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Immigrant and Minority Student Visual Narratives of High School Dropout in Atlanta

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by

Anahita Modaresi

Under the Direction of Kathryn A. Kozaitis

ABSTRACT

This thesis is about the Reading and Writing for Filmmaking Afterschool program, an extracurricular focus group centered around engaging urban immigrant and minority working-class high school students in a discussion about high school dropout using participatory video as a methodological tool. The program was created under the assumption that, (1) within 'free spaces' students who are encouraged to express themselves and explore their social realities through innovative methods will reveal their understanding of high school dropout and the factors contributing to it, and (2) the way these students conceptualize and talk about high school dropout is significant to understanding this phenomenon. Through participatory video, observation, interviews, and storyboard narratives, I examine the discourse of minority and immigrant students as a means of understanding their cultural assumptions and observations of school dropout. As a result, this paper illuminates the issue of immigrant educational retention and attrition in an urban public school setting.

INDEX WORDS: Latino, Hispanic, Minority, Immigrant, Educational attainment, School
                 dropout, School attrition and retention, Participatory video, Narrative,
                 Visual methodology, Afterschool programs, Georgia

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A Thesis

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Immigrant and Minority Student

Visual Narratives of High School Dropout in Atlanta

by

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INTRODUCTION

The students of Starlight High School belong to one of the most ethnically diverse, urban, low-income areas of Atlanta. Situated on the hinge of the Buford Corridor, the school derives most of its student body from majority Latino/a* low-income apartment housing scattered amongst taquerias, stripmalls and eateries along the bustling highway. Afternoon announcements at Starlight are often done partially in Spanish, and signs by the main office are posted in both Spanish and English. When the bell rings, students pour out of classrooms into the hall, and English is heard only intermittently between the many languages being spoken in this space.

As I walk down the hall past the droves of students mingling in the hallways, I begin to notice certain details overlooked before. Young Hispanic* girls wear heavy make-up and tight clothing, while their male classmates often sport heavy gold chains, baggy jeans, and spiky gelled haircuts. Many of these young students walk in couples down the hall, often hand-in-hand and share a kiss before entering their classrooms. And when looking yet closer, one often sees young girls with taut protruding bellies, books in hand.

What is little known when walking the busy halls of this bright school is that less than half of these students will actually leave these walls with diploma in hand. Starlight High School, from an academic perspective, is failing. With the recent legislation requiring schools' to pass Adequate Yearly Progress tests, Starlight has failed to consistently in meeting the basic requirements. The 87% Latino/a student body, 83% of which is economically disadvantaged, has some of the lowest test scores in the state of Georgia. Forty-five percent of the students are English language learners, enrolled in ESL classes tucked back in trailers behind the schools walls (Georgia Dept. of Education 2006a).

*Hispanic is used in this case to mean a person of Latin American descent living in the United States	*Latino/a is used here to describe a person of Latin-American origin living in the United States

A newly hired graduate coach, occupying an office the size of a small closet, has been identifying students "at-risk" and developing "graduation plans" for them, in efforts to boost the school retention rate at Starlight. After school tutorials target students who lag behind, and offer tutoring in Math, Science and Reading. Despite these efforts, there are no extra-curricular activities focused on addressing the non-academic problems these students encounter on a daily basis. Moreover, neither the graduation coach nor any of the guidance counselors are Hispanic or even speak Spanish. Although the standard school clubs are offered, e.g. chorus, French club, and soccer, the students who have the greatest difficulties have little to no support system through Starlight High School to help them cope or explore some of the issues present in their lives, issues which may in fact be influencing their performance at school.

This thesis focuses on the Reading and Writing for Filmmaking Afterschool program, created by the researcher and conducted at Starlight High School. The Reading and Writing for Filmmaking After School Program is an extracurricular focus group centered around engaging working-class immigrant and minority high school students in a discussion about high school dropout using participatory video as a methodological tool. The program was created under the assumption that, (1) within 'free spaces' students who are encouraged to express themselves and explore their social realities through innovative methods will reveal their understanding of high school dropout and the factors contributing to it, and (2) the way these students conceptualize and talk about high school dropout is significant to understanding this phenomenon (Ewald 2001; Fine et al. 2000; Klein 2001; Lunch and Lunch 2006; Montecel, Cortez; and Cortez 2004; Pink 2004b; Pink 2007; Quiroz 2001; Rich and Chalfen 2004; Rubinstein-Avila 2006; Suarez-Orozco 1991b; Taylor 1989). Through participatory video, participant observation, interviews, and storyboard narratives, I examine student discourse about high school dropout as a means of understanding their cultural frameworks, experiences and motivations for staying in school or

dropping out. As a result, this paper illuminates the issue of immigrant educational retention and attrition in an urban public school setting.

CHAPTER I.
PATTERNS OF SCHOOL ATTRITION
AND RETENTION AMONG LATINO ADOLESCENTS

During the past two decades Latino/a enrollment in public schools has skyrocketed. In

1990 nearly 32.4% of public school students were minority and 11.7% were Latino/a. By 2000,

close to 38.7% of public school students in K-12 were minority and 16.6% were Latino/a

(Cordero-Guzman 2005:159). Immigrant youth are said to be the fastest growing sector of the

child population (Landale & Oropesa 1995). This trend is only expected to continue, with a

projected one in three children expected to be the child of immigrants by the year 2040 (Rong &

Prissle 1998).

The precipitating cause of Latin American migration to the US is lack of economic

opportunity or resources in the sending country (Lewellen 2002). These immigrants arrive in their

host country with few material resources, and lack the English speaking proficiency and other

cultural skills to benefit from what would lead to upward social mobility. Consequently, of the

Latino/a youth population, a great number of them come from poor, working-class families.

According to Cordero-Guzman, "a reported 7.2 million Latinos, or 21%, live below the poverty

level compared to 11% for the total U.S. population" (2005:158). In fact, 28% of the total 11.6

million poor children in the US are Latino/a, compared with nine percent of White children.

The impact of this flow of children of primarily poor immigrants into the US public

schools has been profound. Unfortunately, the integration of Latino children and youth into the

American public school system has not been terribly successful from an academic perspective.

Since the 1970s, Latino/as have had an exceedingly high dropout rate, a trend that continues

steadily. A 1997 article in Education Week states that in 1995, a whopping 30 percent of

Latino/as between the ages of 16 and 24 had either dropped out or were not enrolled in high school.

In addition, these Latino/a dropouts had reportedly completed fewer years of schooling than dropouts from other ethnic groups (Viadero 1997). A 2002 National Education Association article states that Latino/a youth continue to have one of the highest dropout rates of any ethnic group—as high as 30 percent (Shoucri 2004) (see Graph A). However, these rates may be even higher (Shoucri 2004; Census 2002). A Census Bureau study shows that 43% of the Latino/a population did not graduate high school, and of this number, 26% dropped out before the ninth grade (Census 2002). The Intercultural Development Research Association conducted a statewide study of high school dropouts in Texas and found that an average of 140,000 students were lost every year, or 6 students every hour, far more than was previously known.

Figure 2. Status dropout rates of 16- through 24-year-olds, by race/ethnicity: October 1972 through October 2004
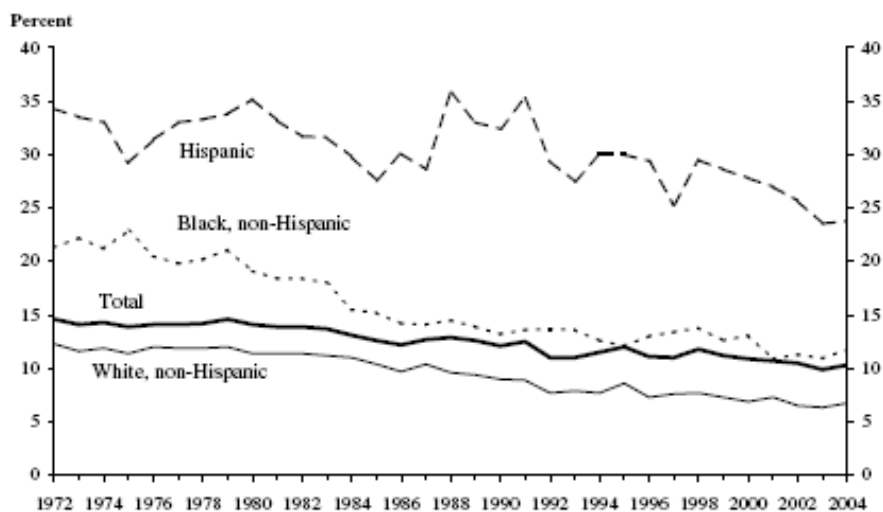
FIGURE II: (Department of Education 2006)

It is difficult to truly ascertain how dire a situation schools are facing. Gaining an accurate understanding of the number of Latino/as dropping out of school continues to be a problem, as tracking student status has not been effective: "Data on student tracking systems suggest that

once a child leaves a school building or a school district, capacity to document (in a timely and an efficient way) students statuses declines rapidly, and responsibility for the child seems to discontinue" (Montecel, Cortez, and Cortez 2004). Schools' capacity to verify whether students have truly transferred to a different school or simply dropped is not realized, and there is a persistent tendency for schools to presume to know where students have gone. In fact, schools are often only able to deliver a rough estimate of dropout rates, while national and state-level accountability reports claim to capture actual dropout rates.

Latino/a Youth Educational Experiences
& Variance in Latino/a School Achievement

Despite the recurrent trend of school failure and attrition among Latino/a youth, evidence suggests that some of these students are successful in school (Matute-Bianchi 1986; Ogbu 1974; Romo 1984; Valverde 1987). It is important to this body of research to discuss some of the schooling experiences of Latino/a in students in the US, as documented in anthropological and social science literature.

Marcelo Suarez-Orozco cites what some social theorists have called for immigrants the 'American Apartheid,' which implicates "the creation of a cultural ethos of ambivalence, pessimism, and despair" (Suarez-Orozco 2003:57). As previously mentioned, immigrants are often forced into the most undesirable socio-economic niches in American society due to lack of financial resources and social networks. They find themselves in poor urban settings, characterized by limited economic opportunities, "toxic schools," ethnic tensions, violence, drugs and gangs (Suarez-Orozco 2003:57). This environment shapes and molds Latino/a students' school experiences.

School experiences differ for different groups of Latino/as. Subsequently, it is crucial to discuss the variation within the broader term "Latino/a" that is employed in this study and others like it. John Ogbu delineates two different types of minority groups in analyzing the variability of documented school experiences and academic performance: immigrants and involuntary minorities (Ogbu 1991). Immigrants are people who have moved to the host country from a sending country in which economic conditions are often poor. Involuntary minorities are descendants of immigrants who, unlike their predecessors, do not have a 'homeland' other than that of their host country. The difference between these two groups becomes crucial when we begin to look at the way these two groups interpret and respond to various factors in their lives.

According to some studies, recent immigrants actually outperform their more acculturated Latino/a-descent peers (Gibson 1991; Marcelo 1991; Matute-Bianchi 1991; Ogbu 1991). Maria Eugenia Matute-Bianchi found that immigrant Mexicans that maintained their identities as "Mexicanos" performed relatively well in school in comparison to Chicano students who were born in the United States. While many scholars attribute school failure rates to language barriers and lack of acculturation on the Latino/a school failure rate, we continue to see Latino-descent, fluent English speakers who have been in the US for generation experiencing disproportionate school failure (Matute-Bianchi 1987). Matute-Bianchi's ethnographic study uncovered the success of Mexican-born students in relation to their U.S. born classmates (1987).

Similarly, Suarez-Orozco found that Central American immigrant students in his study seemed to develop a "dual frame of reference" that enabled them to minimize undesirable educational and life circumstances in the US when comparing them to their previous conditions, which were often far worse (Suarez-Orozco 1991). This dual frame of reference facilitated greater levels of academic achievement in the immigrant students that their US-born peers were not able to attain.

John Obgu also argues that involuntary minorities have a negative dual frame of reference because they "compare their status with that of the members of the dominant group and usually conclude that they are worse off than they ought to be for no other reason than that they belong to a subordinate and disparaged minority group" (Ogbu 1991). Margaret Gibson also argues that immigrant youth have fewer discipline problems and better attendance rates than their involuntary minority counterparts (Gibson 1991). She claims that the parents of these immigrant students rarely blame the school for difficulties their children encounter, and place great emphasis on utilizing education as a means of getting ahead at all costs. Based on ten case studies, Gibson reports that teachers prefer teaching immigrant children to their more acculturated peers because they have a sense of purpose and direction, have fewer discipline problems, spend more time on their homework, are more attentive, and more often respect their teachers (1991:362). In Matute-Bianchi's ethnography of an urban city school, when distinguishing different groups of Latino/a students based on acculturative level, it becomes clear that the more acculturated groups often have the most problems (Matute-Bianchi 1991). These studies reveal a pattern that suggests that we must move past the monolithic category "Latino/a" when studying academic retention and attrition, as differing levels of acculturation seem to influence educational outcomes.

Involuntary minorities or immigrant Latino/as often experience racial prejudice, both from the dominant cultural group and within their own cultural groups (Gibson 1991; Matute-Bianchi 1991; Ogbu 1991). While long-established minorities have a heightened sensitivity to racism, newly-arrived immigrant students are often the victims of direct aggression because of their ethnicity. Teachers who are witness to these forms of aggression inflicted by peers in the school setting often encourage students to "disregard" the problems and 'understand' their classmates' ignorance (Gibson 1991: 377).

An example of this type of "within-race" discrimination was documented by Matute-Bianchi (1991). Recent Mexican immigrants were often teased by more acculturated minority Mexicans for the way they dressed, while Mexican Americans, (US born more American-oriented English speakers) ridiculed Chicano students (those maintaining a distinct ethnic consciousness which is neither Mexican or American) for being 'Wannabes' (that is 'wants to be Anglo') (Matute-Bianchi 1991:219). Meanwhile, "Cholo/as," (those maintaining a "gang-like style that was neither Mexican or American) received derogatory reputations and were held in low-esteem by other Mexican-descent students for their "gang-oriented" styles, although many of these students were not involved in gangs.

Newly arrived Latino/a immigrants have their own set of obstacles independent of involuntary minority Latino/as. They are faced with the task of learning English and often catching up with the other students. Teachers consider these students who don't speak English well as being "slow," place them in special education classes, and not teach to their true potential. Others learn English at a very rapid pace but are still held back in ESL classes due to lack of space or resources in the regular English classes (Suarez-Orozco 1991). This type of treatment can also be perceived as a more subtle form of institutionalized racism: "The powerless immigrant children were not a priority; they were assigned to lower-level classes, even when they had successfully completed the same classes in their country of origin." (Suarez-Orozco 1989) These Latino/a immigrant children often experience boredom, apathy, and depression, gradually becoming withdrawn from their educational environments.

Another issue that Latino/as experience is that schools often fail to account for cultural differences within the Latino/a student population. Educational intervention programs and policies designed to improve academic achievement in Latino-descent students often assume a "cultural homogeneity that does not exist, and typically focus on single-cause assessments and

solutions to perceived problems" (Matute-Bianchi 1991). Educators often suppose all Latino/a students in need of extra academic support to be ESL non-English speakers, at-risk, or learning handicapped. Often time, teachers simply do not know how to identify or address the needs of the Latino/a student population. The 1999 National Center for Educational Statistics Report confirmed that, "Approximately 70% of all teachers recently surveyed said they felt moderately or not at all prepared to address the needs of students from diverse backgrounds including students with limited English proficiency" (Marquez-Lopez 2005:227).

Studies also show that educators often develop solutions to issues associated with Latino/a immigrants and involuntary minorities that do not take into account their real life needs. Edmund Hamann explores the challenges a Georgia community and its school district face when attempting to respond to the educational needs of a new Mexican immigrant population. Hamann captures the emic perspective of the newcomers, and reveals how conflicting beliefs and values can pose serious problems to the implemention of sound educational policy that meets the complex needs of Latino/a immigrants (Hamann 2003). Hamann documents the community leaders' development of a bilingual curriculum in what he calls the Georgia Project, and the district's final rejection of bilingual education. In his final chapter he states, "In all cases, previous assumptions about community, including who was part of it, what mores it embraced, and even what languages were to be used in it, seemed no longer to fit well" (Hamann 2003:347). Hamann's work illuminates the context in which many Latino/a students find themselves; one where strategies to respond to their presence often do not include their voices or input.

Another recent development that influences the school experience of Latino/a students is the No Child Left Behind Act and high stakes testing. This piece of legislation dictates that students limited by English speaking proficiency receive English-only instruction, and fails to

promote bilingual education or primary language development as equally workable instructional

techniques to teach English language and content skills. According to Rueda, "if student are to be

held accountable to challenging standards, they must be given appropriate opportunity to master

the standards" (2005:197). Until this happens, schools will see Latino/a students continue to

experience disproportionately high school failure and attrition rates.

Educational Attainment and Non-Latino/a Minority Groups

It is interesting to note the extreme disparity in educational attainment from minority or

immigrant group to another, particularly because the sample of this study contains two non-

Latino/a minority students (Asian and African). In contrast to the generally low educational

attainment and retention rates of Latino/as, Asian and African populations in the US have done

exceedingly well. In most cases, both Asian and African students have surpassed the educational

attainment rates of whites. In 1980, Asian-Americans were already surpassed whites in higher

educational achievement, with about 50 percent of Asian-Americans ages 20 to 21 enrolled in

college compared to approximately a third of whites of the same age group (Hirschman and

Wong 1986). In addition, Asians have also far surpassed Blacks, whites, and Hispanics in high

school retention rates (Griffin 2002). This trend has grown over a number of years, as Asians

continue to build social networks and establish themselves in the United States.

Africans also greatly surpass Hispanics in educational achievement. Over 57 percent of all

African-born immigrants in the US hold college degrees (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education

1994). In addition, immigrants from African countries are reportedly more likely to hold a PhD

than are European-born immigrants or white Americans (1994). However, African Americans

have experienced low levels of school retention and lack of achievement comparable to that of

Latino/as (Griffin 2002). Scholars continue to theorize why this discrepancy in educational

attainment in ethnic groups has occurred by looking at variables such as acculturation, socio-economic level, and culturally engrained values of education.

