STIGMATIZATION AND SELF PERCEPTION IN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO HAVE TRANSFERRED FROM A TRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN CHICO, CALIFORNIA

_____

A Thesis

Presented

to the Faculty of

California State University, Chico

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

Social Science

_____

by

Alexandra S. Kokkinakis

Spring 2013

STIGMATIZATION AND SELF PERCEPTION IN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO HAVE TRANSFERRED FROM A TRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN CHICO, CALIFORNIA

A Thesis

by

Alexandra S. Kokkinakis

Spring 2013

APPROVED BY THE DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES
AND VICE PROVOST FOR RESEARCH:

_____
Eun K. Park, Ph.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

_____
Gwendolyn J. Sheldon, Ed.D.
Graduate Coordinator

_____
Janja Lalich, Ph.D., Chair

_____
Charles G. Zartman, Jr., Ph.D.

_____
Gwendolyn J. Sheldon, Ed.D.

DEDICATION

Dedicated in loving memory of my mentor and friend, Dr. Andrew J. Dick.
Thanks for everything, Homie.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents, Jane and George Kokkinakis, for . . . everything! Thank you for your unrelenting support (emotional, physical, financial, and more) and belief in the importance of my education, even when I presented you with “unique” choices in my academic pursuits. I have always worked at my studies with the thought that one’s education is the one thing that can never be taken away from them and I want to thank you for instilling that in me early on. Thank you, Dad, for so many needed pep talks when I was feeling discouraged, for helping me talk through what I needed to do, and for always making sure I was well-stocked with “brain food” during my busy semesters. Thank you, Mom, for always keeping such a positive attitude and creative outlook. It definitely rubs off and has been much needed through this process. Thank you for also making sure I still had some fun along the way- you are the best partner in crime!

I would also like to give a huge thank you to my thesis committee. Thank you Dr. Janja Lalich for stepping up to the plate when I needed it most and taking on mid-thesis the commitment of being my committee chair. You have been so helpful, so supportive, and just a joy to work with. I couldn’t have done it without you and it’s been quite a ride between this crazy thesis and all our fun with the classes! I also owe a great deal of gratitude to my other committee members. Dr. Charles Zartman, your encouragement and enthusiasm throughout this process has been truly invaluable. I am so

grateful. Dr. Gwen Sheldon, thank you for always being there to answer my panicked questions and walk me through the daunting paperwork processes of grad school. It is appreciated more than you know. And to my honorary committee member, Dr. Tony Waters, thank you so much for being available and supportive when I needed somebody through some rather rocky patches. Thank you also for assigning Goffman in your class. I likely would have written a very different thesis if you hadn't!

A very special thank you must also go to my awesome partner, Carlos Lopez, without whom I probably would have dropped out of grad school and joined the circus a long time ago. Thank you for always believing in me and making me laugh when I was stressed, ordering pizzas and making me turn off the movie when I had work to do, and dragging me to Duffy's when I needed a break. I don't know what I would have done without all your support and Simpsons quotes.

Thank you also to the Department of Sociology. While I was never officially a major, you all took me in as one of your own and this department feels more like home than anywhere else on campus.

To all my friends and band mates, thanks for keeping me sane and listening to me whine at length through this process. You are truly the best and I hope to be able to return the favor to all of you.

Now, let's all go to Duffy's!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

STIGMATIZATION AND SELF PERCEPTION IN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO HAVE TRANSFERRED FROM A TRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN CHICO, CALIFORNIA

by

Alexandra S. Kokkinakis

Master of Arts in Social Science

California State University, Chico

Spring 2013

This study explores the experiences of students who transferred from a traditional high school to an alternative school. Transferring between those two types of schools is unique in that unlike traditional high schools, alternative schools often have a stigma attached to them due to the widespread belief that students who attend such schools are deviant, troubled, or have socially frowned-upon hardships. Sociological theories, such as labeling theory (Mead), the looking-glass self (Cooley), identity development (Erikson), and stigma (Goffman), along with published research, suggest that this stigmatization, be it experienced or perceived, can result in a change in perception of self. This can, in turn, affect self-esteem, self-worth, success in school, and, further, success in life and employment.

