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**Trade School or Menial Jobs: The Messages African American and Latino Boys are receiving about their Futures in an Urban Transitional School**

In the last decade there has been a major debate about boys' achievement. In particular African American and Latino boys have been shown to face many obstacles in urban public schools of America. In more recent debate about the achievement gap between white students and students of color, scholars have been focusing on the achievement gap between girls and boys of color. In recent news articles schools are in addition focusing on closing this gap between male students of color and their female peers. In the Brookside School in Ossining, NY, "the black boys are set apart, in a way, by a special mentoring program that pairs them with black teacher for one-on-one guidance outside class, extra homework help and cultural activities during the school day."<sup>1</sup> We can clearly see that schools are aware that there is a problem and that male students of color are not receiving the education they so deserve.

Statistics summarized by the U.S Department of Education found that Black and Latino students were expelled much more in comparison to their white peers. In a survey conducted in 2000, it concludes that 17% Black and 9% Hispanic<sup>2</sup> male students were expelled from schools throughout the U.S compared to only 7% white male students.<sup>3</sup> Prior research has confirmed the common perception that students who have been

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<sup>1</sup> Wu, Winnie *To Close Gaps, Schools Focus on Black Boys*, 9 April 2007, New York Times, (online version) <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/09/nyregion/09school.html?ref=education>

<sup>2</sup> Hispanic is used because of the way in which institutions use it; I prefer to use the word Latino, because I feel its more representative of this group. Hispanic and Latino are the same group of people.

suspended from school are at higher risk for other poor school outcomes, including dropping out of school (Wehlage et al. 1989).

Male students of color are seen more likely not to apply to college. When looking at the enrollment figures for African American and Hispanic males in undergraduate institutions we can see that it is less than their white peers. In 2004 35.7% African American and 41.4% Latino men were enrolled in an undergraduate institution compared to 44.1% of white men.<sup>4</sup> In 2006 there were 3,042 black male sentenced to prison inmates per 100,000 black males in the United States, compared to 1,261 Hispanic male inmates per 100,000 Hispanic males and 487 white male inmates per 100,000 white males.<sup>5</sup> We can see that more African American and Hispanic males are in prison compared to their white peers. The fact that more and more male students of color are found in prison than in college may originate from the messages these students are receiving from school and society about their futures.

Scholars have tried to explain this underachievement amongst these groups of males. Research has shown that African American and Latino boys are subject to a stereotype threat, in which they create a negative feeling of their own group which may be portrayed by schools, and the media (Steele, 1986). Other scholars have focused on the “cool pose” theory, in which African American males have to be masculine, emotionless, and fearlessness, which often leads to flamboyant and nonconformist

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<sup>3</sup> SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR), Elementary and Secondary School Survey (E&S), 2000.

<sup>4</sup> SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, [Digest of Education Statistics, 2005](#) (NCES 2006-030), table 205, data from the Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities" surveys, 1976 and 1980, and 1990 through 2004 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Fall Enrollment" survey, 1990, and Spring 2001 through Spring 2005.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ojp.gov/bjs/prisons.htm>

behaviors that frequently elicit punishment in school settings (Majors and Billson, 1992). Ogbu (1986) has found that many students of color, excluding recent immigrants create this oppositional stance against the dominant culture/schooling. These students have observed that those in the same race/class groups as them that have succeeded are not fully rewarded in the same way that white students may be rewarded. Therefore, creating a negative frame of reference towards schooling, that even if they are to succeed in school, they know they will not succeed equal to their white peers. My own research will focus on some of these theories and will be explored through participant observation and student interviews.

This topic is in need of more research to find answers that may help these boys in their futures. My research is aimed to explore the following question:

**What types of messages are African American and Latino boys receiving in school about their futures in an urban transitional school?**

My research is a qualitative study of boys in a transitional school in Hartford, CT. I hope that through my interviews and participant observation we can find answers on why many African American and Latino boys are finding it very difficult to progress in higher education.