The goal of this study is to document the way Latino/a students conceptualize the issue of high school drop out. Nevertheless, because the sample contains both an African and Asian student, differences in culturally inculcated values will no doubt be reflected in the responses of the participants. Such differences will be documented and analyzed accordingly.

Latino/a Educational Attainment in Georgia

The trend of Latino/a school failure and high attrition rates is also present in the fieldsite of this research, Starlight High School in the heart of urban Atlanta, Georgia. Georgia has been a particularly popular destination of Hispanic immigrants over the past decade. A Pew study of six southern states found that, during the last decade, Hispanic growth has increased on average over 300%. In some counties it rose 1,000% (Lewis 2006:71). By 2010, Georgia is expected to become one of the top spots for Latino/a population growth (Growth of Hispanic Population Worries Georgia Educators 1999; Cowan & Coleman 2006). A great proportion of this Latino/a growth in Georgia comes from undocumented Latino/as, an estimated 200,000 to 250,000 (Cowan & Coleman 2006).

The initial influx of Mexican immigrants in Atlanta began in 1975 with the decline in Mexico's economy (Walcott 2002). The migrants were drawn to Atlanta's booming job market, good schools, affordable housing and good public transportation along Buford Highway. Georgia began to develop an abundant need for low-skill labor such as picking Vidalia onions or working in poultry plants (MacDonald & Monkman 2005). Since then DeKalb and Gwinnett Counties have become prime spots for undocumented Latino/a immigrant to settle and raise their families. Walcott describes this area as the Buford Corridor, which is home to a wide variety of immigrant

groups who have come to carve out their own economic niche within Metropolitan Atlanta (Walcott 2002).

In response to the overwhelming increase in the immigrant population in Atlanta, there have been changes in policy and priorities for both non-profit organizations and municipalities. Nowhere have these changes in Atlanta been more present than in the school system. In 1988 the Bilingual Education Act was passed, which afforded children the opportunity to be provided instruction in their native language (Dameron and Murphy 1997). Since then the number of bilingual programs in GA has drastically increased and the number of language minority students has risen.

In response to the high rates of Latino/a high school attrition, a number of strategies have been employed to improve graduation rates. For example, Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue has initiated a $15 million program that provides every high school in the state with a full-time 'graduation coach' who would "better identify the population of students more likely to quit school and help devise alternative plans for helping them graduate" (Jacobson 2006:2). Other efforts include creating ninth grade 'academies' aimed at guiding and supporting freshman high school students (Jacobson 2006:2).

Despite these efforts, the graduation rate remains disproportionately low for Latino/a high school students in Georgia. In fact, according to Salzer, Georgia has the largest Latino dropout rate in the nation, with only 32% earning a high school diploma (2001). In fact, "two thirds of Georgia's Latinos leave high school before graduation" (Bohon, Macpherson, and Atiles 2005).

Starlight High School's Latino/a student population is no exception to this trend. In the 2005-2006 Adequate Year Progress report, 87.5% of the Hispanic student population is listed as not meeting the basic testing requirements. Even more startling is Starlight's graduation rate in 2006. For the Hispanic students the graduation rate is at a mere 33%, down from 34.8% in 2005.

This graduation rate is significantly lower than that of the White (66.7%), Asian (64.7%) or Black (58.7%) students who attend the same school (Education 2006a, Education 2006b).

The data on Latino/a academic retention and attrition coupled with the documentation of the current localized efforts to improve education for these groups, illuminate the context in which my ethnographic study takes place. The way that immigrant youth adapt to their school environments, and the way their schools in turn adapt to them are of great significance in understanding Latino/a educational attainment

CHAPTER II.
THEORY

Explaining Latino/a school attrition and retention has been tackled by scholars of varied social sciences throughout time. A thorough review of the literature separates theories of school attrition and retention into two main paradigms: the failure/success of schools and the failure/success of students themselves. Within both of these paradigms there exist economic and cultural factors that shape the foundation upon which these theories are based.

Theories of culture that explain Latino/a school retention and attrition have been applied both to school culture and the cultural profile of the student. Acculturation is often considered when assessing Latinos immigrants' willingness and ability to stay in school. During the 20th century, Latino/a students' school failure was explained from an intrinsic cause and effect perspective, which typically attributed their cultural or linguistic background of the students to underachievement (Flores 2005). By this paradigm educational attainment became known as a 'Mexican problem,' assuming a sort of inherent deficiency among Latino/a students that caused their dropout rates and low achievement (Flores 2005:76). However, these scholars failed to acknowledge that these students' low academic achievement might have been a result of the "one-size-fits all" educational approach applied to this population, which failed to account for important cultural and linguistic differences.

Since the 20th century, scholars have come a long way in understanding how Latino/a students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds influence their school success/failure and rates of attrition and retention. Theorists have examined students' acculturative level to explain Latino/a students' adaptation to their school, particularly their approaches to academic achievement. Lack of proficiency in English and discrimination, especially common among newly arrived less acculturated Latino/a immigrants, can lead to poor grades and maladjustment to the new culture

(Hovey & King 1996). An immigrant student's ability to navigate a culturally foreign education system greatly influences his ability and drive to stay in school (Gibson 1991).

Another body of research points to the negative impact of increased acculturation to dominant culture on Latino/a school retention (Gibson 1991; Matute-Bianchi 1991; Suarez-Orozco 2001). Suarez-Orozco notes that the length of residence in the United States is associated with declining health, school achievement and aspirations (Suarez-Orozco 2001). She states that, "Acculturation today seems to lead to detrimental health, more ambivalent attitudes towards school, lower grades" (Suarez-Orozco 2001). Jurkovic et al. also argue that acculturative stresses associated with increased time lived in the US can weaken Latino/a immigrants' sense of optimism and increase the likelihood of negative outcomes possibly related to dropout (Jurkovic et al. 2004).

Other studies claim that ability to balance both cultures, biculturalism, is linked to both school and social adjustment (Birman 1998; Gaspar de Alba 1995; Rieffel 1990). By measuring the influence of acculturation on perceived competence in different life spheres, Dina Birman discovered a trend relating biculturalism to "positive self-perceptions of global self-worth" (Birman 1998:335). She draws upon existing theories of biculturalism, which assume that acculturation to both the new culture and the culture of origin occur independently (Birman 1998). By mastering both cultural domains, immigrants adapt to dominant cultural norms, while still maintaining their original cultural identity. However, this assumes that simply *because* immigrants have positive self-perceptions, they are more likely to stay in school, an assumption which leaves out a great many other external factors.

Latino/a Identity and Group Discrimination

It is important to mention here that, although most urban Latino/a youth experience what Suarez-Orozco has referred to as the 'American Apartheid', there is some variance in the way they experience, perceive and adapt to the conditions they face. The different types of behaviors and characteristics associated with varying level of acculturation among Latino/a students is important to this research because it may shed light on what types of Latino/as are more likely to drop out of school.

Students of Latino/a-descent have varying levels of identification with ethnic categories, which lend themselves to a variety of academic behaviors, some less successful than others. Matute-Bianchi recognized patterns of behavior and identification in urban Mexican-descent high school students, which enabled her to distinguish unique groups, each with its own sense of identity and association with a cultural reference group. For example, the Chicanos in her study claimed "their own sense of ethnic consciousness which was neither Mexican nor American" (Matute-Bianchi 1991:215). This ethnic consciousness served as a means of resistance to the discrimination that individuals of Mexican descent experienced in the United States. Torres and Ngin's work with Chicanos also illustrates that their sense of ethnicity is instrumental in individual empowerment and entitlement and in providing a sense of peoplehood separate from dominant culture (Torres and Ngin 1995).

Through their work with these populations, Matute-Bianchi and John Ogbu propose a theoretical framework for understanding the differences between immigrant Mexicans, nonimmigrant Mexican Americans and Chicanos that can be used as a lens through which to interpret current variances in Latino/a student behavior (Matute-Bianchi 1986; Ogbu 1978; Ogbu 1982). This theoretical framework suggests that differences can be understood in terms of:

(1) differences in minority status, (2) differences in the process of incorporation into the United States, and (3) differences in perceptions of and responses to the experiences of discrimination, limited opportunities and subordination (Matute-Bianchi 1991:208).

For Matute-Bianchi, what distinguishes the two groups is involuntary minorities' internalization of their economically disadvantaged position in the United States and their responses to the discriminatory ideologies directed against them (Matute-Bianchi 1991). Matute-Bianchi's work serves as a foundation for my research, as I examine differences in first and second generation Latino/as' cultural conceptions and observations of school dropout. Variations in perspectives from one group to another can be explained and interpreted through this theoretical framework.

Reproduction of Inequality & Deficit Thinking

Although Latino/a students' academic behavior and general adaptation to American cultural/social norms is a plausible explanation for illuminating school retention and attrition, other scholars claim that *schools* should be held responsible for understanding these behaviors and designing policies and programs to meet the needs and concerns of minority and immigrant children. Instead of schools "fixing" students, Montecel, Cortez, & Cortez argue that schools should focus on strengthening or changing the school system to meet students' diverse needs:

> "IDRA's work has promoted a paradigm shift from dropouts to school holding power with the idea that schools must hold on to students because of their value, their contributions, and their potential significance to their communities and to the society as a whole" (Montecel, Cortez, and Cortez 2004).

Berman et al. found that school districts' and educators' tendencies to perceive the problem as "within" the student and family hinders student achievement (Berman et al.1999). They argue that by failing to explore the links between school practices and student outcomes, educators are neglecting to weaken patterns leading to student failure. This 'deficit' thinking on the part of educators reveals attitudes of complacency, as the problem is placed "out of their

hands" and willingness to look for solutions is foregone (Garcia and Guerra 2004). Instead, educators should acknowledge their role in overlooking issues such as discrimination within the classroom, the lack of cultural and linguistic resources at school, and the broader external forces that influence Latino/a students' educational success.

Other theorists argue that schools are settings for the reproduction of inequalities already present within dominant society (Bourdieu 1973; Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu 1987; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Pierre Bourdieu proposed several theoretical frameworks through which the reproduction of inequality within schooling can be understood. First, Bourdieu proposed the concept of cultural capital, which comprises language, tastes, cultural knowledge, dialects, and the capacity to employ cultural resources within an economy of cultural practices, inculcated within family, cultural and academic settings (Bourdieu 1987). McLeod further defines the notion of cultural capital as "cultural and linguistic knowledge, skills, and dispositions passed down from one generation to another" (McLeod 1995). In this sense, schools are settings that reward proficiency in governing cultural capital and punish the lack thereof. Privileged students who are most familiar with the dominant way of thinking and acting earn "educational credentials" with which they maintain power over those whose cultural capital is socially devalued (De Jesus 2005). These educational credentials are then converted back into economic wealth through the job market, which reproduces social hierarchies that support the upper class (Bourdieu 1987, 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Bourdieu and other theorists of socioeconomic reproduction provide valuable explanations for school attrition that place the blame outside of the students, and instead expose "structural processes of schooling that maintain social and economic inequality." (De Jesus 2005) However, one weakness of this theoretical framework is that it ignores the issue of agency in

overcoming the social and institutional obstacles facing them. Students who lack cultural capital often use agency to challenge dominant or traditional norms in order to succeed.

Agency, Resistance & Symbolic Violence

The issue of agency is addressed by Willis in his ethnography *Learning to Labour* in which he documents working-class British students' development of a counter-school culture that resists dominant culture's institutionalized emphasis on academic learning (Willis 1977). Willis demonstrates that individual agency can be exercised by those lacking cultural capital to actively resist structures of domination. Agency and resistance has been crucial in determining Latino/as academic decisions as is evidenced by the increasing success of working class and minority Latina students. Research suggests that immigrant girls are outperforming immigrant boys in their academic achievement, evidenced by lower dropout rates, better grades, and college enrollment (C. Suarez-Orozco 2001). Ethnographers of education have documented instances of such young women who used school success to resist "societal constructions that attempt to render them inferior to males and thus reinforce their subordinate status" (Cammarota 2004:53). Latinas who are determined to achieve educational credentials, associated with higher economic status and greater autonomy sometimes resist stereotypical notions of the female sex that dominate within society, their communities and their families.

This societal and familial pressure to be 'submissive underachievers' may also cause them to drop out of school (Romo 1998). Again I call on the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu to explain how cultural constructions of femininity serve as a form of *symbolic violence* that influences working-class Latinas' motivations for staying in school. Symbolic violence serves as a means by which people may play a role in their own subordination by "gradually accepting and internalizing those very ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them" (Connolly and Healy

2004). Central to this notion is Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, which serves as a group of predispositions to thinking and acting that have been obtained over time through experience (Connolly and Healy 2004). The habitus becomes the reinforced "norm" by which members of society are expected to live. Therefore, girls or boys who resist the habitus, risk being shunned or regarded as "different" by members of their communities or families.

Connolly and Healy apply Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence to their study of working-class girls who partake in traditional forms of femininity by leaving school at an early age to pursue marriage, romance, and motherhood. The authors refer to this as a "gendered habitus," which restricts the girls from staying in school and pursuing other career aspirations. This gendered habitus is sometimes supported and inculcated in working-class girls by their families who are simply reproducing the habitus with which they are most familiar.

Family Obligation & Breadwinner Ideology

Familial obligation is also a factor that influences patterns of Latino/a attrition and retention both negatively and positively. Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco found that a sense of obligation to the family was one of the most significant driving forces in the lives of Mexican adolescents (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco 1995). Saucedo Ramos also found that Mexican working-class parents supported their children's education at all costs in order to secure their futures, thus, creating a sense of indebtedness within their Mexican children (Saucedo Ramos 2003). Quiroz found that, after seeing how hard their parents were working to provide them with opportunities they never had, Mexican and Puerto Rican adolescents felt they owed it to their parents to stay in school in order to secure a better economic position for themselves and their families (Quiroz 2001). In this sense, family obligation can be seen as a factor that aids in school retention for Latino/a students.

At the same time, filial responsibility may also take Latino/a students away from school. Jurkovic et al found that filial responsibility, such as cultural brokering (translating to and for parents within the American community), working to earn money for the family, and the caretaking of their siblings "may compete with other sociocognitive tasks, such as schooling and peer involvement" (Jurkovic et al 2004:81). While there was some benefit to Latino/a students' involvement in filial activities, youth often missed valuable opportunities to participate in school and extra-curricular activities.

This is especially true for Latino working-class boys. Their students are often culturally assigned the role of "breadwinner," which places an enormous amount of pressure on them to provide financially for their families. Working full-time while staying in school is sometimes too burdensome for Latino youth. Moreover, some working-class men see education as effeminate and not 'real' work (Willis 1988). Mark's study of working-class men in Merseyside argues that the 'breadwinner ideology' may discourage many of them from staying in school.

Willis' study of the creation of a working-class adolescent counter culture also brings up the idea that working class males may not associate staying in school as leading to any meaningful job opportunities or economic advancement as he states:

> Education is boring, and does not lead to better things: education is abstracted into a boring, esoteric exercise, involving essentially 'useless' information that will never be used in the real world (Willis 1977:57).

Willis' and Mark's descriptions of working class boys' beliefs about education can be applied to the Latino immigrant population as a means to better understand their high rate of attrition.

Social Capital

School retention among Latino/a students also relates to the amount of social, economic, and cultural resources available to them. James Coleman proposes that the amount of social

capital individuals attain corresponds to their ability to access a broad array of resources (Coleman 1998). Social capital is "a form of capital that exists in the relationships between people" (Kao 2004:172). Coleman focuses on three main forms of social capital: obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms. Applying this theory to immigration, obligations refer to the social networks that immigrants build enabling them to depend on others for favors or help with filial responsibilities. Because immigrants may frequently live a nomadic lifestyle, often moving to where seasonal jobs are, they tend to retain very little social capital.

With respect to education, information channels clue immigrants into information about how to learn more about schools, higher education and other opportunities. With language barriers and little contact with those who have this type of knowledge, Latino immigrants are automatically disadvantage. For example, Bohon, Macpherson, and Atiles found that the most frequent response among key informants attributes Latino families' inability to fully comprehend the intricacies of American educational culture or the Georgia school system where their kids were attending school to the attrition rate (Bohon, Macpherson, and Atiles 2005:49). Some parents held the misconception that families had to pay for public schooling and books. Others did not understand the strict attendance policy in the United States and, therefore, could do nothing about their children's truancy problems. A lack of this type of social capital can lead to the missing or misinterpretation of crucial information for Latino/a students and their families (Kao 2004).

Social norms often reward behavior that fits dominant societies' standards, but can deter Latino/a immigrant students from remaining in school if they do not behave according to schools or society's expectations (Kao 2004). The amount and type of social capital available to Latino immigrants varies "depending on the material and affective resources available to the household composition and to changing ties to other households within the cluster" (Tapia 2004:418). The

amount of social capital that a family possesses can mean the difference between students whose parents are supportive, engaged, and available to assist in their schooling, and students whose parents are constantly working, disengaged, and unavailable to assist with their children's education. This becomes a crucial point as we begin to examine the influential role that parents play in the academic success of their children.

James Coleman's theory of social capital furthers our understanding of types of obstacles Latino/a students face in terms of school retention and academic success. This theoretical framework, as well as others proposed in this chapter, enable us to better interpret and explain the issue of Latino/a retention and attrition, to which this body of research is essential. Theories of filial responsibility, cultural and social capital, habitus, and agency will all be drawn upon in this study to interpret immigrant and minority students' observations and cultural conceptions as they relate to school retention and attrition.

CHAPTER III.
METHODS

Background and Motives of Researcher

My interest in developing the Reading and Writing for Filmmaking Afterschool Program originated out of two sources: 1). my love of working with immigrant and minority youth, and 2). my background in and love of videography as a form of expression. Two years prior, I had traveled to Mexico to do a documentary on "The Street Kids" in Acapulco, and the following year I produced a documentary about refugees resettled by the International Rescue Committee in Atlanta, Georgia. Throughout this process, I came to see the power of documentary as an educational and attitude altering tool, and as a means of empowerment for the people it depicted. I wondered if this level of empowerment might be heightened if the subjects of the videographic gaze also became the facilitators of it.