Based on an analysis of open-ended interviews with students attending one alternative school in Chico, California, the findings suggest that, while students do experience stigmatization as a result of transitioning from a traditional school to an alternative school, few of them internalized the associated labels. Many do not identify themselves with those labels at all, while those who do tend to drop the labels once they acclimate to the school. This may be the result of their possessing positive perceptions of self, which the findings also suggest are one outcome of having transitioned to an alternative school. Comparisons of perceptions of self both before and after attending the alternative school, in combination with direct student explanations, made it evident that prior to attending the alternative school, students did not possess high degrees of self-efficacy and self-esteem (which are generators of a positive perception of self), whereas now as alternative school students they seem to have more positive self-perceptions. This may also be the result of academic success and positive experiences at the school.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Alternative schools provide an opportunity for education completion and high school graduation for those who, for various reasons, do not find success or are unable to continue in a traditional high school setting. Students who typically attend such schools include those who have been expelled or suspended, are truant, and/or have been placed on probation by the Juvenile Justice System, as well as students who are teen parents, have insufficient credit to graduate, or face economic and family hardships that hinder their ability to perform in school. Some students attend an alternative school simply because they do not find that the traditional school setting suits their educational needs. Also, gang members (former or present) and drug addicts (recovering or active) often attend these schools as required by a Juvenile Hall probation system or school district. These students are often recognized in the traditional school setting as being disruptive and problematic by teachers, administrators, and other students, which may have been the cause of their being required to attend an alternative school in their district (Lange, 1998, p. 184). As the academic performances of many of these students are poor and many are behind in their completion requirements, they are deemed “at-risk” of failing and/or dropping out of school.

Rather than viewing alternative schools as second-chance opportunities for education completion and dropout prevention, as many of them try with great effort to

be, these schools are often viewed as “dumping grounds” for problematic adolescents. In general, that view is primarily the result of public perception of students who attend alternative schools, in combination with the lower standardized test scores often reported by these schools (Beken, Williams, Combs, & Slate, 2009, p. 57). The schools are viewed as unsafe, poor-quality schools for “bad kids.” Thus, a stigma has gotten attached to these schools and those young people who attend them. Stigmatization, particularly in the developmental stages of adolescence, can negatively affect an individual’s perception of self and, in turn, one’s self-esteem and self-efficacy. This can affect the teen’s desire to complete his or her education and succeed in school, as well as in future life (McGee, 2001, p. 589).

Statement of the Problem

Given that as identity development is a key aspect of adolescence, a great concern at that stage is how one is perceived by others, particularly peers and recognized authoritative figures (Erikson, 1968, p. 128). Consequentially, the perceptions and labels given to an individual from others can be internalized as one’s primary identity. Also at this developmental stage, self-judgments about and labels given to the self are also socially influenced at this stage and play a role in identity development as well (Thio, 2007, p. 34). These judgments and ideas of possessed and perceived traits and characteristics help to construct one’s perception of self. If these judgments of the self are negative and the traits and characteristics viewed as unappealing (either by others of by oneself), ultimately, one’s perception of self can be poor. This, like stigmatization and sometimes because of it, may cause an individual to feel shame and worthlessness. One

outcome may be a detrimental effect on a student's desire to continue attending school and his or her belief in the ability to perform well. Eventually, this may cause a student to be unsuccessful and/or drop out (Kratzert & Kratzert, 1991).

A young person's experience at school is thus a powerful developmental factor, given that school is where much socialization and identity development occurs (Harter, 1999). Not only do traditional and alternative schools provide different types of social settings, but also they are viewed differently by the public, hence, attending one or the other type of school will naturally affect students differently. That being the case, a transition from one to the other, particularly from a traditional school to an alternative one, may cause a student's perception of self to change as he acclimates to the new school, its social and academic setting, and the social implications of attending an alternative school.

Purpose of the Study

This study attempted to address the following questions regarding alternative school students who transferred from a traditional school and their resultant perceptions of self:

- How do students attending alternative schools perceive themselves?
- Has the perception of self changed as a result of transferring from a traditional school to an alternative school?
- Does the perception of self change as the student acclimates to the alternative school? If so, how does it change?