I argue that these students are receiving messages about their futures that will lead them to work menial jobs or attend trade school rather than attend college. The message they are receiving is that attending four year colleges is an unattainable goal and that their best bet is to go into trade school or get a job. Additionally, I argue that these students are receiving an unequal education and they are well aware of it. This unequal

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education in addition is why these students are not thinking about college, they feel they are not given the education that will lead them to college.

I anticipate that this study will provide useful insights into the challenges faced by these male students of color in this transitional school, and how educators can help these students excel. There is a need of opening a dialogue into the many problems that some males of color are facing at the hands of our educators and administrators. These young men need help and guidance, and the answer to the research question can help educators fix the inequalities in urban school systems. This research can also help to explain the achievement gap, since too little research on the achievement gap has explored the views of Black and Latino boys. With these answers it is intended to show educators the difficulties these young men are facing in the school system and ways in which change can occur. They as well as their peers in urban schools deserve an equal and equitable education. This research is significant to educators, parents, and youth, and to all professionals and students in the fields of urban education, juvenile studies, social work, and sociology, as well as anyone who is concerned about the way our schools are shaping the next generation of African American and Latino boys.

### **Literature Review**

In *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*, Ferguson (2000) demonstrates how a group of eleven and twelve year old males are identified by school personnel as “bound for jail” and how the young men construct a sense of self under such circumstances. She conducts her research through interviews and as a participant/observer with the boys in classrooms as well as settings outside of the classroom. She argues that rather than simply internalizing these labels, the boys look

critically at schooling as they dispute and evaluate the meaning and motivation behind the labels that have been attached to them. Like Ferguson, I am looking at the ways in which labeling male students of color effect the decisions they make for their future. In contrast to Ferguson I ask questions that relate to these students' future. Are these labels having an impact on these students' future decisions? Ferguson (2000) looks at what it means to get into trouble for these young boys, my research differs because I am asking questions about their future aspirations and the messages they receive about their futures.

*In Hopeful girls, Troubled boys: Race and gender disparity in urban education*, Lopez (2003) focuses on the lives of immigrant youth from the Dominican Republic, West Indies and Haiti, and how more girls are succeeding at higher rates than their male peers. She illustrates how and why schools in inner cities are failing many male students of color. She shows that girls maintain optimistic outlooks on their lives while boys are ambivalent about the promises of education. My research differs because I am not comparing these young men to their female peers. I am more interested why these students are ambivalent about the promises of education and if their ambivalence has anything to do with the messages they are receiving about their futures.

*In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, Chapter 5, School Days: Learning to be a Better Criminal Bourgois (1995) focuses on the lives of street-level drug dealers in East Harlem. In this specific chapter he focuses on the early-socializing institution of mainstream society in the inner city: the public school. This leads into street culture alternative to school, due to truancy. I like Bourgois, would like to know what often leads students into these lifestyles of the street rather than school. I want to further research how the messages schools are sending leads to these decisions of their futures.

## **Methodology**

To research this topic I used qualitative data by conducting in-depth interviews, because I believe that only way I would be able to answer my research question is to ask these young men, rather than make my own assumptions. In addition, I wanted to give voice to them for once, about the school problems they encounter. Too much research does not focus on the individual but rather the system that they are in. I focused on young men in a transitional school. This transitional school was set up for students that may have been expelled or suspended multiple times from district schools. I chose these young men because I believe they are the ones that are greatly underserved in the Hartford public school system because of the way they have been labeled, by school districts. I believed that by me conducting this research I would give back to those in my community that are in dire need.

In addition, participant observation in the classrooms at the transitional high school was conducted, with extensive field notes. I spent about 15hrs for a month conducting observation in three classrooms. The classrooms consisted of an 8<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies, a high school social studies classroom in which students rotated, any day could have been 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and a computer lab in which students also rotated. The participant observation was conducted, to observe any messages that the students were receiving from teachers, staff and administrators at the school. I wanted to see exactly how the teachers talked about the students' futures with them? What types of future goals if any were mentioned by teachers to students?