I had stumbled across the videographic work of Ross Kauffman and Zana Briski, *Born into Brothels*, in which Briski taught photography to children of prostitutes in Calcutta, India as a means of better understanding their worlds, and I remember marveling at the way these children were empowered and provided opportunities by this process. The students were able to represent their communities and lives while developing valuable photography skills. I began to think about how I could integrate these elements into an applied research project that would be used as a setting for social sciences inquiry and for the collective empowerment of disadvantaged immigrant and minority students in my own community. The result of this vision was The Reading and Writing for Filmmaking Afterschool Program.

Curriculum Design

In the Summer of 2006, I developed a curriculum based on the applied and theoretical work of Ewald, Lunch, and Suarez-Orozco, and Pink, in order to conduct an after school program at an ethnically diverse high school in Atlanta, Georgia (Ewald 2001; Lunch and Lunch 2006; Suarez-Orozco 1991; Pink 2007). By building upon these authors' techniques and approaches, I was able to craft a curriculum that would serve as means of generating data as well as empowering my informants.

The activity in my curriculum called, "Storyboard Narrative" was based on Suarez-Orozco's Thematic Apperception Test, in which informants were shown drawings and then asked to make up a story based on what they saw in it. The concept behind this activity was that given these drawings, subjects would be inclined to talk and reveal important information about themselves (Suarez-Orozco 1991:51). Suarez-Orozco employed this technique in order to uncover the "interpersonal concerns" of informants (1991:51).

For my storyboard exercise, I ask the students to tell me a hypothetical story about a boy or girl who drops out of school, including as much detail about the characters as possible. I ask them to explain this character's motivations for dropping out and to think about what kind of students most often drop out. In doing this, I attempt to gain insight into their cultural assumptions and observations regarding what types of kids drop out and why. The logic behind the exercise is that students will collectively create vignettes based on their exposure to and observations of dropout in their communities. The success of the story idea is based on the students' collective familiarity with the circumstances and characteristics of the students most likely to drop out. In other words, the students must negotiate whether "it does happen" or "it doesn't happen" when developing the storyboard narratives.

I also conduct a follow-up focus group to gain informants' explanations for the cultural assumptions observed during the storyboarding session. Through the follow-up interviews I am also able to ascertain whether or not the hypothetical characters/stories created were in fact based on real characters (i.e. peers) and scenarios observed in the students' communities. As a result, I am able to determine implicit group cultural and moral assumptions regarding *what kind* of students drop out of school, *why* they drop out and *what happens to them* after they drop out.

The relevance of this exercise to the research is that these moral assumptions would theoretically be derived from students' observations of school dropout. Therefore, I would also be provided insight into what actually *does* occur. Moreover, the students' assumptions about school dropouts would reveal to what extent the students are able to identify with the characters and the assumed causes of dropping out.

The method in my curriculum called "Participatory Video" was based on the work of Lunch and Lunch, who teach disenfranchised persons around the world to represent their feelings and desires using video (Lunch and Lunch 2006). In only a few sessions, the participants are taught video production techniques and then make videos voicing local collective concerns. The exercises in their curriculum are meant to encourage group reflection towards the attainment of two main goals: 1). The creation of videos used to create awareness of local issues, eventually leading to social change, and 2). To empower the members of that community by encouraging them to take charge of their lives. These videos are edited by the community members and then shown to members of the local government or society (Lunch and Lunch 2006).

Ewald, who teaches photography to disadvantaged children, provides th foundation upon which to build my work with adolescents. Ewald signifies the point that seeing the world through the eyes of children enables adults to better understand the issues with which they are coping. Ewald also has been successful in teaching photographic technical concepts to children, such as

framing, composition and lighting, after which I also modeled several of my lessons (Ewald 2001).

As an aspiring anthropologist, I hoped to devise a curriculum that not only drew upon creative concepts and theories, but that was also based on anthropological principles of inquiry. Pink's theoretical framework was used in my curriculum to address ethical and empirical issues of my research. First, Pink discusses ethical implications in visual ethnography such as informed consent, permission to photograph/publish, and harm to informants. She indicates that researchers should be sensitive to the visual cultural and experience of the people with whom they are working (Pink 2007:55). She stresses the importance of 'giving something back' as the ethical obligation of the researcher, which informs the development of my curriculum. For example, I allow informants to direct and facilitate their own activities and work at their own pace, choosing to represent themes with which they feel comfortable. Publishing their images is not approached as a given, but as a privilege, and done only once the informed consent of all participants and their parents has been given. In this case, visual ethnographers must be invested just as much in the *process* as they are in the final *product*, and willing to forgo the publishing of their work for the sake of informants' well being.

Last, Pink problematizes the fact that non-academic viewers often treat images as 'truthful recordings' or 'evidence.' She argues that, "Ethnographers should pay particular attention to how different approaches to the visual and different meanings given to the same images may coincide or collide in the domains in which we research and represent our work" (Pink 2007:52). Indeed, this point is crucial during the acquisition and editing of footage, as the manner in which situations or informants are represented can lead to misinterpretation and the false notion that meaning and truth lies "within" images. This point will be reiterated and further discussed later in this section.

The Reading and Writing for Filmmaking After School Program:
Background & Research Questions

After a year of building rapport and drawing on my local contacts, I gained entry into the school with permission to facilitate the program with "at-risk" Latino/a students for the duration of three months. The added incentive for the school was that I would provide students with snacks, spend the first thirty minutes of each session helping them with their homework, and would then engage the students in fun exercises that required them to read and write scripts as a means of improving their reading and writing competencies.

I was given a list of nearly 30 students by the school graduation coach who were said to be "at-risk" of dropping out. Since the school and its staff were incredibly busy, as they often are, I took it upon myself to go around to each classroom to introduce myself and invite the students on the list to participate in the program. After two weeks of recruitment and preparation, the program began.

This thesis describes, documents, and interprets my interactions with one Vietnamese, one Ethiopian and five Latino/a students and the video data that they collect in this after school program. The purpose of this study is two-fold: 1) to capture immigrant and minority high school students' cultural conceptions, values, and observations of school dropout, and (2) to explore the feasibility of using participatory videography as a method of qualitative measurement. Additional research objectives that also inform the design of this project are: (1) identify participants' perspectives on the incentives and rewards of dropping out as well as the costs and repercussions; (2) identify participants' perspectives on the factors or influences that lead to school dropout and school retention; and (3) determine participants' perspectives on the activities in which

adolescents engage after they drop out of school. A secondary goal was to assess the impact that the program has on their sense of school belonging, self-concept and goals for the future.

All data is transcribed and coded according to Kurasaki's (1997) Coding Scheme (cited in Bernard 2000:464), and visual narratives are interpreted using grounded-theory and discourse analysis. The activities and exercises conducted are discussed in the body of the thesis to provide greater insight into the methods' used and to illustrate central themes or events.

The participants include two second generation Latinos, three first generation or immigrant Latino/as, one second generation Ethiopian, and one first generation Vietnamese. All informants range in age from 14 to 17. Because there is significant ethnic and acculturative diversity within the group, I document the variance in responses within the focus group. Of the seven total students in the program, three are in ninth grade, two are in eleventh grade and two are in twelfth grade. All students come from working-class families, live along the Buford Corridor in low-income areas, and qualify for reduced or free lunch.

This study draws upon the significant body of research documenting and theorizing the issue of Latino/a educational attrition and retention to enrich existing theoretical models and offer possible viable methods for working with at-risk immigrant populations in an urban public school setting. This study offers a single ethnographic account of immigrant and minority students' cultural observations and conceptualization of high school dropout as a means of illuminating the issue of school retention and attrition.

I made the conscious choice to study the perspectives of non-dropout immigrant and minority high school students rather than dropouts. Studying the perspectives of ninth and tenth grade students at risk of dropping out would enable me to gain insight into the types of obstacles and opportunities these students face on their path to either stay in school or drop out. I wanted to understand the challenges they perceived as making it difficult for them and their peers to stay in

school. In addition, studying eleventh and twelfth grade immigrant and minority students would provide me insight into the factors, values, or opportunities they perceived as enabling them to stay in school.

'Free Spaces:' The Importance of After School Programming

Before discussing the developments of the program, it is important to briefly explain why I chose to conduct the program in the "after-school setting." After school activities have gained increasing popularity over the past few years as researchers have documented an increase in "positive youth development" as a result of such programs (Rubinstein-Avila 2006). Rubinstein-Avila cites Morrissey and Werner-Wilson's criteria for facilitating positive youth development: "established standards of performance…[that] require effort, and provide a forum for expressing one's identity or interests, such as sports, performing arts, and leadership activities" (2005:51). In this sense, engaging students in an applied research program allowing them to express themselves using creative methods would also have a potentially positive impact on them.

Evidenced by her work with the after school program "Equinox," Rubinstein-Avila argues that by allowing youth to "escape their day-to-day realities, Equinox promoted youths' reflective engagement with their own social realities…" (Rubinstein-Avila 2006:256). For some of her participants, Equinox symbolized a relief from students' negative experiences within the classroom setting. Others commented that they were able to learn new things within the program that were not taught at school, things that enabled them to develop new competencies.

Fine et al. signify the importance of what they call 'free spaces' for working-class urban young adults who experience impoverished material conditions (2000:131). They argue that such spaces offer participants an alternative "home" to come to that offers a far safer alternative to gangs and other negative peer groups and that may provide them a sense of belonging. Because

these are 'free spaces,' not situated within the confines of institutionalized borders, participants are able to contest negative stereotypes about their race, ethnicity, gender, class or sexuality and to "break down public representations for scrutiny and invent new ones." (Fine et al. 2000:132) Since schools are often settings for discrimination and the enforcement of culturally defined norms, teens desperately need a healthy space in which to freely express themselves.

These authors raise important points about the value of creating alternative unregulated spaces for youth to come to, to develop new skills, renegotiate their identities, form a sense of healthy belonging, build new relationships, and express themselves in a safe environment. My after school program would be an alternative space for the students of Starlight High School, where they could freely express themselves and explore themes in their own lives using audiovisual skills that had never before been taught to them in the school setting.

Theory of Research Design

In this body of research I employ a humanistic epistemological approach, which utilizes the researchers' beliefs, values, and feelings to attain insight into the issue of school dropout among immigrant youth (Bernard 2000:21). Although certain studies can afford a greater level of objectivity, this study, because of its small sample size, the unique nature of the research and its participants, and the extent to which research/subject engagement occurred, a more subjective and humanistic approach is appropriate.

Gaining access to the experiences, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of these Latino/a youth dictated the building of a great deal of rapport with them. Passing out surveys randomly to obtain my data would have restricted the amount of detail and types of information I could have achieved. For this reason, I chose to conduct observation in order to attain a richer description of the emerging patterns and themes present within this population. However, my role as observer

was often limited by my necessitated additional role as program facilitator, which required the guiding of group discussions and activities. To compensate for this, I use video as an "interim" observer and was able to capture and later watch the group interactions that I myself facilitated.

I also use a visual method that I call participatory video to gain further information about these students and their communities, as well as peer video interviews, visual narrative, and storyboard narrative. The rationale for employing these specific, unconventional methods is that if students were given the opportunity to explore their schools and communities using video, they would reveal their perspectives and observations of school attrition and retention.

Conducting Research with Children

The voice of children is not often heard in social research. In the past, researchers regarded children as "adults-in training" and their voices were not legitimated as meaningful for understanding social and cultural phenomena (Mitchell 2006). Children, (especially children of minorities and immigrants) are rarely asked for their ideas or perspectives, as adults often assume that they "know better." Consequently, the words and expressions of children are rarely given much weight.

This trend has slowly begun to change, as anthropologists and other social scientists begin to view minors, as not simply the reproducers of culture, but as "cultural agents and social actors in their own right" (Mitchell 2006:60). As children become viable participants of social research, there increasingly comes a need to develop research methods relative to the developmental level of youth. This has created the need to rethink the current research methods involved in studying adults (Mitchell 2006).

Traditional methods of inquiry have certain limitations when applied to research with children. Children's ability to verbally articulate complex emotions, thoughts, and ideas is

generally less developed than that of adults. Subsequently, visual methods have become effective in allowing children to communicate their feelings, knowledge, and perceptions in non-verbal ways that are meaningful to researchers. In addition, visual methods such as drawing participatory video, and "Metaphor Sort Technique" are enabling rather than constraining (Mitchell 2006; Dell Clark 2004). By allowing children to express themselves using methods with which they are acquainted and at ease, the researcher *discovers* meaning created by their subjects, rather than imposing it (Dell Clark 2004).

Dell Clark argues that visual methodologies such as MST allow children a latitude of expression (2004). By allowing her subjects this freedom, she found that the children automatically volunteered information relevant to her research, saving her from having to probe and risk stretching the boundaries of trust and rapport. Moreover, her method allowed the children to confide in her on their own terms, thereby, shifting the power into their hands as she states: "Through the sorting task and talk about it, children raised and framed issues in their own terms, while I played the role of an interviewer who sought to understand" (Dell Clark 2004:175).

Mitchell also argues that it is essential to provide children this level of flexibility in order to not miss or overlook children's interests and concerns (Mitchell 2006:61). Mitchell's work with engaging children from the Philippines in visual research using drawing as a methodological tool also sheds light on how research with children should be approached (2006). Like Dell Clark, she argues that drawing, because it is seen as a familiar activity for children, can be particularly effective in revealing children's perspectives and experiences. However she also points out that:

> The content of children's drawings is a departure point for apprehending something of their worlds and world-making, although those drawings are never mimetic or complete recordings of what children know or think about a particular topic (Mitchell 2006:63).

Moreover, drawing and other such visual activities provide a diversity of children the chance to participate, regardless of their cultural background or intellectual capacity.

Also of value to the study of children is visual methodology's capacity to grasp the attention of "hard-to-reach" youth. When working with "at-risk" teen populations, it is important to develop creative and innovative ways to keep youth involved in research studies that involve long-term participatory observation on the part of the researcher. Allowing youth to use and become proficient in technology that is ubiquitously fashionable in the popular media attracts and retains the attention of this age and cultural group where other methods have failed. In this sense, visual methods are perhaps a more appropriate way of conducting research with children who have needs that often differ from that of adults.

Narrative and Discourse

As the Storyboard Narrative is the method from which I derive most of my data, I must provide a brief theoretical background within which this portion of my research is situated. The storyboarding activity is guided by the research objective to reveal how urban immigrant students' narratives and ways of talking about high school dropout reflect their cultural framework, observations, and values. Within this broader question are the following questions:

Who tells what kinds of stories? What are the common and reoccurring themes in their stories? How do they explain these themes? How do these stories relate to their personal experiences? And finally, what can these stories tell us about the socialization and internalization of popular racial stereotypes?

Narrative, as both an oral and written tradition, is used to study the way research participants create and renegotiate meaning. Narrative can be created or elicited, fictional or non-fictional (Klein 2001). However, one thing that remains constant within the narrative genre is that

the themes within them are culturally determined (Klein 2001:162). Klein argues that narrative offers a kind of implicit or explicit evidence of the narrator's preconceptions and aims, which, I argue, provides researchers with insight into the cultural framework of the teller. According to Capps and Ochs (1995), how a person chooses to tell a story (i.e. what they omit or select, inflection, tone of voice and repetition of certain words) reveals a great deal about the self, cultural norms & the world one inhabits.

Rymes argues that such narratives "convey a great deal about the individual doing the narrating" (2001:23). In her ethnographic work, Rymes studies student's narratives of school dropout as a means of identifying recurring patterns of narrative structure and language use that she sees as being shaped by institutional and historical forces. In this sense, Rymes attempts to study narrative as a kind of self-portrait or 'source of the self.'

Rymes employs Taylor's notion of narrative as a 'source of moral self,' which is said to emerge through the 'moral overtones' that shape our interpretation of events or people in our lives (1989). By looking at how two stories about the same event are told differently, Rymes is able to identify the students' different assumptions and moral understandings of characters and events in the narratives. Identifying these cultural assumptions is part and parcel of understanding students' motivations for exhibiting certain behaviors that, in this case, relate to their choosing to either drop out or stay in school.

Although many studies of narrative focus on specific linguistic elements such as grammar and morphology to derive meaning, I lean more heavily on discourse analysis and grounded-theory to interpret the narrative data in this study. Discourse analysis is described by Bernard as the close study of naturally occurring interactions as a means of understanding culture (2000). Grounded-theory entails identifying categories, concepts and themes that emerge from text, and

linking the concepts into formal theories. Through these two processes, I attempt to make sense of the way these seven immigrant students conceptualize high school dropout.

In the next chapter, I highlight and discuss the students' elicited storyboard narrative conducted during the Reading and Writing for Filmmaking After School program. In order to structure the narratives, I use Labov and Capps and Ochs' outline of narrative formation. Labov proposes the idea of a 'coda,' which serves as a link between the world of the story and the interaction of the participants in the present conversation (1972). Ochs and Capps further expand on Labov's work by proposing the "setting or central problematic experience," which often necessitates a reaction, either psychological or behavioral (1995). The following outline I employ in structuring the storyboard narratives mirrors that used in Rymes' (2001) study:

1. Abstract (not always present)
2. Setting/Central problematic experience
3. Response
4. Consequence
5. Coda (not always present)

These elements are present in both the written storyboard and in the oral narratives during the brainstorming of the storyboard. Throughout this exercise I identify recurring central problematic experiences, responses, and consequences of the characters in the story.

Language Socialization

Of central importance to the understanding of group cultural assumptions of dropout is the way language has been used to socialize certain stereotypes. The concept of language socialization was developed by Ochs & Scheifflen who proposed a unique model of communication and language acquisition (1984). The authors suggest that the process of learning language is directly influenced by the process of becoming a competent member of society and

that language is a central part of this progression. They further argue that "acquiring knowledge of its [language's] functions, social distribution, and interpretations in and across socially defined situations…" is part and parcel of what makes individuals successful within society (Ochs & Scheifflen 1984:277).