This study is also an effort at expanding the current understanding of stigma and stigmatization by posing the following questions:

- Do students who transition from a traditional school to an alternative school experience stigmatization as a result?
- If stigmatization is experienced, are associated labels internalized by the student?

These questions delve into the social stigma attached to the notion of one's attending an alternative school in an attempt to understand whether these stigmas have an impact on as a students who begin and continue to attend an alternative school and, if so, the ways in which students themselves experience and cope with the stigmas.

Exploring student-experienced stigma is significant because of its relationship to a person's belief in how she is perceived by others. A poor perception of self frequently leads to low self-esteem, a lack of self-efficacy, and being unsuccessful in school (and, thus, in the future). These factors may also lead to students' deciding to drop out of school, a phenomenon that alternative schools focus on preventing (Franklin, Streeter, Kim, & Tripodi, 2007, p. 140). Students may also choose to drop out for fear of being labeled or stigmatized by the public stereotype of alternative schools as being poor in quality and designated for "bad kids." As that negative view of alternative schools is particularly prevalent among students in traditional high schools, that perception may be acutely influential for students who are transitioning from a traditional high school to an alternative one (McGee, 2001, p. 590).

While research exists regarding the relationship between a damaging perception of self and the subsequent negative implications, little is written about the role

of stigmatization and its impact on one's perception of self in students who have transferred to an alternative school from a traditional one. This study, therefore, addresses this lacuna in an effort to increase our current understanding of identity development in adolescents who find themselves in such a situation and the implications. This study also examines whether or not these implications endure in the minds of students as they continue at their alternative school. A broader understanding of stigmatization and perception of self and their implications on the success rates of these schools was gained by interviewing alternative school students at Fair View High School in Chico, California, about their experiences and perceptions of themselves, as well as how they believe others view them.

Theoretical Foundation

This study draws primarily on labeling theory, the looking glass self, identity development, and Goffman's theories on stigma. Labeling theory is used to explore identity development and behaviors of individuals that result of being negatively labeled by others, as well as the self (Mead, 1934). Identity development is one of the primary foci of adolescence and is highly dependent on the categorization and comparison of traits; hence, labels placed on the individual during that phase of life frequently influence the perception of self. These labels, whether given directly or perceived by the individual to be given by others, play a role in the experience of the "looking-glass self." This theory suggests that an individual identifies or perceives himself or herself to be what he believes others (particularly those whose opinions are valued) recognize and judge him to be (Cooley, 1983). It is common during adolescent identity development to use a

socially-reflected self-image to determine one's primary identity and, as a result of the perceived judgments of others, experience pride or shame in oneself (Harter, 1999, p. 13). These feelings of pride and/or shame in one's identity directly influence an individual's perception of self through the effects on self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Goffman's (1963) theory on stigma and stigmatization examines the repercussions on an individual of possessing or perceived to be possessing a socially undesirable trait that does not comply with the dominant cultural and normative expectations. The theory also addresses the impact and results of labeling and treating an individual accordingly, which potentially creates a conflict between a person's virtual (her identity according to others) and actual social identity (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). The inferior treatment of those who are stigmatized causes many to attempt to avoid behavior and/or characteristics associated with said stigma. For those who cannot evade stigmatization, this label of having a "spoiled identity" can be a source of embarrassment or shame and can cause a negative self-image and social hardships (among others) in the individual's life (Goffman, 1963, p. 5). For this study, Goffman's theory will be used to examine the stigma associated with alternative schools and how the repercussions felt by students affect not only their perception of self but also their desire to associate with the alternative school to which they have been assigned or requested to attend.

Based on the theories and the research questions of this study, alternative school students' perceptions of self and perceived/experienced stigmatization were explored by analyzing interview data using the following categories: (1) self efficacy, (2) self-esteem, (3) the effect of perceived judgments of others, (4) experienced treatment by

others, (5) first impression of the school, (6) opinions of school experience, and (7) internalization of associated labels.