I conducted my participant observation before conducting interviews because I wanted the students to become familiar with me. Fifteen students were then selected to be

interviewed; they were the ones who were more willing to talk to me in a one on one interview. All students were required to sign an informed consent form as well their parents. These students felt more comfortable with me because they found out that I was from Hartford and had attended many of the same public schools as them. I was not seen only as a Trinity College student but rather someone that lives in the neighborhood and actually has knowledge of the schools in Hartford. As well my younger brother had a reputation amongst these young men, therefore I felt that they opened up to me because of my brother and they knew that I actually was one of them.

In the interviews I focused on their perspectives of school and society and how this shapes the decisions they make for their futures. I chose to focus on the students' future aspirations; because I don't think much research has focused on their aspirations but rather their school performance. I wanted to research what goals if any these boys were setting and how schools (teachers, curriculum) help shape these decisions. The interviews lasted approximately 10-15 minutes (See APPENDIX A for list of questions). The interviews were not longer because I wanted to speak to as many students possible, and knowing that it would take longer the students would have not agreed to do it. I thought about focus groups; however it was difficult due to time conflicts in my schedule and the fact that many students might not have felt comfortable to speak in a group.

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. This was done because I wanted to hear it from them and use their words; I think their words are a lot more powerful than my own. To analyze the responses I coded answers in a way in which I can find any recurring themes in the responses of the students'. As well I compared my observations of the classroom to the responses of the students. I also examined school literature such

as posters on the walls and their previous yearbook to compare the messages being mentioned to those the boys are actually receiving in the classroom.

As well, I arranged a field trip for the students to attend Trinity; I wanted to allow them to see Trinity as a welcomed visitor. One student had mentioned to me that the only time he had step foot on the campus was when he was being chased by the cops. I arranged this field trip to open the eyes of these students. I wanted them to experience college first hand; they attended a sociology class Race, Racism and Democracy and were able to have lunch in our dining hall. I did this for them to show them that I do care about them and that I was not only present at their school for research but as a friend.

### **Context**

Hartford's school district is made up of 94.2% African American and Hispanic students. 16.9% of the students are labeled with having a special education disability. These disabilities range from learning, intellectual, emotional disturbance, speech impairment, etc. The two disabilities that I believe are relevant in this study are learning disabilities and emotional disturbance. These are the two disabilities that most of the students at Hood Academy would potentially fall under. These are the two disabilities in which the largest groups of students are labeled under, 1,895 out of 3,658 students were labeled with having a learning disability and 590 out of 3,658 were labeled with having emotional disturbance.<sup>6</sup>

I was unable to find a strategic school profile for Hood Academy<sup>7</sup> from the CT Department of Education website, however when conducting my research, all of the students were either Black or Latino. The students ranged from grades 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>, ranging

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<sup>6</sup> Special Education Strategic School Profile 2005-06, CT Department of Education, printed 1/18/2007, <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/der/ssp/sped0506/sped064.pdf>

from age 13-19yrs old. There were less than ten girls and the rest of the student body consisted of males. Many of the males had told me that they had encounters with the police and many had mentioned spending time in juvenile and/or in prison.

Additionally through informal conversations with teachers the students were considered special education (ED) and were below their grade level in reading and math. Hood Academy was located inside one of Hartford's middle schools located in the upper Albany area. Hood Academy consisted of six classrooms and one computer lab. The school was re-located as of this school year 2007-08 from its previous location on Pennsylvania Ave<sup>8</sup> in the Frog Hollow area in Hartford. When located on Pennsylvania Ave. Hood Academy had four floors of classroom space, with a built-in kitchen in the basement. The students had many more "specials" such as: a Library, Technology, Art, Music, Careers, and Physical Education. These "specials" were cut down to only Careers for high school students and physical education only for the 8<sup>th</sup> graders. They had previously a nurse, a clinical psychologist, a psychologist, 3 social workers and a self contained person (considered a social worker), a guidance counselor, literacy facilitator, a family resource guide and an intervention specialist. This previous year, they had only one social worker, a nurse they share with the middle school, and the family resource guide.<sup>9</sup>

The school's mission statement is as follows:

"The mission of Hood Academy is to develop in each student the necessary skills to succeed in district school, the larger community and society. Hood Academy provides a therapeutic approach within a safe environment with mutual respect, and family support,

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<sup>7</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>8</sup> Pseudonym

with consistent, individualized programming to meet the behavioral, academic, social and life skill needs of each student.”