In this sense, language socialization is an essential part of the social capital that Bourdieu and MacLeod propose. Language may be learned during infancy within the home, but is constantly reshaped and relearned based on the cultural demands of dominant society at large. This becomes an important point in the analysis of the narrative data.

Participatory Video Method

The next method, Participatory Video, was developed under the assumption that by providing youth an exciting, powerful and yet familiar tool for capturing and documenting aspects of their lives, they would (a). Become empowered to engage further in the research study, (b). Reduce the level of obtrusiveness inherent in research/subject interactions by collecting data pertinent to the research topic, and (c). Obtain data that might not be accessible to researchers.

This method is inherently participatory because it involves research subjects who act as video ethnographers and collect data in their own communities. The method has its roots in participatory action research, which views research as itself a social practice in the sense that there is shared ownership of projects (between subjects and researchers), a focus on community action, and community-based analysis of social problems (Kemmis & McTaggart 2005). The participants in the program would be given full control of what issues to focus on, how to present the details of those issues, and what would be done with the final product. If so desired, the final product could be used to create awareness of issues that are important to this community, enabling progress to occur.

This method is by far the most controversial because it involves minors videorecording members of an immigrant community for research purposes, which could expose the identities of an undocumented and/or vulnerable population. This said there are a number of ways to get around issues of confidentiality. First, all students would be given video release forms for their parents and others portrayed in their videos to sign. These forms would explain in detail (in multiple languages) what was to be done with the images and what rights they had over them. Additionally, the students would have the option of either disguising the identities of the persons in their videos in editing or choosing to document an issue rather than a person or people in their videos.

Brief History of Visual Anthropology

Because I have opted to employ a visual methodology informed by theories of and work in Visual Anthropology, a brief history of this field is in order: Ethnographic film began as an agenda of colonialism developed to discover something profound about "primitive" cultures (De Brigard 1995). It was thought that the medium, popularized in the early 1900s, could reveal a variety of patterns in the behavior of man. Félix-Louis Regnault, a physician turned anthropologist, was the first to make an ethnographic film in 1895. His theoretical motivation for his filming was "the study of physiology proper to each ethnic group" (Regnault 1931:306 quoted in De Brigard 1995:17).

Since then, ethnographic film in anthropology has taken a variety of turns and flourished at different times throughout history. In the 1930s Mead and Bateson developed visual ethnographic work that began to be used for teaching purposes. Coined "educational motion pictures" ethnographic films began to teach audiences anthropological principles within museums and universities. Shortly after, ethnographic film began to take on more governmental agendas

and were often sensitive to the needs of government policy or of opposition politics in different countries (De Brigard 1995).

Observational cinema was introduced in the 1960s as a means of more accurately exposing the "truth" about people by employing an "observational" style of shooting (Young 1995). Interviewing, which was said to skew the natural order of events, was frowned upon, and long unobtrusive shots were employed as a means of serving as an "objective recording instrument" (MacDougall 1995:46). However, ethnographic filmmaker and anthropologist, David MacDougall introduced skepticism regarding claims that filmmakers could remain "invisible" while in the field shooting footage. Additionally, Young points out that observational cinema cannot be seen as an objective epistemology because any given situation that is being recorded can be misinterpreted or misrepresented by the filmmaker both during the shooting and editing processes (Young 1995). Even so, observational cinema has served as an important methodological attempt to develop solutions to classic problems in fieldwork, such as missed events/details and constraints of note taking.

Since then, observational cinema has continued to receive criticism for the limitations it imposes as an anthropological methodology, the main critique being that the medium fails to include important information, such as context and theoretical foci: "…if ethnographic films is to become anything more than a form of anthropological note-taking, the attempts must continue to make it a medium of ideas" (MacDougall 1995:48). After 1974, anthropology gave up hopes of creating scientific and purely "objective" ethnographic films, as previously unquestioned assumptions about science also fell under scrutiny.

John and Malcolm Collier's work, (1986) Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method, served an important role in the development of Visual Anthropology as a subdiscipline (Pink 2004:3). However, alternative visual methodologies independent of

ethnographic film did not become widely recognized in anthropology until the early 2000s, with the applied visual anthropological work of Pink, Chalfen & Rich, Levine, Flores & Mitchell, among others (Flores 2004; Levine 2004; Mitchell 2006; Pink 2004a; Pink 2004b; Pink 2007, Rich and Chalfen 2004). This recent work requires researchers to "'hand over the camera' and re-position the seat of (symbolic) power, encouraging 'subjects' to be 'behind-camera' rather than 'on-camera'"(Chalfen and Rich 2004:19). As Visual Anthropology and the methods used within this field are so recent and developing, I will discuss some theoretical foundations of the type of research methodology used and how these and other scholars have employed these methodologies in their work.

Praxis and Applied Visual Methods

Visual methodologies have become increasingly accepted and practiced in the field of anthropology (Pink 2004; Mitchell 2004). These methodologies have been particularly useful in the realm of applied work (Pink 2004a; Rich and Chalfen 2004; Twine 2006). Studying how other scholars have employed visual methodologies informs the development and facilitation of the visual method that I employ in this study, which I call "participatory video."

However, because most of this work has an applied focus, it is important that I situate their work, as well as my own, within a paradigm of praxis. Praxis calls for the application of theory and anthropological knowledge within real life circumstances and for applied knowledge to be used as a foundation for theoretical development (Baba 2000). There has been, and continues to be, much conflict within the disciplines of academic and applied anthropology; often times academic anthropologists falsely accuse applied scientists of not contributing to the creation of anthropological theory, doing work uninformed by theory, and lacking scientific rigor (Kozaitis 2000; Baba 2000; Chambers 1987). Despite this, advocates of applied anthropology

continue to assert that, in light of their ethical responsibility to their subjects and the needs of society, academic anthropologists cannot continue to ignore the interdependence of theory and practice (Kozaitis 2000:18).

Kathryn Kozaitis signifies the obligation that anthropologists have to act collectively in the service of humanity:

> This call is not for academic anthropologists to *become* social activists. Rather, it posits that we *are* socially active already, if not self-consciously, or responsibly so. Academic anthropology is as ethically and politically a *practice*, as any other public service from which we distinguish it and on which society depends for sustenance. To be elevated to *praxis*, our work in higher education must consist of more humanitarian sensibilities, greater social responsibility, and a firm commitment to quality (Kozaitis 2000:51).

Chambers also sees applied anthropology as contributing to the state of social affairs, specifically when employed as a policy science to bring about change and the betterment of humanity:

> The model of applied anthropology as a policy science places emphasis upon the potential of anthropological inquiry to contribute responsibly and in a broad perspective to the understanding of social issues (Chambers 1987:320).

Praxis, then, is an essential part of understanding theoretical, social, and cultural issues present within our fieldsites and society as a whole. In this sense, by employing applied anthropological methods, I, and others like me, attempt to create a foundation upon which anthropology, both academic and applied, can continue to build in order to address the real issues within our ever changing society.

Applied *visual* anthropology is a new and budding subdiscipline that has much to teach other anthropologists and social scientists in varying disciplines. Rich Chalfen and Michael Rich provide us with a particularly eloquent and concise passage describing the work of this field:

> Applied visual anthropology usually includes the generation, observation, description, analysis, or application of visual data to the solution of a human problem. Its object is to

use image representation to identify, define, and design features of the material, social, biological or symbolic environment by prescribing a solution to a specific problem. The process inevitably requires cultural brokerage between identifiable, defined constituencies, in order to improve communities, which sometimes have diverging, even opposing ideologies. The applied visual anthropologist's goal is to offer production experience and sociocultural sensitivity to the visual representation of human experience, and to provide expertise in the presentation of the audiovisual information to implement social change (Chalfen and Rich 2004:17).

Chalfen and Rich present an innovative visual method, called "Visual Intervention/Prevention Assessment," which is centered around the creation of visual illness narratives that enable doctors to better understand the conditions of their patients (Chalfen and Rich 2004:18). In patients teaching their clinicians about their illness by documenting their day-to-day experiences, issues, perceptions, and needs on videotape, this method serves not just as a tool for data collection, but also as a means of cultural brokerage that was not previously available.

During this study patients found that, by using the camera as a mediator, they were able to reveal information to their doctors that they would not have felt comfortable directly reporting to a clinician. Similarly, physicians acknowledged that they had not previously heard or seen their patients' expressions of life conditions in such depth. Finally, the process of self-examination using this visual methodology also helped patients, resulting in "quantifiable improvements in patients' asthma status, possibly because of the cognitive dissonance between what they observed themselves to be doing and what they knew they should be doing." (Chalfen and Rich 2004:23)

Susan Levine documents the efficacy of an experimental documentary film project that enabled people to "break the uneasy silence" regarding evidence of HIV/AIDS (Levine 2004:57). By showing an audience films about people with HIV/AIDS and then engaging them in discussions about the ways in which they could relate or resonate with the themes within the documentaries, her research team was able to identify gaps in people's knowledge about HIV/AIDS and to "unpack the theoretical relevance of audience reception theory and theories

about illness etiology" (Levine 2004:59). In the process, Levine encouraged people living with AIDS to confront their disease, to gain courage to tell others about having AIDS, and for those not infected with AIDS to learn more about the disease.

Lisa Mitchell engaged Filipino children in drawing in order to reveal children's perspectives, while making their knowledge and concerns visible to adults as a means of identifying and solving issues that concerned them (Mitchell 2006:62). Again, we see the facilitation of cultural brokerage and increased information sharing within groups, as well as the collection of anthropological data with which to develop theory essential to understanding cultural and social phenomena.

Carlos Flores returned to his native Guatemala to conduct a community video project that yielded important ethnographic insights about an indigenous group while serving as a means of "cultural reconstruction" and "social healing" after a period of civil war and social displacement (Flores 2004:31). He focused on teaching community members how to make videos that centered on the topics of education, health and religion. His project is of significant importance in that it returned the power that was taken from indigenous groups during the colonialist era to the natives and facilitated external communication and resistance to peripheral cultural domination (Ginsburg 1995).

Sarah Pink's applied visual anthropological work studying Europeaners' cleaning preferences, contracted by a company called Unilever Research, reveals how even corporately funded applied visual ethnographic work can be used to uncover important information applicable to issues in academic anthropology. Pink was able to conduct a comparative study of cleaning homes and lifestyles in two countries using visual methodology while continuing her research on changing Spanish gender roles in the domestic sphere (Pink 2004b).

Representation and Ethical Implications

The visual methodology I employ in this study has the potential to be both revelatory for research purposes and beneficial for the subjects who are being studied. However, by capturing young people's images, a level of power is asserted over those individuals based on the manner in which they have been captured, what is done with the images, and how those images are represented and interpreted.

In social research, there is an Ethical Code of Conduct that guides the work of social scientists. The American Anthropological Association forbids anthropologists from doing any secret research or research that may harm their subjects (Bernard 2002). Other ethical issues associated with research include informed consent, covert research, confidentiality, harm to informants, exploitation, ownership of data, 'giving something back,' and the protection of informants (Pink 2007:49). By capturing subjects using visual methods, anthropologists are inevitably representing individuals in ways that have the potential to conflict with this code of ethics. Representation, then, is an essential concept to the ethical examination of this highly political research methodology. For this, I turn to the work of Stuart Hall.

Hall argues that meaning is produced from the interpretation of a representation, which varies from person to person. Because the creation of meaning is subjective, meaning is often distorted by different sources during representation, so in this sense, nothing exists meaningfully *until* it has been represented. Hall also takes 'social constructionist approach' in understanding the idea of cultural representations, believing that meaning is constructed rather than simply found (Hall 1997:5).

With the construction of meaning, there comes power. When looking at an image of an individual, we make decisions about how to classify that person based on the color of his skin, his

gender, his class, and the manner in which he speaks, walks, dresses and behaves. Implicated within the process of representation is the potential for stereotyping, which is linked to the work of Saussure. Stereotyping is a process by which persons are reduced to a "set of exaggerated, usually negative, character traits" (Barker 2000:392) that works through representation as a system of power. Saussure's idea of semiotics informs the process of stereotyping in that certain characteristics, such as race or skin color, can serve as signifiers that allow us to classify all persons or objects exhibiting those characteristics into one stereotyped group. This serves as an instrument of power, in that any person or thing that fits into a discursively formed category is then expected to act or behave in a way consistent with the stereotype that supposedly defines them. Members of society then begin to assume how something or someone will act based on various exaggerated character traits.

Hall believes that when character traits are ascribed to a certain stereotyped group through representation, members of society begin to form an image of these persons that gradually becomes accepted as truth. This socially and culturally constructed "truth" comes to define certain groups and restrict the nature of their actions through the production of stereotypes. In this sense, those individuals are forced to operate within the restrictions of this system, because any attempt to transcend these stereotypes can result in a destabilization of the culture, due to a rupture in the discursively constructed system of classification.

Producing images of anthropological subjects that may serve in reproducing stereotypes, whether they be racial, gender, or class-based, exposes those we are studying at potential risk. Therefore, in addition to the AAA's Code of Ethics, it is essential when employing visual research methods to represent the anthropological subject in his/her true context, taking careful attention not to "edit out" details that might aid in the debunking of popular stereotypes typically

associated with those individuals. Additionally, we have an obligation to allow our participants to have control over the final product that is produced.

As Bernard notes, the Society for Applied Anthropology dictates that "the first obligation is to those whom we study" (2000:71). In this specific body of research, it is my obligation to provide the adolescents in my study the opportunity to choose the manner in which they are represented. This includes their taking part in the shooting of footage, deciding what to record, how to record it, what to leave in and what to take out. Moreover, the students should be allowed to decide how they would like those images to be used and to whom they would like them to be shown. Lisa Mitchell signifies the importance of working *with*, rather than *on* children (Mitchell 2006:61). During each step of the process, the subjects should feel that they are *participants* in the production of their ethnographies and visual narratives, not mere subjects.

By creating alternative representations of Latinos, participatory video further offers benefits that are guided by the SAA's code of ethics calling for researchers' devotion to bettering the lives of their subjects. If the images and life histories of the participants are exposed as a form of "video low" within mainstream society, much can be accomplished in the challenging of popular stereotypes of Latino/as in the media.

However, researchers' first and foremost concern should be with the maintenance of confidentiality for all subjects, which becomes particularly important when dealing with undocumented immigrant populations such as the one in this study. In addition, conducting research with non-adults that draws on innovative methodological approaches requires careful attention to inherent dispositions of power implicated in such an endeavor. As Pink states:

> When doing ethnographic research in intimate contexts like the home the use of visual media and methods create new ethical and practical dilemmas as the camera enters personal domains that might not normally be the object of public scrutiny (Pink 2007:28).

Pink argues that the anthropologist should use his/her professional discretion when deciding

when and if visual methods are appropriate or ethical. In such cases, it may be necessary to

consult a key cultural informant who is more acquainted with the kinds of beliefs and issues

common to the population.

CHAPTER IV.
RESEARCH ACTIVITIES & OBSERVATIONS

Oral & Visual Storyboard Narratives

In efforts to employ research methods appropriate for Starlight High School's student population, I developed the Storyboard Narrative Method. The Storyboard Narrative Method, while staying true to the Video/Filmmaking theme of the program, entailed the students' oral group conceptualization of a story idea and characters related to high school dropout, and then their sketching of a vignette including their story idea and characters. The students were asked to create characters that were as believable and three-dimensional as possible. In this sense, the participants had to brainstorm and negotiate the characters' motives and reasons for their behavior, what type of individuals exhibited this type of behavior, and why. The most critical part of this exercise was the brainstorming session, because it was during this time that the students revealed their cultural conceptions, values, and first-hand observations of high school dropout.

In addition, this activity encouraged students to recount individual personal experiences with high school dropout as a means of adding credibility to their story or character ideas. For example, one student would describe a story of his brother dropping out under the same circumstances he described in his story idea. Because these stories and experiences were recounted to the group members, and not to the researcher, a level of unobtrusiveness was accomplished that might not have been otherwise possible. Although I was witnessing the activity, I was not actively involved in it and the students almost seemed to forget my presence.

Finally, the vignette that the students came up with reflected the perceived consequences of

dropping out of school for this population. The students would also add their motives and incentives for either staying in school or dropping out, all while participating in a fun and engaging activity.

One central feature of the OSN is that each student builds upon others' ideas, which in turn encourages other ideas. This collective construction of perspective has been documented in other narrative studies like this one (Rymes 2001; Miller et al. 1989).

Another feature of the process of oral storyboarding is that the success of each story idea depends on the group's collective familiarity with such scenarios (i.e. "it doesn't happen vs. it does happen"). The students constantly renegotiate boundaries of possible permissible behavior or events based on lived experience in order to determine the idea's credibility or believability in the "real world."

Another theme that I found to be present within the OSN is that the students "vilify" characters in order to make them believable as dropouts (i.e. "they're drop outs anyway…draw a roach and snakes crawling around in their apartment"). Creating characters that are "good" seems to disqualify him/her as a potential school dropout.

And finally, stereotyping is utilized to create characters, situations, and events. In other words, in the OSNs only certain types of people (i.e. race, gender, class, style, good/bad) can exhibit certain types of behavior. In this sense, only certain "types" of people are seen as potential dropouts. These characters were developed from culturally conceived stereotypes based on students' observations and cultural frameworks.

Visual storyboard narratives are cited in the Appendices (Appendices D) of this thesis and are the final product of the oral storyboard narratives, and the brainstorming or collective oral creation of the story. The oral storyboard narratives constitute the focus of this study, as they

contain the reasoning behind individual and collective cultural assumptions and other information not found in the visual storyboard narrative.

Interviews, Written Narratives, and Observation

As was previously mentioned, I interviewed and elicited written narratives from the students to clarify or enlighten certain statements, behaviors, or actions that I observed during group activities, and the storyboard narrative brainstorming session. Written narrative assignments were also given to students in lieu of homework, because most of them preferred not to bring homework to the group, with the exception of Fernando. The assignment topics were: (a.) Your Identity, (b.) What you like most about school, (c.) What you like least about school, (d.) Going to school in the US (e.) Final questionnaire about dropping out of school.

