded)	Dummy race variable. 1=African-American, 0=Other Race	0.132	0.339
Hispanic	Dummy race variable. 1=Hispanic, 0=Other Race	0.145	0.352
Asian American	Dummy race variable. 1=American Indian, 0=Other Race	0.096	0.294
Other or Multiple Races	Dummy race variable. 1=Other/Multiple Races, 0=Not Other/Multiple Races	0.057	0.232
Overage	Dummy age variable. 1=One or More Years Overage for Grade (Born before September 1985), 0=Less than One Year Overage.	0.185	0.388
ELL	Dummy English Language Learner variable. 1=English is Student's Second Language, 0= Native Speaker.	0.169	0.375
Family Income	Categorical variable for total family income from all sources for 2001. 1="None", 13="200,001 or More".	9.066	2.418
Parental Expectation of College	Dummy variable. Student response to the question "what does your mother think is the most important thing for you to do right after high school?" 1="Go to College", 0=All other responses	0.804	0.397
Percent Receiving Free Reduced Price Lunch	Percentage of students receiving free or reduced price lunch. Categorical. This variable was only available during the first follow-up year (October 2003). 1=0-5% FRP Lunch, 7=76-100% FRP Lunch.	3.584	1.887

Note: Survey questions taken from the base year ELS student and administrator surveys, with the exception of FRP lunch, which was taken from the first follow-up administrator survey in 2004.

Appendix G: Effects of Imputed Values on Dependent and Independent Variables

VARIABLE	PERCENT IMPUTED	MEAN PRE-IMPUTATION	SD PRE-IMPUTATION	MEAN POST-IMPUTATION	SD POST-IMPUTATION
School Membership	4.91%	2.669	0.494	2.667	0.746
Academic Engagement	4.24%	3.250	0.483	3.250	0.483
Student-Teacher Interaction	4.16%	2.811	0.522	2.811	0.523
School Safety	5.58%	3.274	0.725	3.274	0.726
Poor Facilities	16.50%	1.681	0.633	1.694	0.621
Private School	0.00%	0.215	0.411	0.215	0.411
School Size	15.24%	4.612	2.491	4.662	2.454
Certification	19.27%	0.883	0.230	0.873	0.221
Block Schedule	0.00%	0.214	0.410	0.214	0.410
Gender	0.00%	0.502	0.500	0.502	0.500
White	0.00%	0.570	0.495	0.570	0.495
African-American	0.00%	0.132	0.339	0.132	0.339
Hispanic	0.00%	0.145	0.352	0.145	0.352
Asian American	0.00%	0.096	0.294	0.096	0.294
Other or Multiple Races	0.00%	0.057	0.232	0.057	0.232
Overage	0.40%	0.184	0.388	0.185	0.388
ELL	0.00%	0.169	0.375	0.169	0.375
Family Income	0.00%	9.066	2.418	9.066	2.418
Parental Expectation of College	18.22%	0.810	0.392	0.804	0.397
Percent Receiving Free Reduced Price Lunch	29.80%	3.445	1.950	3.584	1.887

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