### **Analysis**

#### **Aspirations for Future**

After analyzing some of my interviews, I can conclude that these boys are being sent messages that they should go to trade school or work menial jobs. When I asked them, question number six, Do you want to go to college? Students answered:

**Student 4: “Umm no, I’m thinking about trade school.”**

**Student 6: “Naw, hell no”**

**Student 7-: “No that’s more school.”**

**Student 8: “Yeah” [I asked, where do you want to go?] “I don’t know mechanic.” [I asked so trade school?] Student answered “yeah”**

We can see from the student’s responses that either they don’t want to go to college or they want to go to trade school. Through observation, I can conclude that college was hardly ever mentioned in the classroom. On one occasion, while in social studies class and student (Latino boy) mentions to the teacher (white male) that he needs to get a job. The teacher then instructs him to go out and get applications at like McDonald’s and other menial jobs and he will help him fill them out in school. Rather than mentioning to the student that he can get a good job if he furthers his education by going to college, the teacher is allowing the student to settle for menial labor.

In another occasion while in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade computer class, a Black male student mentions that he doesn’t want to go to college, (I don’t know what conversation this statement arose from, but I quickly took note of it).

**Black Male Student: “I will get side tracked, you know all the girls.”**

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<sup>9</sup> Information was retrieved from the previous year’s yearbook.

Teacher: “Who told you, you can’t go to college.”  
Black Male Student: Doesn’t respond

The teacher who is the career specialist is clearly showing some encouragement for him to attend college. However, she could have taken this opportunity to show him how to go online and search for colleges and their applications. Instead, she makes the comment and continued to try and figure out which laminating paper to order rather than taking the conversation further. The boy continued to listen to music and watch videos on You Tube.

Since teachers are not mentioning to the students anything about college, I felt as if college was not an attainable goal for some of the students. In addition, my interviews revealed that students in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade did have the optimistic view that college was attainable. These students were still hoping that they would transition out of Hood Academy and into the district high schools. However, the high school students were more pessimistic because they affirmed that Hood Academy was the end for them, many of them were in the path of graduating.

### **Inequalities of Education**

Throughout my observations and when conducting interviews with the young men I found evidence that students were well aware of the educational inequalities present in their school. When asked, do you feel that what you are learning is going to help you get into college? Why or why not? Students responded:

**Student 2: “Naw they don’t teach, its aight but the work is easy over here. Its not on my grade level, I’m ahead of everybody.”**

**Student 6: “Cause it’s different you aint getting the same type of work as other high schools are getting” [I asked yeah, different like?] “They get more education, a lot more.”**

**Student 8: “Yeah a lil bit” [I asked Why, why only a lil bit?] “Cause they don’t really teach us things that they’re suppose to teach us right now.”**

**Student 12: “Yes a lil bit” ^Why a lil bit? “Cuz umm its not really its umm I don’t think they teach, teach stuff, stuff that we don’t know.”**

The interviews reveal that they are aware that what they are learning is not preparing them for college, so why even bother to think about it if it is not attainable for them. For which can be why they are choosing trade school or to work as their choices for after high school.

Through observation I can conclude that these students were receiving an unequal education. I visited the school three times a week in three different classrooms. When sitting in any of the classes with the students the first 5 minutes would be spent explaining the lesson and the next 10 minutes finishing the lesson. Once the students were finished with the minimal work they were allowed to go on the computers.