These written narratives and responses provided me with more specific information regarding each individual's personal choices and attitudes regarding staying in school or dropping out. In addition, I was further able to decipher specific influences that they perceived as either encouraging them to stay in school or drop out. The students' responses will be discussed later in this chapter.

During the first thirty minutes of each session I would observe the interactions of the students as they snacked and chatted while "doing their homework." During this time I noticed a clear social and spatial separation of the immigrant Latino/as (Rosa and Fernando) and the minority Latino/as (Betza, Louis, and Richard). Rosa and Fernando were consistently the first students to come in and would sit quietly at the table doing their homework. Betza, Richard, and Louis were consistently late, never interacted with the immigrant Latino/as, and stood chatting at the opposite side of the room from them. When members of the two groups did speak, they never

or very rarely spoke to each other in Spanish. In fact, the Latino/a minority students seemed to relate far better to the non-Latino/a minority Asian and African students in the group, than they did to their Latino/a counterparts.

In the course of the three months that the group met, certain relationships developed that excluded other members. For example, Fernando and Rosa, the two quiet Mexican students' opinions and input were often not included in group activities; the other students often overpowered them in discussions. In addition, I observed a level of outright discrimination against Fernando on the part of several other group members, which will also be discussed further in this chapter.

Participatory Video Narratives

The group was given the option to making their own videos for four main reasons: (1). To further motivate them to participate and stay in the program; (2). To test the viability of using participatory video as a method of qualitative measurement; (3). To use the final footage for an ethnographic video for educational and research purposes; and (4). To allow them to explore their own views and observations of dropout. In order to first engage the participants in the program and retain attendance, I began by teaching them video production techniques through a series of fun exercises, which required members to work together and get to know one another. This included developing and shooting skits, conducting interviews, and creating and videotaping commercials centered around various random props I gave to them. In addition, students viewed several documentary films while I taught them story creation. All the while, the students were educated about various options regarding what could be done with their final videos, such as youth film festivals and scholarship submissions for university media programs.

After the first month of the program, students began taking cameras home to shoot footage for their final videos. For each session, the group would screen the footage that had been shot by other group members and briefly discuss the themes in each video. The students all included elements of their family life, but tended to focus on school or activities outside of the home. A common interview question that was posed to other Starlight High students in several of the videos was, "Do you like home or school better?" I found this to be an interesting question, since it was something that we had never before spoken about in our sessions. Most students did not like to focus solely on drop out, but rather documented their school experiences and interviewed their peers to find out how they felt about school. Another popular question was "What would you say to the students who want to drop out?" This question may have originated from talks that we had in the program about students who drop out. It was almost as though many of the students took on leadership roles in their videos to communicate the message, "Stay in school."

Although this was the least fruitful exercise in terms of gaining meaningful data for this study, it was essential to keeping the students interested and involved in the program. Allowing the students to plan, direct, shoot and edit their own productions seemed to provide them a certain sense of power. The excitement in the group grew and I could see that many had begun to dream of their finished product up on the big screen. For possibly the first time at school, the students were being trusted with real responsibility; the responsibility of taking care of camera equipment that was not their own as well as the task of bringing it back on time. They were trusted to manage their time with the camera in a way that would allow others to have a turn to shoot their footage. They had the power of the capturer, interviewing classmates and friends to gain insight into questions they had perhaps never before tackled. And after the shooting process was over

and editing began, they were able to include or exclude any footage that they saw fit and frame their story using their own stylistic preferences.

Although themes varied from student to student, some were more successful than others from a research perspective. Some of the themes of the participatory video footage will be discussed in the following section along with those from the other types of data, including written narratives, participant observation, and storyboard narratives.

CHAPTER V.
"*That's* Gangster":
PRESENTATION OF DATA & THEMES

Transcription Key

Symbol	Meaning
[	Overlap
=	Sentence continuation across an interruption
(0.2)	Silence interval
—	Brief, self-interruption
↑	Rising intonation
↓	Falling intonation
CAPS	Raised volume
?	Final rising intonation
(xxx)	Item of doubtful transcription
(( ))	Description of scene
Italics	Item of analytic focus

Narrative Theme #1: Gangsters
"*People who wear baggy pants*"

One of the most popular thematic subjects within the storyboard narratives was what the students referred to as "Gangster." According to one student, gangsters are people who have "weird hair, wear baggy jeans, and hair nets." Some of the culturally assumed characteristics of gangsters were that they were the targets of bad treatment at school and were typically most likely to drop out. The students also believed that these "gangsters" often cared the least about

school. The term "gangster" had become such a part of the students' vocabulary that the word

could also be employed as an adjective to easily communicate to others the kind of person a

student was: "he's so *gangster* he carries a squirt gun" or "*that's* gangster" ((Louis pointing to

Fernando's hair)).

1   Anahita: so, what kind of students are treated the worse, you feel like?
2   Group: ((shaking their heads)) (1)
3   Richard: gangsters ((whispering to Louis))
4   Louis: Yeah, gangsters ((nodding and laughing))
5   Thu: ((smiling and nodding))
6   Anahita: Who are the gangsters?
7   Louis: people who have weird hair
8   Dawit:] ((pointing to Louis)) Louis
9   Louis: WHAT?? ((laughing and covering his eyes))
10 Richard: ((also pointing to Louis)) people dressed like this
11 Thu: people who wear baggy pants, wear hooded jackets and stuff and__
12 Dawit: [Fernando
((whispering to the camera and pointing to Fernando))

Being gangster, to those who were considered "gangster," however, did not seem to be a

completely negative thing. The students who were called "gangster" in the group interviews did

not seem to view this as an insult, but rather a reflection of their stylistic preferences and life

choices.

<div align="center">

Narrative Theme #2: "Bad" Girls and Guys
"If she was good she woulda' stayed in school"

</div>

The group members also talked a great deal about "bad" vs. "good" girls and guys as

candidates for dropping out of school. Although members of this category *could* be gangsters,

they were not necessarily so, as gangsters were sometimes members of an aesthetic stylistic group

that may not necessarily exhibit the behaviors associated with "bad" kids. "Bad" kids included

boys who did drugs and got drunk a lot, girls who got pregnant, and boys or girls who dropped

out of school and typically had "bad" home lives. The major assumption was that in order to drop

out of school, a student had to be "bad":

1 Dawit: Ok. So there's a guy and a girl. They're both in high school__
2 Betza   ] high school sweethearts you could say (.4) it's a *gangster*, and a *good girl*!
3 Louis: Betza↑!
4 Richard: this is not the East Side Story, ok?
5 Louis: it's a pregnant chick (.3) they're both bad.
6 Richard: NO!
7 Betza: NO, because sometimes girls get influenced by the guys
8 Dawit: listen (.5)
9 Betza: guys are bad↑
10 Thu:] look if the girl were good she would've decided to stay in school and you're
11 trying to say that they're both dropping out, so if she was good she would've stayed in school
12 still

Narrative Theme #3: "Whites"
"White parents don't care"

The group also often talked about "whites" when discussing possible scenarios for

dropout. For the group, non-Hispanic and non-Black individuals with "white skin comprised the

category of "white." The common conception was that Whites were rich, had more opportunities

than Blacks or Hispanics, and that their parents didn't care what they did. The group argued that

White people "had more convenience" and would get any job over blacks or Hispanics.

Moreover, White parents were "more liberal" and "let there kids more out there."

This was an assumption that all group members equally agreed upon and shared. The

group was able to communicate to each other a certain type of behavior or situation simply by

referring to it as a "White thing:"

1 Thu: Is it a nice apartment that they're living in?
2 Dawit:] Bad. We're not doing the whole cliché white person thing=
3 Thu: Oh-h-h↓
4 Dawit: =cause it won't work

In the following passage, the students discuss the impossibility of a white student getting kicked out of the house for getting pregnant in high school because her parents, "don't care." We also see the culturally shared notion that White kids have a more lenient and "party" lifestyle that is condoned and accepted by their parents:

1 Thu: they were at a party drinking, you know typical White people, you know (.1) ok? So…
2 Group: ((laughing))
3 Thu: you *know* what I'm talkin' about, right? Ok?
4 Group: Yeah, yeah yeah.
5 Richard: Yeah, but then they won't get kicked out of the house
6 Dawit: [or *rich* White
                                                         people
7 Thu: and these are like (.3) like these parents are like…(.5)
8 Betza: but see, White parents↑ (.2), they really don't *care*
9 Richard: *yeah*

When asked to explain and expand on their remarks during the storyboard brainstorming session, students cited cultural differences between White and Hispanic kids that accounted for their differences in behavior, educational attainment, and life choices:

1   Betza: they have like, ok, well I personally think that they let their kids more (.2) out there,
2   like they're more liberal in certain things↑=
3   Richard:] they have more convenience
4   Betza: =and like but the thing is, like, when their kids are small they start educating them
5   much more, like taking them to school right away and all of that, where, let's say Hispanic
6   parents, they don't *DO* that
7   Richard: They're more strict (.4) they just like__
8   Betza: [they just let things happen and like the White
9   families, American families, let's say, they like take charge of it. But when they grow up,
10 they're more liberal in certain things.

Theme #4 (Observed): Discrimination
"Do you have a father?"

An important *non*-narrative theme that emerged during group interactions over the course of the program was the more acculturated immigrants' discrimination against a less acculturated Mexican student named Fernando. Fernando, an immigrant and very quiet, studious, and shy boy

was seen as "gangster" by the others based on his haircut, demeanor, and way of dressing.

Throughout the program there were several instances where most members (with the exception of

Rosa and Thu) explicitly teased or discriminated against Fernando:

1   Louis: *that's* gangster ((pointing to Fernando's hair))
2   Dawit: Fernando, man, do you have a job?
3   Fernando: Yeah.
4   Dawit: Do you have a father? See, if he has a father he's not a bastard.
5   Group and Anahita: ((gasps, Betza's eyes go wide))
6   Louis: how *could* you man? ((smiling))
7   Dawit: it's *true* ((laughing))

Theme #5: Dual Frame of Reference
"They respect students, not like in Mexico"

As was previously discussed, many theorists have adopted John Ogbu's "dual frame of

reference" concept to help explain why newly arrived immigrants typically manage to remain

optimistic in difficult life circumstances. The results of the written narrative exercises reflected

the potential validity of this theory as I began to see a clear difference in attitudes between the

first and second generation Latino/as in the group. For example, during the writing assignments,

"What do you like least about school in the US?" Fernando and Rosa had nothing negative to

write regarding their US school experiences, whereas the Latino/a-Americans in the group cited

several complaints. The following passage captures their written responses to this assignment:

First Generation Latino/as:

Fernando: What I don't like about this school that I like at Mexico is nothing. This school is better than the schools in Mexico. Here you can learn more stuff have better food. The teachers are more nice and care about the students. The teachers care about your education and your well-being. In here you have transportation, and they encourage you to stay at school. They have trained teachers. They respect the students, not like in Mexico.

Rosa: I feel that its better coming here to school in the United States. Because you

have more opportunities than in Mexico because if you want to keep going to school in Mexico is not the same because not all the people have money to pay the school so I think is better here.

Second Generation Latino/as:

Betza: Things that I dislike about school are basically people who say are your friends, but then they go and just stop talking to you. I also dislike having to wake up so early in the morning and going to classes that you don't like very mucho.

Louis: What I strongly dislike about school is that when I was a freshman I used to know more than half this school but now in my junior year I'm left with a few friends left.

Richard: I don't like that school starts at 8:30 in the morning. It would better if it starts at 9:30 so students would be well rested. Also the cafeteria food is nasty it looks if it was left over from a month ago.

Theme#6 (Observed): Differences in First & Second Generation Latino/as & Filial Responsibility
"I watch TV and go on MySpace"

The second generation Latino/as in the group had more complaints about school and they also reported having far less filial responsibility in comparison to the immigrant Latino/as both in the group and others that I spoke to at the school. Whereas most Louis, Betza, and Richard reported often going home to watch TV and surf the internet or MySpace, Rosa and Fernando were responsible for taking care of their younger siblings and helping their parents. The two times that Fernando missed our group was when (a). he had to help his sick mother and (b). he had to take care of his little brother, because his mother had to work. Additionally, Rosa missed group once because she had to help to translate for her mother in court.

In addition, there were numerous "at-risk" immigrant Latino/as that the school asked me to recruit who were unavailable to participate because they worked most days after school. Students voiced a great desire to participate but felt obligated to work to help

support their family. One Latina tenth-grader already had a full-time job working at the local tienda. In contrast, I found that a greater number of second generation Latino/as were available to participate in activities after school, because they worked less to support family needs.

Summary:
"Why Kids Drop out of School" and Incentives for Staying in School

Throughout the course of storyboard creation, group discussions, interviews, and participatory video narratives, the group discussed specific rationale behind students' dropping out of school. By documenting the commonly proposed scenarios and voiced cultural assumptions about the type of people who drop out that were agreed upon by all of the group members, I was able to document their explanations of and reasons behind high school dropout and their perceived incentives for staying in school.

The common themes/assumptions documented within the category of "setting/problematic experience" in the storyboard narratives, which caused kids to drop out were: (1). Students who had bad home lives and their parents were always fighting, (2) students who were "bad," that is, getting involved with drugs, having sex, and getting pregnant, and (3) students who were gangsters and "didn't care about school." As non-dropouts, these themes were based on the students' ideational culture and observations of school dropout in their communities rather than their first-hand experiences with dropout.

In response to these settings or problematic experiences, students cited two different "responses," one for males and another for females: males were either forced or chose to work rather than attend school, and females were either forced or chose to drop out due to pregnancy. Finally, the "consequence" that the students described was always dire. Usually this involved the

characters "ruining their future," often the male selling drugs and/or possessing weapons (See

Graph A and Appendices D):