In one occasion while in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies class the teacher explains to the students that they will be finishing the crossword puzzle they have been working on. He mentioned to me before the class began that the puzzle contains 35 words, he assigns about 7 words a day and says, “It will take them about a week to do.” After giving the students the directions he says the first word “Equatorial” and gives the definition, the other words are on a sheet of paper on an easel: material, valuable, perfectly, interior, circumference, lower, during. The teacher only gives the definition for the first word and allows them to find the other words never mentioning their meaning or significance.

After leaving this classroom that day, I write in my field notebook, “Sitting in the classroom I look into the eyes of these young boys and see my own brothers. My heart saddens to see these boys being deprived of an education that they so deserve, a 40 min class and they worked on a crossword puzzle in which they only looked for eight words and the rest of the time on the computers playing video games and/or listening to music. I question do they know what the words mean and their significance. Shouldn’t they be learning? 40 min of their lives that could have been spent learning was wasted.” Looking back at many of my observations in the classes I notice that teacher instruction was very limited, therefore student work was limited. It bothered me day in and day out to leave those classrooms knowing that these children were not receiving an education that they deserve.

I conclude that teacher expectations of the students were low; because of the assignments the students were given. Not many were thought provoking and no new knowledge was necessary to complete the assignments. In other classrooms students were given remedial work that was not intellectually stimulating, the students are aware of this, as they mentioned in my interviews. These low expectations from the teachers can be why these students are looking toward menial labor and/or trade school. They are full aware that this is not going to help them get into college.

Student 6 when asked if he wanted to attend college answers, “Naw hell no” I then I continue to ask again [So you don’t want to go to college?] “Probably, maybe, Hell no” [Why?] “Cuz it’s different you aint getting the same type of work as other high schools are getting” [yeah, different like?] “They get more education, a lot more.” This student is making the conclusion that the reason he doesn’t want to attend college

because he is not being prepared for it he says “its different you aint getting the same type of work as other high school are getting”, we can infer that this student feels that other high schools are preparing their students to attend college where in Hood Academy they are not.

### **Labeling**

The interviews show that many of the students were attending Hood Academy because of behavioral issues. I asked students, why do you think you came to Hood Academy? Students responded:

**Student 7: “Cause I was doing bad” [Like what?] “Pulling down the fire alarms, smacking my principal.”**

**Student 8: “Got expelled from my other school that I went to” [Why, you got expelled?] “Cause I hit the teacher” [Why’d you hit the teacher?] “Cause she got on my nerves”**

**Student 1: “For bringing a knife to school.”**

**Student 15: “Behavioral problems”**

**Student 14: “Because I threatened the school, I was bout to blow it up.”**

From these responses we can assume that many of these students might have been labeled with emotional disturbance disability because of the reason for their suspension and/or expulsion. During an informal conversation with a Math teacher, he mentioned that Hood Academy was not a transitional school because it was more like a “holding school”. He mentioned that when they had the resources available to them they can transition these students into district schools, however due to the lack of resources this was not actually occurring. He further stated, “Special Ed dumped 25 students to this

school, it was suppose to be 7 regular students and 7 students of special Ed.” The teacher is stating that special Ed is “dumping” students here rather than actually providing them with the social services needed to transition them into mainstream public schools.

Through observations I felt that many of the students were ones that the district schools were not able to cope with them. The principal one time mentioned to me, that I was brave to talk and sit with the students. He mentioned that most people are terrified of these students. I remember thinking to myself why should I be scared? These are young men that need some guidance and help that’s all. I felt that these students were being labeled “troubled or criminals” because of their experiences in district schools, however speaking to them I never felt they were troubled. I see them as students that are being deprived of resources that can actually make a difference in their lives.

### **Teacher perceptions**

Students mentioned that teachers are fair and that some of them are helping them to get into college. I asked the students, do you think that teachers in school are fair?

Students responded:

**Student 2: “They aight they try to help you, but this work is easy though.”**

**Student 4: “Well in this school they are fair”**

**Student 5: “A lil bit.” ^Why, why aren’t they fair? “Feel me cuz in a way they don’t let you do wuteva you want, you feel me, I like to do, you feel me I cant stay in one place, I’m jumpy, move around.**

**“All these teachers get on my nerves” ^Like what do they do? “They annoy you, you feel me. You go out to get a drink of water, they follow you, stalk like you bout to kill somebody.” [Student mentioned this statement prior to this question]**

From Student 5’s response we can see that he feels that teachers are fair only “a lil bit.” He felt constrained and not allowed to do “wuteva you want.” He also felt a type of

annoyance on how the teachers followed him. He says “they follow you, stalk like you bout to kill somebody” we can conclude that the student felt like he was labeled as a “criminal or trouble” and that teachers had to keep a close eye on him. He felt constrained in this environment as if teachers were not allowing him to be himself.

Through observations, teachers and students had really great relationships. I watched how the students spoke to the teachers and felt that the student’s felt comfortable talking to them about their problems. One student (12<sup>th</sup> grade) mentioned to the career specialist that he needed help to get his apartment back from DCF, (Department of Children and Families), she then asked him if he needed her help. She stated she would write a letter about him and help him. On another occasion, a student (12<sup>th</sup> grade) needed help figuring out how many credits he needed to graduate. The math teacher sat with him and they began to figure it out.

From these observations and many more the students felt that they can go to the teachers for help. This excerpt from an interview touches upon the teacher support [And here the teachers?] “They aight they try to help you, but this work is easy though”, another student here mentions the extra help teachers provide him with at Hood Academy “I don’t know I get more, more help. They a little more lenient with me, if I need the extra help and they cut me some slack a little bit.” I felt that these teacher-student relationships are very valuable. I didn’t get the feeling that the students looked up to the teachers as role models, but I felt that these students liked the support they received from the teachers. The teachers can take these relationships and help the students make good decisions about their futures.

## **Theories**

Ogbu's theory of the negative frame of reference can not be used to help explain the obstacles these students face; all mentioned that schooling was important to their future success. When asked, Do you like school or come because your parents make you? Students responded:

**Student 5: "I come cuz you feel me, I need the education, I need finish high school, go to college chill with it and run my own business."**

**Student 4: "Umm to be honest with you not really. What I want to say I don't wanna come to school, but I know I'm going to need it to further my education. So of course if it's going to benefit me after this, of course."**

**Student 7: "No" [so why you come?] "Cause I have to" [Why who makes you?] "My mom"**

**Student 9: "Nah, my mom wants me to get a good education, so I'll go."**

**Student 11: "Not that my parents make me, cuz I have to" ^Why do you have to? "Cuz I don't know, but, (pause) I don't know, I know I have to."**

These responses reveal that these students do not have a negative frame of reference towards schooling. These students mentioned how school is important for their future success. Student 4 responds by saying "I don't wanna come to school, but I know I'm going to need it to further my education." He is being honest in saying he doesn't want to come but does attend because he needs it to further his education. Other interviewees mentioned coming because of their mothers, Student 9 explicitly says he comes because his mother wants him to get a good education, showing us that his mother believes education is valuable for his future.

Students at Hood Academy did not feel subjected to a stereotype threat; all mentioned feeling good about being Black or Latino. I conclude that the reason they are

not subjected to a stereotype threat, because they are in the majority in their schools and in their neighborhoods. From my own personal experiences, I don't think we are subject to this stereotype threat until we are in a setting in which we are the only one or in which they are a few of us and I often felt subjected to this stereotype threat. This has happened to me; I never felt that being Puerto Rican was bad because I was always around them, until attending Trinity in which there is not many of us. I think that settings and the people around contribute to this stereotype threat, especially if the majority of people around you are those of the white dominant culture.