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1   Dawit: so, there's two people (.2) they go to a party (.3) um both their parents are, like (.4)
2   ver-ry (.3) fighing (.3) crazy=
3   Richard:              [ yeah fighting
4   Dawit:                              =so-o they don't like their school life, they try to
5   stay together (1.0) I mean their home life, and then they try to stay together. So then they
6   go to a party together and then they do some stuff
7   Rosa: ((laughs))
8   Dawit: and then (.2) the next thing you know (laughs) she's pregnant (.3) and then they
9   both drop out of school to get jo-o-b-s↑ (.3)
10  Betza: well (xxx) her, because she's pregnant, she (.3) can't work
11  Richard:       ] one can't get a job (.2) the girl can't get a job
12  Betza: the guys gonna have to be the one to have to get a job
13  Dawit: the guy drops out to get a job
14  Betza: the girl has to drop out too cause she's pregnant
15  Dawit:                              ] pregnant
16  Richard: no, she can still come to school↑
17  Thu: yeah, like, unless, like her parents, won't (.2) like take her
18  Dawit:                                  ] HER PARENTS KICK HER OUT
19  Betza: yep ((nodding))
20  Thu: oh, ok so she has to drop out to take care of the baby (.4) and he has to work full-
21  time (.1) ok there we go
```
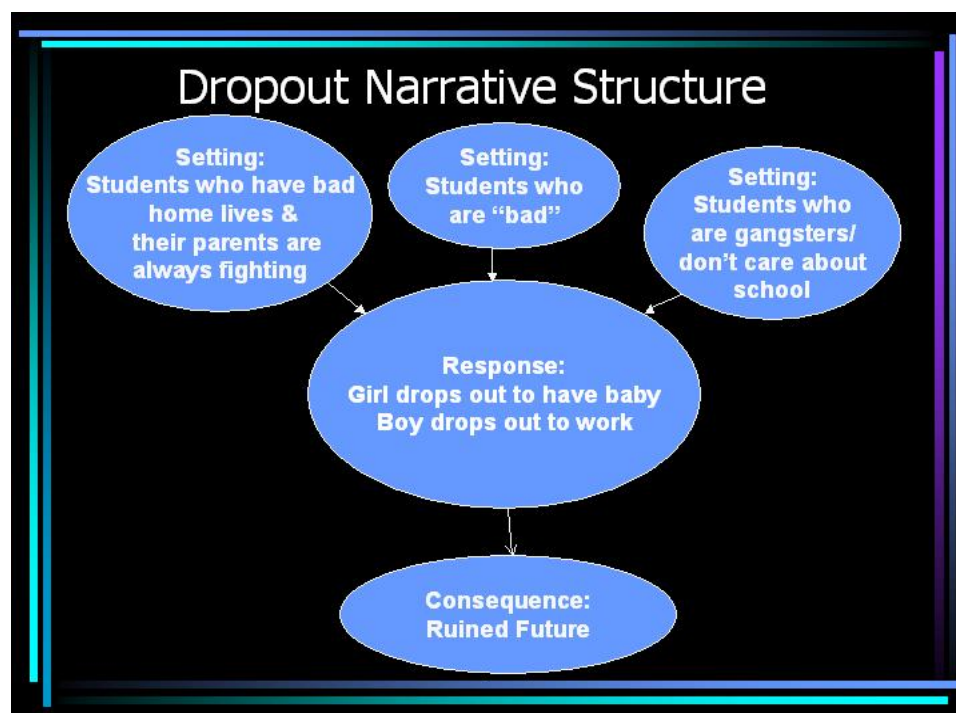

FIGURE III.

This leads us to the students' perceived incentives for staying in school. Several of the male participants reported having thought of dropping out before, and some have friends or family members who dropped out. However, these students reported that they would not dropout because of the anticipated incentives of staying in school and negative consequences of dropping out.

When questioned about why all the participants shared the belief that dropping out of school would lead to a "ruined future," the common explanation was that, (a). the type of work options available to high school dropouts were undesirable, and (b). those who graduated high school could earn more money.

In the final writing assignment, although their reasons for staying in differed slightly, all students reported that they planned to stay in school. However, the overarching theme present in *all* the students' writings about staying in school was that staying in school ensured them a better life. Dropping out of school for all students signified a difficult life full of struggle and hardship:

Fernando: "I want to stay in school to someday be a doctor, a soccer player or something cool that deals with technology or animals."

Louis: "Because I've got this far now and I'm thinking about what will be my best future."

Richard: "I want to graduate get an education, also I want to get a good job."

Dawit: "School is important…it's a way to get ahead of everyone and stay out of trouble."

Betza: "Because to me, it is important to become something and make something out of my life."

Thu: "I plan to stay in school because I want a great future."

There seemed to be some variance in the group responses from the non-Latino/a participants. Thu, a Vietnamese female, had a far harsher concept of teens who dropped out of school. She tended to see all dropouts as extremely "bad" people and tended to be far more critical of them than the other group members. In addition, Thu had never even so much as

considered the possibility of dropping out of school whereas most of the Latino/a participants

had. She admitted that dropping out of school was not even an option that she would consider.

For example, in the written exercise she notes:

> *No one encourages or discourages me to stay in school. I just think about if I drop out*
> *then I won't have a really good life. I just want a great future. I don't want to be people*
> *on the street struggling to survive or people having a job that only pays minimum wage.*

Dawit also consistently proposed and advocated scenarios that differed from that of the

Latino/a group participants. Dawit seemed to believe that a bad family life and getting involved

with drugs was the most common setting leading to dropout:

1   Dawit : they go to the party because (.2) their parents (.2) um their parents just had a
2   fight (.3) so they are really angry (.3) so they just go to the party and do whatever
3   Thu: Yeah but they wouldn't like kick her out if, like, she's a goody two-shoes
4   or whatever
5   Dawit: They *thought* she was but she got *caught* with drugs, she's pregnant and
6   she was at a party

The concept that dropping out of school "ruins your future" was also reiterated again in

the participatory video footage, both by the group members and also by the peers they

interviewed at Starlight High School. For example, Fernando, who seemed to have the most risk

factors present in his life of any of the other members, including both parents reportedly

unengaged in his schooling, a verbally abusive and constantly absent father, and extremely poor

socio-economic conditions, reported that he had never before that about dropping out of school in

his participatory video footage:

1   Sister: Have you ever (.4) think about dropping out?
2   Fernando: (.5) No
3   Sister: Why?
4   Fernando: because my dad tells me that if I drop out of school I will have to go to
     work and pay rent and do all of that stuff (.3)
5   and I don't want to
6   Sister: What does your dad do?
7   Fernando: construction

8   Sister: Oh-h-h. So that's a hard job↑
9   Fernando: yeah
10 Sister: what do you think about students that drop out?
11 Fernando: they're stupid
12 Sister: Why?
13 Fernando: because (1.0)
14 they could win (.3) a lot *more* money if they study than dropping out

The students also listed in the written assignments people or variables that influenced their

decision to either stay in school or drop out. Often, students looked to their siblings for examples

of both what to do and what *not* to do regarding educational choices:

*Dawit: "My parents push me to do well in school and my brother has been in and out of school
which caused lotsa problems, so it helps me want to stay in school."*

Richard: "Watching my brother graduate it encourages me to do the same thing."

Fernando: "I always try to be the best of the best. I try to be better than my sister."

On the other hand, students reported that parents or elder extended family members at times

helped to create situations or environments that both encouraged *and* discouraged school

retention:

Betza: "My parents encourage me to keep going and not give up."

*Dawit: "Something that makes me want to stay in school but also drop-out is my parents. They
are so serious about school they take things out of proportion and I wanna dropout to
make them mad. It's childish I know but I wouldn't do it for real. I wanna make them
proud which makes me want to stay in school."*

Richard: "My parents always want me to do more with my life."

Louis: "Friends and family because they give me tips along my way to help me stay in school"

*Fernando: "My mom and my teachers have encouraged me to stay in school but my aunts are
always saying that I won't. My personal problems sometimes discourages me to
stay in school, because I sometimes get in trouble and they say that I can't be
something when I grow up because they think that I'm dumb and I'm a*

troublemaker."

Similarly, friends were cited as both encouraging and discouraging students to stay in school.

Some of the students reported that friends helped to make school more enjoyable, while others

had friends who negatively influenced the students' desire to finish school:

> *Betza: "What I like best about school is being with my friends. Although some friends that I had don't talk to me anymore for no apparent reason, I still have others that stick with me. No matter what has happened, one very good friend of mine has stuck with me. And that's what makes school so much better, knowing you still have others there for you."*
>
> *Louis: ((in response to, "Who discourages you from staying in school?")) "A few of my friends who dropped out. They told me that they had good jobs that paid well and it made me feel that school was getting pointless."*

Finally, one student reported that extra-curricular activities helped him to stay in school. Louis

specifically, who had reported considering dropping out the most of all the other members,

attributes his ability to stay in school to school clubs, which he joined when school was beginning

to seem boring and pointless. Louis spoke of several after-school clubs that he enjoyed and felt

that if it were not for these clubs, he might have given up on school:

> *Louis: "I joined more after school clubs and that was fun to do so I felt that I shouldn't leave yet because I wanted to learn more from these clubs."*

It is interesting to note that students like Louis who had considered dropping out of school

still perceived dropouts as "bad." Although both Dawit and Louis reported having thought about

dropping out (i.e. Dawit because of his parents, Louis because school seemed "pointless"), they

felt that students who actually *did* drop out were "bad." There seemed to be a cultural divide

between those students who had thought about dropping out, and those who *actually did* it.

Several of the students, specifically Thu and Betza, were not able to relate to dropouts.

Others related to some of the perceived factors contributing to dropout, but still tended to see

drop out as something occurring to "others" who had problems at home and became involved

with "bad stuff" or "bad people." However, these students were still *at risk* of dropping out of

school because of various risk factors present in their lives associated with school attrition (i.e.

cultural barriers and socio-economic status). In the next chapter, I will discuss how these

students' ideational culture and observations of dropout are significant to understanding school

retention and attrition in immigrant and minority populations.

CHAPTER VI.
ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATIONS
"The guy's gonna have to be the one that's gonna have to get a job"

Students At-Risk

The students' final collective narrative dropout scenario depicts "actually happens" a non-white girl getting pregnant and a boy getting a job to support his pregnant girlfriend. Interestingly, the students' perception that Latino boys working while in school leads to dropout, reflects the current data regarding Latino/a employment experience and early school attrition rates (Olatunji 2005). A recent study found that in non-white Mexican origin and Mexican American students, working while in school for as little as eight hours per week increased the odds of dropping out by 27%, and those working twice that much increased their odds of leaving high school early by *sixty* percent (Olantunji 2005:18). The study found that first and second generation Mexican girls were *three and a half more times likely* (emphasis added) to drop out by the tenth grade than their male counterparts, although it is unclear if this statistic is in fact related to pregnancy.

Similarly, the students' conception that girls who got pregnant while in high school were most likely to drop out supports published data (Cassell 2002). Studies have shown that when examining the relationship of academic ability to the potential for teenage parenthood, high school sophomores with low academic ability were twice as likely to become pregnant by their senior year as those students with high academic ability. In addition, it was found that teenage girls in the bottom 20 percent of basic math and reading skills were *five* (emphasis added) times more likely to become pregnant during high school than those in the top 20 percent (Cassell 2002).

Data in this case seem to suggest that it is the "risk" factors surrounding these girls that lead *both* to the likelihood of their dropping out as well as their becoming pregnant. Studies claim that girls "at risk" for these outcomes include those with parents who are not supportive or not involved with their child's academic experiences, those with low expectations for school achievement not engaged in school activities, and those typically living in poverty (Cassell 2002; Brindis 1992). Research indeed shows that among the girls who have become both pregnant and dropped out of school, 61 percent of the pregnancies occurred after dropping out of school (Cassell 2002). The students in the group were most likely familiar with the type of students who tended to drop out, and naturally attributed their "kind" (those who dressed and behaved a certain way) to teen pregnancy and dropout.

While some were more understanding of students who dropped out than others, according to all the students, dropout was only something that happened to "bad" kids who either didn't care about school or had gotten involved with "bad stuff" and, therefore, *had* to dropout. For that reason, most of the students in the program saw dropout as something that "others" did rather than something that they could relate to personally. As is reflected in the storyboard narrative, their main reason for staying school is based on an anticipated or imagined better future or life. For them, dropping out meant a ruined future, and subsequently, they felt that only "bad" kids or those who had no other choice would drop out of school.

Although the group participants' perceptions that dropouts were "bad" might have been inaccurate, there does seem to be a somewhat clear distinction between students who are more at risk for dropping out of school than those who are not. Students often take notice of others who are disengaged, those who sleep in class, demonstrate an apathetic attitude, and are often absent from school. Students who exhibit these behaviors often have problems occurring or originating outside of school, which often leads to an alternative way of dressing and acting that students call

"gangster." For this reason "gangsters" have come to be associated by students and teachers as those most likely to exhibit risky behaviors leading to dropout. However, as was noted in the students' discussion, dressing or acting gangster did not necessarily mean that a student *was* in fact bad, but that they had taken on the stylistic characteristics of those who typically *were* bad.

Being "bad" (i.e. exhibiting behaviors leading to pregnancy, drug use, and dropout) according to these students had little to do with low socio-economic status or cultural barriers. "Bad" students, according to the group members, were those who had *such* difficult external and personal problems, such as bad home lives and fighting parents (cited in data analysis), that they had given up on the idea of education for financial prosperity. Since practically every student attending Starlight High School lived under or at the poverty level, it was these types of problems that separated the "good" kids from the "bad" kids, therefore, creating scenarios more or less likely for dropout to occur. This finding supports published literature suggesting that disengaged parents among other risk factors play an important role in school attrition.

Fernando, although he seemed to be the most studious and hard working of all the participants, was, by definition, the most "at-risk" due to the personal problems he reported such as disengaged parents, aunts who discouraged him, and a verbally abusive father. In addition, Fernando also possessed many of the characteristics of a "gangster," which often signified family or personal difficulties present within students' lives. This evidence suggests that students often tend to "display" risk factors stylistically, possibly making them more prone to discrimination.

Despite being at-risk, Fernando's immigrant status serves as a protective factor enabling him to remain optimistic despite difficult circumstances. Fernando's maintains a dual frame of reference because his life in Mexico was so much more difficult than it now is in the United States. In this sense, he may not in fact be the member of the group most at risk of dropping out.

However, Fernando's baggy jeans, jelled hair cut, and quiet and troubled demeanor may have caused others to believe otherwise.

The way these "gangster" students dressed and acted fits the description of Matute-Bianchi's "Cholo/as" who were said to wear baggy pants, have a gang-like style and to be gang-oriented (Matute-Bianchi 1991). These students had simply been given a different name, "gangsters," to describe their stylistic preferences and "gang-like" behavior. The Cholo/as in Matute-Bianchi's student were also discriminated against by their Latino/a counterparts, just as the "gangsters" at Starlight were discriminated against by the other group members. This illustrates that this sub-ethnic group of Latino/a students has existed for some time and continues to face discrimination that may contribute to the high attrition rates of Latino/a students.

Accounting for Variation and Similarities in Group Responses

There was some variance in the types of responses given or stories told by the Vietnamese and Ethiopian student. Thu (the Vietnamese girl) and Dawit (the Ethiopian boy) saw dropouts as extremely bad people to be looked down upon. While most Latino/a students argued that "bad" kids could simply be "good" kids who make mistakes, Thu saw any person who dropped out, got pregnant, or did drugs as *inherently* bad. Dawit also was more extreme in his view of dropouts, often citing drugs and weapons as the main cause for or consequence of their corruption, while most Latino/a students saw pregnancy for females and working for males as the main motivating factors of dropout.

I attribute the difference in perceptions of dropout to cultural values of education respective to each ethnic group represented in the program. For example, for Thu completing her schooling and pursuing college was intrinsically "the right thing to do" and doing otherwise was looked down upon. This reflected culturally socialized ideals of success respective to her

Vietnamese identity. According to Hirschman and Wong, the first Asians arriving in the United

States were successful entrepreneurs, and were therefore able to develop social and economic

capital over time to send future generations to school (1986:33). When these generations did

pursue education, Asian ethnic groups often saw the financial benefit of doing so, and thus these

groups came to greatly value of education as a means of succeeding. These ethnic groups saw the

collective betterment of their people as directly linked to educational attainment in the United

States (Hirschman and Wong 1986). This may have a great deal to do with the way Thu regarded

dropouts in her community, since the pursuing education was a culturally instilled value.

Similarly, Dawit's harsh perception of school dropouts reflects his Ethiopian cultural

identity and upbringing. Published literature shows that African immigrants have the highest rates

of educational attainment in the United States, most of them holding advanced degrees (Journal

of Blacks in Higher Education 1994). This is in direct contrast to black Americans' school

achievement rates, who often internalize the discrimination and subordination they experience as

non-immigrants in the United States (Ogbu 1991). Dawit may have been reproducing the cultural

values that had been instilled in him by his parents and family.

The Latino/a participants did agree that students who dropped out were "bad" but had a

less harsh view of dropouts than Dawit or Thu. I attribute this to the consistent educational

underachievement of the Hispanic population in the United States and a subsequent lack of

positive role-models for Hispanic students. The Hispanic population in the United States has long

been seen as nothing more than a form of cheap labor and its children have long been expected to

be nothing more (De Jesus 2005). This stereotype has been internalized and reproduced in many

Latino/a immigrant and minority families. When their model of success is not linked to