Some scholars believe in the “cool pose” theory, in which African American males have to be masculine, emotionless, and fearlessness, which often leads to flamboyant and nonconformist behaviors that frequently elicit punishment in school settings (Majors and Billson, 1992). I argue that these young men at Hood Academy did feel a sense of feeling to be “cool.” After listening to the interviews, I felt as if I did not ask anything about being cool or being an “offey”. The word “offey” was often used in the classroom and one student mentioned that the principal was an “offey.” After looking at my field notes, I noticed that I never had a clear definition of what this word meant to the students. I knew what the word meant, because I did attend Hartford public schools and growing up, my friends and I used it. However, I wanted to know from the boys exactly why they used the word and what it meant to them. I asked one student who had previously chatted with me a lot about life and school, so I felt he would give me the true meaning of the word “offey.” He mentioned to me that people are labeled an “offey” because they do something that may not be acceptable to people who are popular. “Like you aint cool, you do something stupid too (student).” I then asked how people become

cool. He stated, "From your reputation." I continued by asking how do you get your reputation? He states, "You get your rep [utation] from the streets, by what you do in the streets, fighting, selling drugs, being loyal to your friends." We can assume that these behaviors that lead to being "cool" are nonconformist in the school setting that often lead to punishment by the schools. He also mentioned to be that someone who attend college is no an "offey" as long as he remains loyal to his friends and does not forget about where he come from.

### **Additional Findings**

All interviewees mentioned feeling good about being Black or Latino. Every single student interviewed mentioned the words GOOD or PROUD and said it very quickly without any hesitation, when answering, how do you feel about being Black or Latino? When asked, how do you see the media depict Blacks and Latinos such as the news, TV shows movies etc, older students felt that they are negatively depicted while younger students seem confused by the question. I infer that the reason the older students felt they were depicted negatively because of the experience they have had with racism and other experiences they may have had. These students are more aware of racism that exists in institutions. Where as the younger students yet had not much experience with racism, therefore not really feeling a sense that they were being depicted negatively.

Regardless of the fact that not all students mentioned experiencing racism, those that did mentioned cases that had to do with police authority. One interviewee mentioned to me his hatred for police. I asked him what his disliked about Hood Academy, his response was:

**“The rules, the cops” [What don’t you like about the cops?] “Everybody hate the cops [emphasized this, as if it’s a universal rule]” [Why?] “Cause they, if you, they be looking at you like you did something and then 5 min later he [referring to cop at school] gonna come like you did something after that he say I’m watching you, he be doing that a lot.”- Student 7**

This student emphasized that “everybody hates the cops”, he gave me a weird look as if I didn’t. I can infer that when he said “everybody” he is referring to everybody he may have contact with such as his peers in school, or those in his neighborhood. He mentioned that they look at him as if he did something, from this I conclude that he felt as if he was looked as “trouble or a criminal”. Other students mentioned how police are racist, this student mentions being arrested with a white peer and how the police treated them differently,

**“Well the police in school, well matter of fact in Hartford. Umm one time I was arrested, I got arrested with a white kid this was when I used to live in the suburbs and I think we got charged, I think we got charged with the same criminal mischievous and trespassing. I think something like that and we both got the same charge and the office gave me more of an attitude. Went to the other kids home and told his mother that hanging out with this kid, should be hanging out with me imma bad influence and said that in front of me and the mother but when he took me home it was a different story. Your kid was doing this datddda I’ve also had bad experience with the police before so it causes me to think it’s a color issue.” -Student 4**

From observation, I felt that the students did not “like” the police officer present at the school. Many times coming into the school, he would say to me, “Oh here comes a sweet face” I would say, “the students here don’t have sweet faces”, he would laugh as if I said a joke. I was not present at the school all day, everyday and did not know the actual encounters some of the students had with the police officer; however I felt that this was a tense subject. I had always wondered why the students wouldn’t see the officer which

was a black male as a role model, but then I soon found out that many had encounters with the police so “everybody hated the cops” regardless of their skin color.

### *School Quotes*

Many of the quotes mentioned in the yearbook and around the school, were quotes that were encouraging, but did not line up with the teacher practices. On the front of the year book it states, “In order to success we must first believe we can.” This is a message that is really encouraging what CAN these students achieve if they believe, to work menial jobs or attend trade school. No quotes in the yearbook or around the school mentioned going to college. These students felt that believing they can is graduating high school, get a menial job or attend trade school. These students have the mind set that these are the only attainable goals for them. Quotes serve as great motivators, yet these words have to be repeated to these students from the teachers themselves. Much more encouragement is needed to help these students further their education.

### *Conclusions*

To conclude male students of color in this transitional school are receiving messages that trade school or menial labor are their only options for their future. From participant observation and interviews some of these students felt that college is not attainable for them. These students are not being sent messages that the college is possible; it was hardly ever mentioned to the students. Teachers have great relationships with these students and should expand on these valuable relationships to help these students go into higher education.

In addition these students are receiving an unequal education compared to their peers and they are well aware of it. The education these students are receiving are not leading

them into the path for college. Much of their time is spent on computers and not much teacher instruction is occurring. As well, the labeling of these students has a great effect on their future outcomes. They are being labeled special ED and sent to this transitional school and not being provided with “ a therapeutic approach within a safe environment with mutual respect, and family support, with consistent, individualized programming to meet the behavioral, academic, social and life skill needs of each student” as stated in their mission statement. These students are being denied many social services that would help them transition to district schools. For many of the students Hood Academy is their only hope. We should help to make this transitional school actually a transitional school and not a “holding school” for those special Ed students that district schools might label an undesirable or unable to control.

I continued to mention college to these students and arranged the field trip to Trinity for them to have first hand experience, however I hold an optimistic view. In reality no matter what I did these students are tracked for these menial labor or trade school. The education they are receiving is not preparing them for college. I hope that my research opens a dialogue into how these students are being short changed because of the lack of resources and the lack of guidance needed for them to become successful in higher education.

I asked the students what they would teach if they had the possibility these were some of their responses:

**Student 1: “I would teach more than what were doing. Like English, Science and Math.”**

**Student 2: “Me, I like math, I would try to teach, teach the kid more not what they don’t, more of the stuff they don’t know and get them over their grade level, so they can better themselves”**

**Student 5: What would I teach [surprised by the question] I'll teach World History."**

These students want to learn more, student 2 mentions he wants put students over their grade level, others mentioned more of a particular subject. These students obviously would like to have a more desirable education. Don't they deserve that?

My research did not focus on the perspectives of teachers, administrators or staff at Hood Academy. I felt that my research was limited because my interpretations of their responses could not have been their true opinions. However, I wanted to see the perspectives of the students because their views are too often ignored. I believe that these teachers are a result of an equal school system and due to the lack of resources are forced into these roles where there is not much hope. These teachers were great and if given the proper systematic support needed would probably try to help these students excel.

I hope that educators see these responses and help these youth as well as the school itself. I as well hope to continue building relationships in which these students can benefit from. Throughout my winter break I hope to arrange a speaker from the local community college to come speak to these students. I as a member of this community feel obligated to help them when no one else will. I hope educators and policy makers also benefit from this research and see how these students continue to receive an unequal education that they so deserve.

This research is in dedication to my brothers John and Christian. I now understand the struggle you both have experienced and hope others will understand and help those

“brothers” that are in need of some help. To the students at Hood Academy, I thank you all for the laughs and opening my eyes to your realities.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **School Perceptions**

1. Why do you think you came to Hood Academy?
2. What did you like about your old school? Dislike?
3. What do you like about Hood Academy? Dislike?
4. Do you like school or come because your parents make you?
5. Do you think that teachers in school are fair?

### **College**

6. Do you want to go to college? If not, what do you want to do after high school?
7. Do you feel that what you are learning is going to help you get into college? Why or why not?
8. Do you think that the teachers and administrators at your school are helping you get into college? Why or why not?

### **Self-perception**

9. How do you feel about being Black or Latino?
10. How do you see the media depict Blacks and Latinos such as the news, TV shows movies etc?
11. Have you ever experienced anything bad and felt that happened to you because of your skin color?

### **Recommendations**

12. If you had the chance to say what is taught in school, what would it be?

13. What would you change about schools in Hartford?