educational attainment, Hispanic students view dropping out as an acceptable choice if for the

sake of raising children or working to support the family, which will be discussed further in the

next chapter. This may account for the variance in responses respective to the Latino/a and non-Latino/a students.

Finally, the group participants all agreed upon the themes presented in the previous chapter possibly, because they had been socialized to an extent by my presence and by society to believe that dropping out of school was "bad." These students as non-drop outs believed that staying in school would provide them the kind of success that society valued. Students who dropped out were seen as inevitably involved in negative groups or activities that resisted dominant cultural standards of morality and success.

Encouraging & Discouraging Factors

The students also expressed several factors that both encouraged and discouraged them to stay in school. The most common response of all the participants was that having supportive parents encouraged them to stay in school. In both cases, parents played the most significant role in encouraging students' school retention. The below graphs represent the various themes that the students stated in their questionnaires regarding factors that encourage and discourage them to stay in school. The numbers next to the words in the table signify the number of participants that listed this as a factor in their written questionnaires.

Table I.

Discouraging Factors	Encouraging Factors
(1). Parents (1)	(1). Parents (5)
(2). Nothing (1)	(2). Friends (3)
(3). Extended Family (1)	(3). Siblings (3)
(4). Friends (1)	(4). Clubs (1)
(5). Personal Problems (1)	(5). Nothing (1)
(6). No Answer (1)	(6). No Answer (1)

This finding also supports published data that suggests that parents play an extremely pivotal role in influencing the academic success of their children (Saucedo Ramos 2003; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 1995; Tapia 2004). In this case, students like Fernando, Betza, Richard and Louis reported that their parents' support, encouragement, and expectations for them encouraged them more than any other factor to stay in school. These students reported that their parents' support prevented them from "giving up" on school when times got tough. However, one student (Dawit) found the amount of pressure that his parents placed on him to do well in school was so great that he felt it discouraged him from staying in school. Another (Fernando) felt that extended family members discouraged him by telling him that he would fail to go to college.

Narrative Concepts & Lived Experience

In most cases, I also found that the narrative story concepts proposed by each group member during the storyboarding reflected his/her lived experience. In other words, members would develop story concepts about dropout with which they were most familiar. For example, Dawit was constantly opposed to the idea of making the dropout character a McDonald's worker, because he himself worked at Arbys and was a successful student going on to college the following year. However, his idea for the dropout character always included his getting involved with drugs and having difficulties at home, because he watched his brother experience this and then drop out of school:

1 Dawit: So, say, maybe you and your parents don't agree on the same things and don't agree on
2 what you want to do in your future, and then, you might even get pregnant and then your
3 parents want you to keep the child, and then they just tell you to drop out of school, or you just
4 drop out cause you don't want to deal with them anymore. That happened to my brother, he
5 got in trouble but then my dad got him, like, kicked out of school for something, and then he
6 didn't go to school for a whole semester.

Another example is Fernando, who also suggested a narrative idea for the storyboard that involved a girl who gets pregnant and a boy who is forced to drop out to work in order to support them. In his participatory video footage, we learn that his aunt recently dropped out from Starlight High School because she became pregnant:

1   Sister: Why do you think they [students] drop out?
2   Fernando: um, I don't know I got an (.4) aunt, that dropped out just this year↑ (.3) because my uncle got her pregnant (.3) and she had to drop out.
3   Sister: That's why you think most girls drop out?
4   Fernando: yeah

Reproduction of Racial Stereotypes

I also found that students tended to *reproduce*, rather than resist, racial stereotypes. In fact, in most cases, the students tended to internalize socialized racial stereotypes, therefore reproducing social inequities already present within dominant culture. This is evidenced by their criticism or discrimination of students who "looked different" or dressed in a way inconsistent with dominant culture's stylistic norms (gangsters) while still admitting at times falling victim to the same type of discrimination as Dawit stated:

1   They judge us by our haircuts ((employs the word "us" rather than "them"))

Moreover, students also reproduced popular racial stereotypes as they attempted to explain why Latino/a and Black students dropped out more often than White or Asian students. In fact, during the storyboard narrative, they agreed unanimously to rule out the possibility of the dropout character being White. They maintained that more Latino/a students dropped out and had more disadvantages against them, while Asians were successful because: (Louis) "Asian people are *smart*," and because (Dawit) "they have been doing good for so long and their good side is greater than their bad side." These assumptions reveal the reproduction and internalization of

socialized racial stereotypes, which may play a role in the ethnic/class-based discrimination shown to hinder Latino/a academic success.

Although the students' perceptions and conceptualizations of high school dropout and the types of students that dropped out were based on personal observations, assumptions, and socialized racial stereotypes, many of the students' assumptions did reflect reality. It is significant to note that, while their explanations regarding *why* Asian students outdid Hispanic students academically or *why* male Latino students dropped out to work (i.e. that they were "bad" or "gangster") might have been inaccurate, they expressed a keen awareness of school dropout that reflected data in published studies on this topic (Brindis 1992; Cassell 2002; Olatunji 2005). The students knew that many Latinas who dropped out got pregnant and that Latinos who dropped out did so to work.

This finding supports my assumption that examining the way students conceptualize issues in their own communities that affect them, such as high school dropout, enables us as researchers to better understand and interpret these issues. Interpreting the data without the perspectives of students who deal everyday with the obstacles and opportunities leading to patterns of school attrition and retention hinders our full understanding of this issue. The students' stories, knowledge, and assumptions of "what happens" and "what doesn't happen" is based upon their first-hand experiences with these very issues, and, thus, they are valuable and pertinent to this study. In addition, by studying students who have "beat the odds" and examining how they have dealt with the various risk factors in their lives, we can better understand how to help those in future generations who will continue to deal with such circumstances.

The units of analysis in this study (non-dropouts) reveal the incentives and motivating factors that have enabled them to stay in school against the odds. They reveal the belief that staying in school guarantees financial success whereas dropping out leads to a life of difficulty

and strife. Each students' values and beliefs about education reflect their moral and cultural framework and the way they have been socialized to think about success in the United States. Their observations of school dropout provide insight into the types of obstacles and opportunities minority and immigrant students face during their schooling.

Theoretical Discussion of Data

Although students who were seen as "gangsters" might have possessed more at risk behaviors than other students, it is important to mention that "gangsters" might have simply been students who did not possess dominant cultural capital and were, therefore, seen as different or "bad." As Bourdieu and McLeod suggest, schools may be a setting where positive cultural capital is rewarded and negative cultural capital is punished, both by teachers and by students. In this case, it seemed that the more acculturated Latino/a students possessed dominant cultural capital and, therefore, discriminated against other Latino/as who did not. Acculturation does seem to play a large role in discrimination, as immigrant Latinos do not possess the "cultural and linguistic knowledge, skills, and dispositions" to earn the educational and social credentials necessary to avoid being discriminated against (McLeod 1995).

Although discrimination is a theme in this thesis, we also see the role of agency in overcoming the negative obstacles Latino/a students face such as discrimination. Fernando represents the Latino immigrant student who struggles with myriad structural, cultural, and social obstacles but continues to believe in his abilities and pursue education as his key to a better future. His dual frame of reference as an immigrant Mexican student provides him a sense of optimism towards the future and a drive to take advantage of the opportunities in the United States that are not present in Mexico. This study, however, demonstrates how many challenges

students like Fernando must overcome in order to succeed. In cases like this one, agency is sometimes not enough.

Also drawing on theories of symbolic violence and breadwinner ideology previously discussed, many students internalize the very structures and ideas that tend to subordinate them (Connolly and Healy 2004). As is seen in this study, racial stereotypes are reproduced within the school and students tend to accept them as fact. Central to this study is the notion of gendered habitus, which has been found to discourage girls' from staying in school. As is found in the student narratives, girls are most often seen as dropping out in order to pursue motherhood or marriage. The data highlighted in this study also solidify this perception, as the same girls who often display risk behaviors are also most likely to drop out and pursue early motherhood.

It is possible that for Hispanic girls who face myriad structural, cultural, and social challenges, individual agency is undermined due to their gradual acceptance of gender, class, and racial stereotypes. For many girls, accepting the role of "mother" or "homemaker" comes as a far easier alternative to struggling against discrimination, cultural barriers, and structural forces posed against them. For others, like Betza, these stereotypes drive working-class Hispanic girls to resist the gendered habitus and "make something of themselves" outside the realm of motherhood. These girls have often been socialized by society and also by parents or peers who challenge traditional gender roles to see those who drop out as "bad." It may be mainly the more acculturated girls, possessing dominant cultural capital, who have the necessary skills to resist this habitus. However, less acculturated immigrant Latinas may possess the dual frame of reference and optimism to take advantage of opportunities in the US not previously present in their homeland, and also resist this traditional gendered habitus.

Finally, as was seen in this study, the common cultural conceptions amongst the research participants was that Latino students (boys) most often dropped out to pursue employment. The

literature also suggests that boys who work, either for themselves or to support their families, are more at risk for dropping out than those who do not. As Jurkovic and Kuperminc et al (2004) suggested, filial responsibility does tend to compete with schooling and extra-curricular activities that aid in youth development and school retention. The students in the group reported that the boy 'had to drop out to support his pregnant girlfriend or family." Here again we see the breadwinner ideology at play in creating another type of gendered habitus. This time, the male working-class Latino habitus places pressure on male Hispanic students to drop out to provide for their families. Latino working-class students often feel responsible for taking on the "breadwinner" role, while women fulfill their roles by bearing and raising children. However, this gendered habitus is now increasingly challenged by Latino working-class students, as they begin to see a clear distinction between financial prosperity and continuing education. It is for this reason that male dropouts are often seen as "stupid" or "bad" for dropping out, because the work options available to them are so undesirable.

The students' association of schooling with financial success and dropping out with financial duress reveals the way that they had been socialized to think and talk about schooling. Language socialization is part and parcel of becoming a productive and accepted member of society (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984). Consequently, dominant society plays a large role in the way students come to feel and talk about topics like education and success. Schools and the media constantly convey the message that staying in school leads to financial prosperity as a means of motivating students to stay in school. Even my presence as an upper-middle-class educated person talking to the students about school dropout contributed to the way they perceived this issue. In this sense, the source of the students' agreement about the value of schooling came from dominant cultural capital reinforced by institutional forces such as schools

and the media. These students internalized and reproduced the idea that education leads to financial success, in part because that is what they had been socialized to do.

In addition, the students were aware of the fact that education often *does* open the door to upward social mobility based on popular models of success seen in the media as well as in everyday society. As is shown on the map in the Appendices, Starlight sat amidst both low-income housing and upper-class housing developments. Subsequently students were exposed daily to models of the financial success and upper-class status that they felt education could provide.

Impact of Participatory Video Program

A secondary goal of this research has been to assess the potential impact that the program has had on the students. Because of the time and financial constraints imposed upon the program as a Master's level research initiative, I was unable to fully address the impact of the program on participants as a formal research question. Nonetheless, I conducted a focus group with three of the participants (Betza, Louis and Richard), which sought to expose how the students felt about the program and explore what they had learned about themselves as a result of the program.

Their answers reflected what I had observed over the course of the group: The program provided the students with new skills that seemed to excite and empower them, and they yearned for more and more knowledge. In addition, the process of screening video footage as a group, sharing about their day-to-day lives, and participating in group discussions about issues like school, family, dropout, and peer pressure seemed to help some of them sort through their problems and connect with others who were going through similar problems. In that sense, the program also achieved a kind of therapeutic outcome, which allowed students an open and free space where they could express themselves and bond with their peers:

1   Anahita: How did you feel about the program ending?

2   Betza: It was *really* (.3) actually (.5) sad↓. Like I was (.2) HAPPY that I had (.2) um made a video and all th-a-a-t↓ (.3) but, I was sad, because I had actually like (.2) learned↑ more↑.

3   Louis: um, I learned a lot of good things. It was (.2) *real* good. Ending↑ (.3) I wish I'd learned a little bit more, but (.1) I learned a lot ((nodding)).

4   Richard: ((saddened)) I wish we'd had more time. Um, I really liked the program and I was really sad when it ended

5   Anahita: What were some of the things that you guys learned about yourselves?

6   Louis: My voice didn't sound like what I thought it would

7   Betza: I don't *look* like how I thought I would (.7)

8   and feelings-wise and emotionally-wise, I realized that (.4) that (.5) it's hard to explain ((looking emotional; begins to ask Richard to speak for her))

9   Anahita: No Betza, what were you going to say?

10   Betza: oh, it's hard to *explain* ((looking embarrassed and shy)), it's like (.3) um, I donno, it's weird ((looking down at her feet)) (.3) it's hard…

11   Anahita: so, through video, do you learn about other people and yourself?

12   Betza: YEAH. you learned a lot about people. *THAT'S* what it is, you learn more about how people *are*↑

13   and their problems (.3) not *all* their problems↑ but like *some* of them↑

14   and like in some ways you can relate to what they feel, cause sometimes you feel like there's nobody else out there and nobody's going through the same things you are↑ (.2) but then there are other people who have (.2) worse problems going on↑ and so you learn to appreciate things a little bit more

Having the students conduct individual video interviews with each other also allowed them to explore some of their problems together and possibly see that they were not alone in the issues with which they were coping. Because the students were able to choose the topics of their interviews and frame their own questions, they were able to discuss issues with which they could relate. The following is an interview conducted by Thu in which she asks Fernando about his life now and experience coming to the United States from Mexico:

1   Thu: So how was it in your house?

2   Fernando: In Mexico?

3   Thu: Yeah

4   Fernando: (1) I don't know

5   Thu: you don't know? (2) so what was it like for you to move from Mexico to here? Like how was that, was it a struggle for you?

6   Fernando: yeah.

7   Thu: what problems were you going through?

8   Fernando: (.3) I don't know, I was small and (.4) I didn't know if I could make it↑
    because we had to walk, like, for two days. I don't know.
9   Thu: so how do you like America? Do you like it?
10 Fernando: Yeah
11 Thu: Like, what do you do here, like growing up here like from Mexico, do you enjoy it
12 here or there?
13 Fernando: here

Participatory Video Method

Finally, using participatory video as a method of qualitative measurement was effective in

a number of ways while failing in others. The method, in this study, served more as a research

program retention tool than as an effective means of capturing data pertinent to the research topic.

Allowing the students to use cameras to document and explore their lives from their own

perspectives achieves a very broad type of data, because the subject matter captured is left to

participants' discretion and interpretation. The data that the student collected pertained more to

their family and personal lives and schooling experiences than to school dropout. While this data

would have been useful in a full ethnographic longitudinal study, I was more focused on

answering specific questions addressing factors surrounding school retention and attrition.

As was my experience, even when assigning students a specific research topic, researchers might

often find the data scattered, therefore requiring them to sort through it to find useable portions

relevant to the study. Overall the method was not reliable because there was no way of

controlling what types of information were captured and in what manner they were acquired.

However, because the method maintains a high level of unobtrusiveness and allows

students to have a kind of dialogue with the camera, it is very effective at capturing students

inside thoughts, emotions, and reflections, which can be very difficult for a researcher to typically

attain. The fact that the camera served as a kind of reflexive tool that allowed students to reflect

on their lives makes it potentially a very useful research tool in the social sciences. In addition,

the camera's capacity to capture "hard-to-reach" data within the communities of the participants is another potential strength. Nonetheless, due to this method's lack of reliability, participatory video should be used only in specific types of studies and as a *supplement* to other methods of data collection.

However, the Participatory Video method has a great deal to contribute both epistemologically and educationally if refined.   For example, the video footage collected by the students was edited together into a final ethnographic video, which will continue to be used for teaching and educational purposes for years to come. Videos like this one may appeal to a wider audience than the academic audience that is customary for journal papers and published texts. In addition, videos like this one can be archived and accessed by researchers interested in conducting future studies using visual methods for similar populations.

Education For ALL?

By examining the culturally conceived racial stereotypes shared by the group members in this study, we see that students internalize race and class-based stratification within our school systems, influencing notions of "who can" and "who can't" succeed. As is seen in this study, it is difficult to find a student who does not at the very least desire what education promises, who has not been socialized through our media, advertising, and social institutions to accept that education buys financial prosperity and social prestige. It is the internalized belief that it is only those possessing valued race, class, social standing, and appropriate cultural behaviors who are able to succeed that sets some students up for failure.

Even more discouraging for those students is the socialized notion that only those who are able to finish school have "made something of their lives."   Students who feel they are forced to drop out due to family problems, financial hardship, or cultural obstacles get caught in the cycle

of inequity and only reproduce racial and class-based stereotypes. While many students in Starlight High School drop out to attain working-class employment to support their families or raise their children, they are also aware of the financial success and social prestige that education promises.

That they be called "bad" or "gangster," and discriminated against because of a choice that might have been viewed as "the only option," is perhaps the greatest injustice of this phenomenon. Here, I raise the point that there exists a kind of dissonance between socialized ideals of success in the US and, not only what *is* actually attainable for many working-class immigrant students, but also stereotypical notions present within American society and immigrant communities regarding where working-class Latino/as belong. Consequently, until education actually *is* attainment for all, I argue for a society that is more understanding of different types of success.

In this passage, I do not advocate that these students be "excused" from completing school because of the obstacles they face. Quite the contrary, these students should continue to be reached out to and provided the resources necessary to remain in school. Because educational attainment opens doors to social and financial success and self-sufficiency, it will continue to be the ideal goal for all students. However, until society becomes more understanding of the structural, financial, and ideological obstacles facing this population, discriminatory stereotypes will continue to limit the potential of our immigrant and minority students.

CHAPTER VII.
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRAXIS
"I finally did something right"

Potential for Further Research

The Reading and Writing for Filmmaking Afterschool Program at Starlight served as a space for youth to explore various issues in their lives, make new friends, and develop new skills. From an applied anthropological perspective, the program was preventative rather than ameliorative in the sense that it may have prevented students in it from dropping out of school. From a research prospective, it provided an ideal setting for social sciences research in which focus groups, interviews, and observation occurred. This program, if implemented on a larger scale, has great potential to be successful both as a research tool and a milieu for youth development. The methodology and curriculum developed for this program can be used in further studies and expanded upon to address specific research questions of interest to the researcher(s) and participants. The program should be implemented with the help and assistance of the school system whenever possible, but should remain an extra-curricular activity in order to retain the value of it's "free spaces."

Another possible further step may be using the final video products of the program in the development of teaching tools and the formulation of policy. One important benefit of this program is that it captures the true essence of "what is going on" in the schools, as seen from an insider perspective, and more specifically, from students' perspectives. If the Department of Education genuinely hopes to create educational policy that addresses the true needs of its students, more of these such teaching and informative tools are necessary. Policymakers are constantly in need of resources with which to gain a rich and nuanced understanding of the

unique needs of the students they serve. In light of this, developing ethnographic videos and teaching tools based on students' exploratory projects regarding students' observations, perspectives, and experiences are in great need.

Finally, a larger-scale evaluation of the student impact of the program will help to raise support for the development of more programs like the Reading and Writing for Filmmaking Afterschool Program. Future studies should focus on the effects of the program on student development and feelings of school belonging and engagement. These studies should involve mixed methods to help bolster the evidence for beneficial program outcomes to educational policymakers and potential funders.

Development of Programs within Non-Institutionalized Settings

From a strictly applied perspective, the Reading and Writing for Filmmaking After School Program demonstrates the value of free spaces and the types of programming that can be offered to at-risk or disadvantaged students as a means of preventing and reducing high school drop out. Whether this specific program actually reduced or prevented school dropout is yet to be seen. However, research has already linked programs like this one offering spaces for self-expression, bonding with peers, and skill development to school retention (Fine et al. 2000; Rubinstein-Avila 2006).

With ever-changing times and the forces of globalized technology all around us, practitioners should constantly be on the lookout for ways of engaging at-risk or "hard-to-reach" youth in positive and empowering activities that serve as alternatives to negative peer groups. "Video" and "filmmaking" are often buzzwords for urban youth and a program that offers the possibility of making one's own video may peak the interest of even the most hard-to-reach

youth. Offering a therapeutic and safe environment while providing a means of cultural expression using technological tools may be just the right combination for attracting urban youth to school retention programs.

In addition, providing students with the chance to show their video work to a broad audience and educate others about themselves and their communities puts students in leadership roles, which may also produce positive outcomes. At the conclusion of the program, students in the Reading and Writing for Filmmaking were given the opportunity to screen their work at Georgia State University before students, faculty, and friends. Subsequently, they served as proud representatives of their school, communities, and classmates while being exposing to a university setting. It is precisely these types of experiences that may increase students' motivation to stay in school and eventually pursue higher education.

CHAPTER VIII.
CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that the students' narratives did in fact tend to reflect their experiences, observations, and moral assumptions, which revealed a great deal about the circumstances surrounding Latino/a school dropout in their community. Moreover, the study confirmed that the students in fact showed a keen awareness of school dropout and those students most likely to drop out, which reflect published literature regarding theories of school retention and attrition. This research also showed that students who had fewer risk factors (i.e. good home lives and engaged parents) tended to be more resilient to dropout regardless of socio-economic or class status. In other words, risk factors seemed to separate those who would "give up" from those would not. Parents were also reportedly the most common factor in the students' lives in terms of encouraging them to stay in school, which also reflects published literature regarding parental engagement in schooling.

Additionally, a kind of "gendered habitus" at Starlight often legitimized dropout among Latino/a students. These students participated in their own symbolic violence, often choosing options or exhibiting behavior that led to their own subordination. Boys dropped out often to take on the role of "breadwinner" of the family, while girls chose motherhood as a culturally accepted alternative to schooling. Also, the study revealed that students at Starlight associated schooling with financial success, which served as a motivating factor for them to stay in school. Schooling for these students signified desirable employment opportunities and financial prosperity whereas dropping out guaranteed a life of poverty and strife. The study also illustrated that Latino/a students internalized and reproduced socialized racial stereotypes, possibly setting themselves,

and their Latino/a counterparts, up for failure. This serves as another form of symbolic violence which leads to the subordination of Latino/a students and influences their school attrition rates.

Finally, the analysis revealed that participatory video as a methodological tool is useful as a supplement to various other methods, and is particularly useful in research with children. By allowing teens the option of expressing themselves non-verbally using an audiovisual tool, we strip away barriers hindering the expressivity and reflectivity that is essential to understanding their perspectives, observations, and experiences. Moreover, the program aided in youth development and the prevention of school attrition, as students reported developing new skills, a new social network, and exploring issues related to school dropout with their peers. This study resembles others that provide 'free spaces' in which students are able to investigate their social realities with a peer group as a means of youth development.

Latino/a students have an overwhelming number of obstacles to overcome when approaching schooling in the United States. These students come from a long history of poverty and subordination originating in their countries of origin and continuing on into their present environments. Latino/a immigrants' who come to the United States are often motivated by a lack of essential resources in their sending country and the prospect of providing their children with much needed opportunities. However, once arriving, many Hispanic families cope with the challenge of being undocumented in the United States, which limits eligibility for financial aid in higher education and access to higher paying jobs. Because Latino/as are often limited to manual labor and working-class employment, they remain in the cycle of inequity with the continual discrimination and stereotyping of their people. This cycle of inequity plagues not only first generation Latino/a immigrants but also their children and future generations of Latino Americans.

Latino/a students often find themselves attempting to adapt to a cultural and educational system that is riddled with obstacles without the proper resources to do so. Moreover, students find their parents unavailable to engage actively in their schooling due to a lack of social capital. Parents often work two jobs to make ends meet and Latino/a students often feel obligated to take care of their younger siblings, help around the house, and seek out employment to help support the family. These factors compete with and often undermine schooling, making school graduation all the more difficult for these students.

By looking at the various risk factors and structural forces present in students' lives, their perceived motivations for dropping out vs. staying in school, and the factors that they see as encouraging/discouraging them to either stay in school or drop out, we are able to identify to what extent specific themes and patterns begin to resurface, both in this study and others like it. In doing so, students are speaking out with their own voices to provide us with the knowledge necessary to create theoretical solutions for educational policy, after school programming, and community outreach efforts, and to produce lasting change for future generations to come.

School dropout is an issue that continues to plague our society, both economically and socially. Much has been done on the part of education policy makers to thwart the ever-ascending dropout rate of Latino/a students. Despite these efforts this rate continues to rise. Based on this study and others like it, which use innovative methods to engage students in discussions about their lives and observations, I argue for more efforts to be put forth to better understand the *student* perspective of school failure and attrition.

Understanding how Latino/a students conceptualize and react to the obstacles and opportunities with respect to high school graduation enables us to better devise solutions to support their true needs. Therefore, after school programs that empower students by allowing

their voices to be heard can also serve educators, social scientists and, ultimately, students in a variety of different ways.

This body of research was distinctive because it employed a combination of several innovative qualitative methodologies fashioned to suit hard-to-reach youth populations, including participatory video, storyboard narratives, and written narratives. The study sets a new foundation upon which future scholars can build when conducting research with children. In addition, the ethnographic video accompanying this text, (*Participatory Video Narratives: Voices Unheard*), provides more detail of the curriculum/research exercises, which can be utilized and expanded upon by future researchers and/or practitioners.

This study was also unique in that it approached immigrant attrition and retention neither from a school nor student deficit standpoint. Instead of looking to one of the two "failure" paradigms (school vs. student failure) to explain Latino/a retention and attrition rates, the research sought to uncover immigrant and minority students' shared cultural assumptions, ideational culture, and observations of schooling with which to better interpret and/or contextualize existing theories of school attrition and retention.

Limitations

There were several limitations within this study. First, I found it difficult to recruit the type of students ("bad" kids and "gangsters") that are perceived to be most at-risk of dropping out of school to participate in the program. In this sense, while the program still provided me students' perspectives of schooling, from an applied perspective, the students who would most benefit from this type of program were out of reach. In addition, the perspective regarding the types of obstacles and opportunities that these specific students face was lost.

Another limitation of this study includes my inability to simply observe the students due to my role as program facilitator. There were many times when I was forced to guide the students' activities when I would have preferred to simply observe their interactions. In addition, the presence of the camera and researcher may have influenced the amount and type of information disclosed by the students. Finally, there may have been some influence of popular media representations on story ideas. Consequently, it is difficult to know for certain whether these stories were in fact created based on lived experience or simply a popular scenario depicted on television. This said, during the follow-up interviews, the students stated that these stories where based on their perceptions of what occurs in most dropout situations.

Also the Participatory Video method ended up being somewhat problematic because, while the students did become empowered to engage further in the research program, their footage was not always relevant to the research topic. The challenge was additionally that, because of the level of autonomy the students were given, many used the activity as an opportunity to "do documentaries" about their lives, rather than focus on the agreed upon topic. It became clear that, although allowing the students some creative freedom was ideal, had stricter guidelines been instated, the video footage would have been far more fruitful and relevant to the research topic. While this information provided a greater sense of the identities of the subjects, the opportunity to collect data more relevant to high school dropout was lost.

Additionally, the Storyboard Narrative exercise was problematic in the sense that the students were performing for dominant society, having been influenced by the dominant perspective of school dropout. While the students' stories held a degree of authenticity, it is difficult to know from where their beliefs originated. This said, the follow-up focus groups provided me insight into where the students' beliefs originated and why they had chosen to portray dropout characters as they did.

By the end of the research project, I remember feeling that I had just begun to break the surface with the participants at Starlight High School. Building rapport and establishing trusting relationships with youth is no simple task and requires time and patience. However, I could tell that the students had begun to feel very comfortable with, not only my presence, but also the presence of the camera. I cannot help but feel that had the program continued, it would have attracted more students and possibly shed a great deal more light on the issue of educational attrition and retention in urban immigrant communities.

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APPENDICES:

A. Map of Fieldsite: (Note low-income apartment complexes surrounding school)
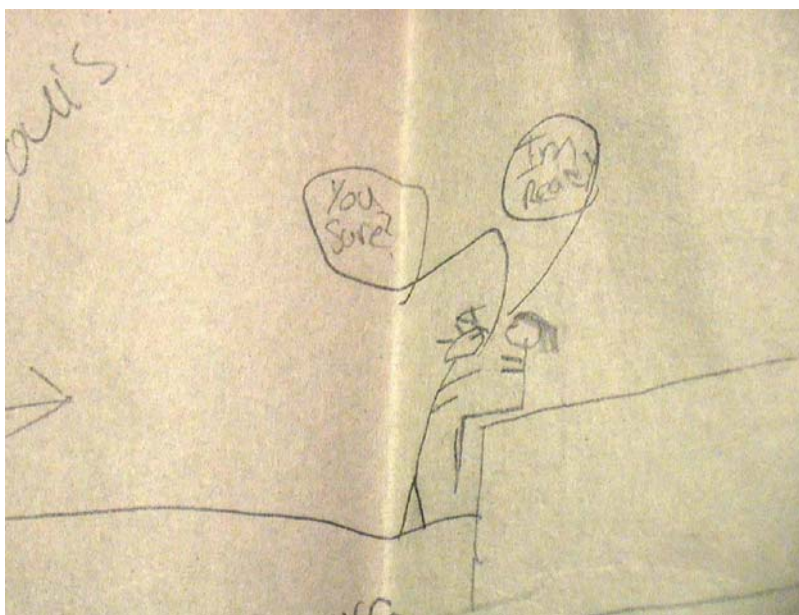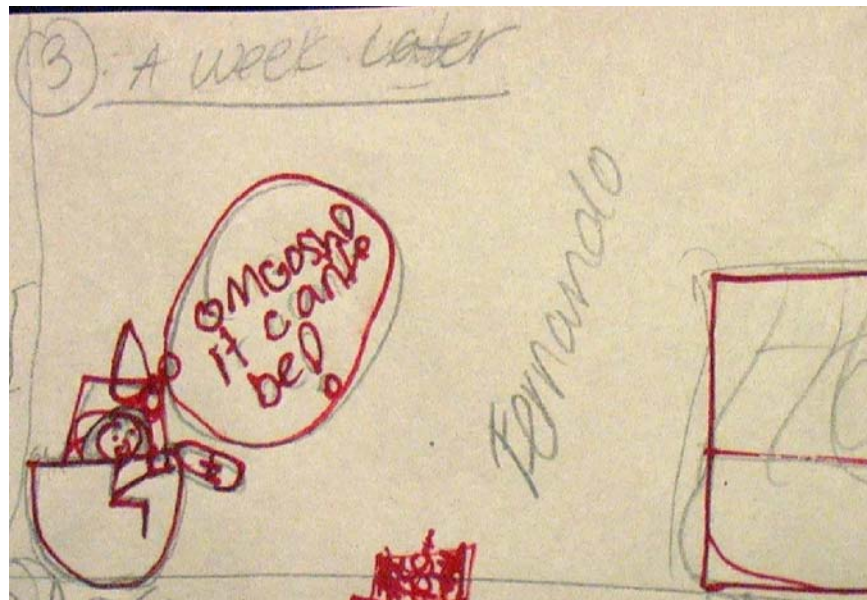
Starlight High School
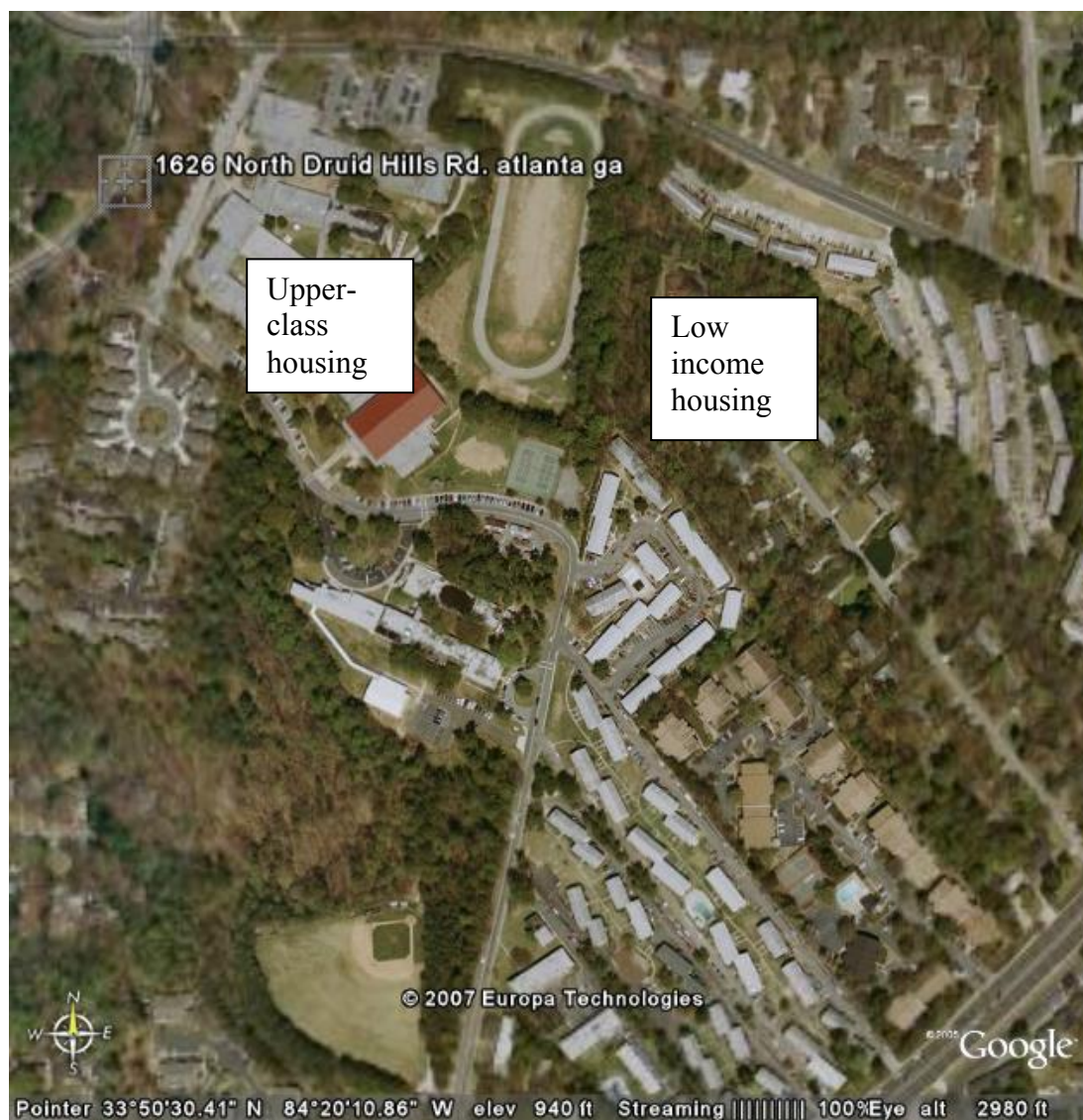
APPENDICES B: Site Room

APPENDICES C: MAP OF ROOM

Anahita

Students
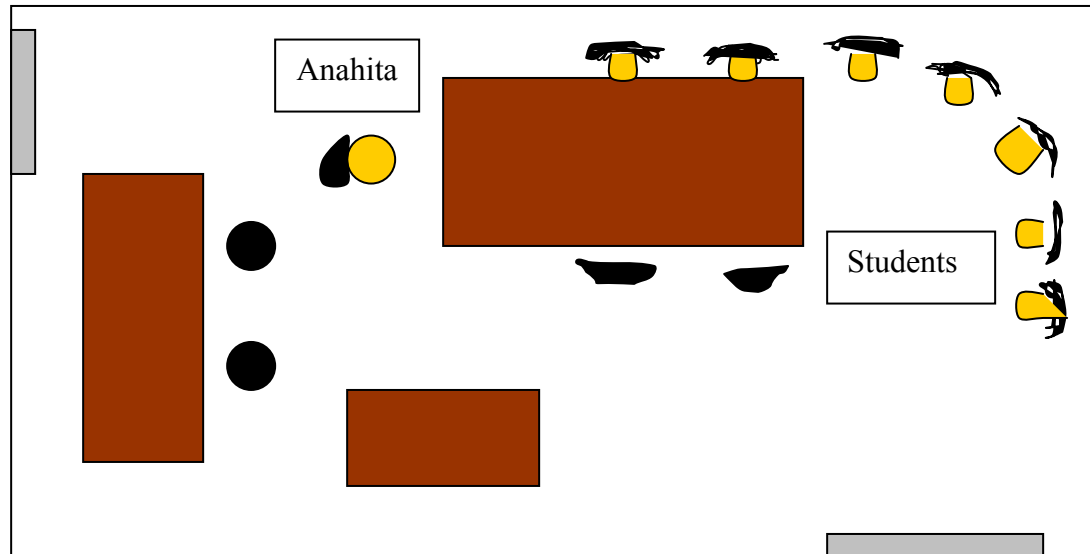
APPENDICES D. Visual Storyboard Narratives

Setting/Problematic Experience:
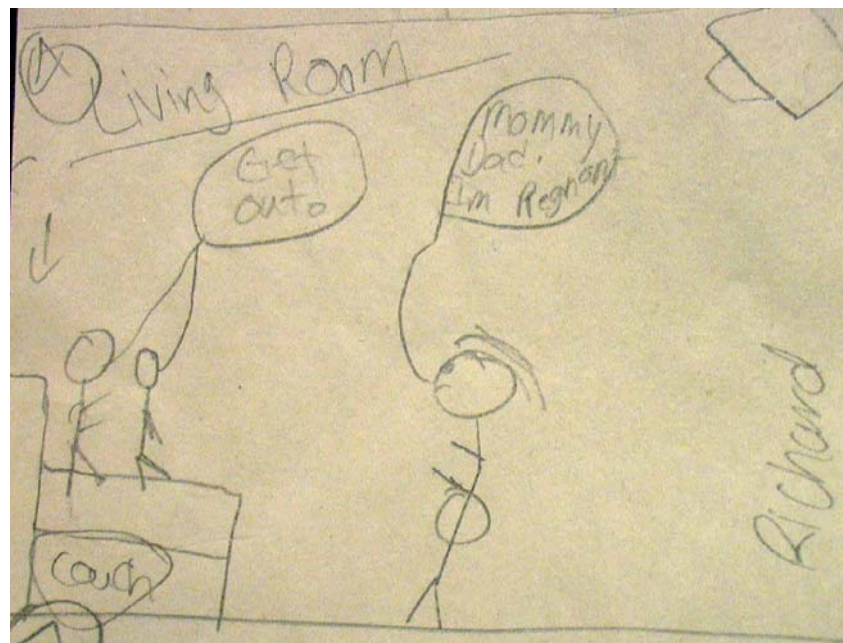**Boy and Girl meet at fraternity party**

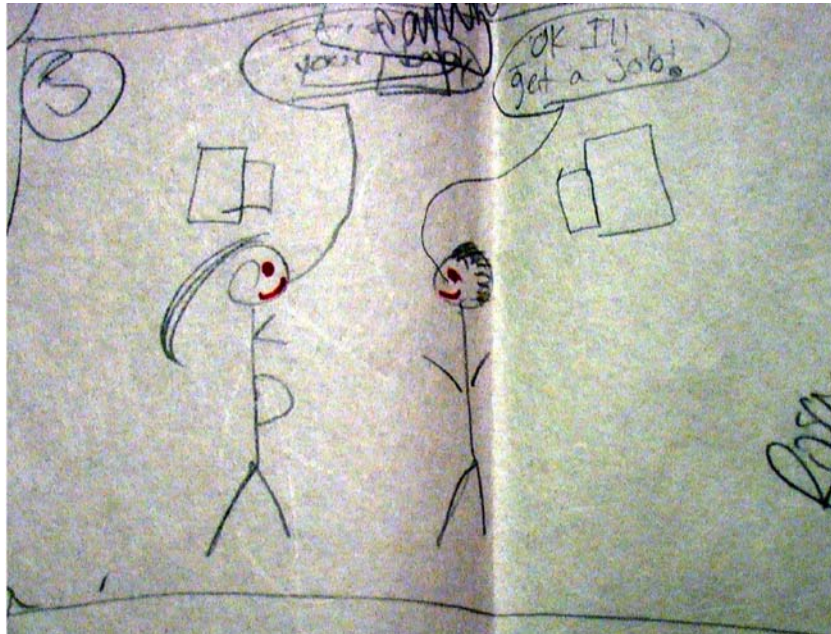**Setting/Problematic experience:**
They have sex

Setting/Problematic Experience:
One week later the girl takes a pregnancy test and finds that she is pregnant

Setting/Problematic Experience:
She tells her parents and they kick her out of the house

Response:
Boy is forced to get a job to support them

Response:
The boy leaves the house to work

Consequence:
The boy ends up on the streets with a gun selling drugs