Methodological Approach

This study was designed to interview high school students who made the transition from traditional to alternative schools. Data were collected using one-on-one interviews with students currently enrolled at the alternative school, Fair View High School in Chico, California. This school was selected for its proximity to the researcher's university. It is also the only alternative school available within the city of Chico, California. In this regard, this study is geographically limited to just one community in Northern California.

The number of students interviewed was limited as a result of their being minors and needing parental permission to participate in the study. Select students approved by the principal of Fair View High School were given informed consent forms to be signed by their parents/guardians, which were returned to the researcher. The number of students who completed this task restricted the number of students the researcher was able to interview.

As this is a qualitative study that asked open-ended questions, no numeric conclusions can be drawn from the data. Also, given that the students who were interviewed were allowed to refuse to answer any and all questions they chose, data are limited to what interviewees were willing to volunteer.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reviewed here provides insight into what self-perception is and how it is developed socially and cognitively. The development of self-perception in adolescents and the significance of the perception of others on identity development are examined here. Stigma is also addressed here, particularly as it relates to its implications for self-perception and self-esteem, as well as its position in creating identity labels. Finally, alternative schools are explored in their functions, goals, and student population, as well as the internal and external perceptions held about these schools.

Self-Perception

An individual's self-perception is developed through interaction with one's self, others, and society as a whole (Fitts et al., 1971, p. 2). It is also developed through cognitive construction (Harter, 1999, p. 8). It is difficult for an individual to always recognize his actual self, as the self that is seen through one's own perception is much more readily available. It is this self-perception that helps an individual determine who he thinks he is, including how he ought to interact in the social world (Cooley, 1983). This can be understood by exploring how self-perception is developed and how it is influenced by external, particularly, social, factors.

Constructing the Self and Self-Perception

As an individual is able to symbolize, assess, and give meaning to objects, so too can she do this to the self. Thus, just as objects can be deemed acceptable or unattractive, the self can be judged and recognized in the same way. While the self that it is experienced and assessed is known as the "phenomenal self," the collective whole of these self-images makes up one's perception of self (Fitts et al., 1971, p. 14). Three principal elements of the self allow for the formation of self-perception to form: the identity-self, the behavioral-self, and the judging-self.

The identity-self develops as a result of the individual's assigning labels and associating symbols as a means of describing oneself. This compilation of labels and symbols influences how the individual observes and judges himself (Fitts et al., 1971, p. 15). As some labels require behavior or action to precede them, the identity-self is often dependent on the behavioral-self for further development.

The behavioral-self involves one's actions, along with the reasons the individual engages in them. Fitts et al. supports this notion by stating that a person's behavior is incited by internal and external forces (1971, p. 16). Mead (1934) also contributes to this topic, indicating that an individual will behave in a manner that is expected of her or perceived to be expected of her, based on the social groups to which she belongs and her relationships with significant others. The reactions of the individual and those of others to those behaviors determines how the individual's identity-self is influenced. If the behavior is responded to in a positive manner, it will likely be continued, honed, and internalized as another label associated with the identity-self. If the behavior is responded to in a negative fashion, it will likely not be repeated.

However, some cases arise where the individual finds the behavior to be satisfying while others do not, or vice versa. These circumstances, as well as any repeated negative feedback to the behavior, can result in perceiving one's total self as undesirable and thus labeling one's self as such (Cooley, 1983; Fitts et al., 1971, p. 16). At that stage it is important to recognize the differences in characteristic evaluations. Evaluations of the self can occur in two contexts: the global and the domain-specific. Most behavioral and secondary labels related to self-evaluation are domain-specific. This is to say that the individual looks at aspects of the self as they relate to the context in which an aspect fits. Examples of this would be perceiving one's self as intelligent in school or having a particular skill. Global evaluation, on the other hand, encompasses the self as a whole. This type of evaluation is directly tied to notions of self-worth and self-esteem (Harter, 1999, p. 5). Self-esteem is directly tied to the perception of self in that it helps to maintain and/or improve the self-concept. If one is proud of his identity-self, he is less likely to risk changing it and, thus, will uphold associated labels and behaviors (Cooley, 1983; Fitts et al., 1971, p. 18).

These evaluations occur within the judging-self. This is the self that observes, compares, assesses, and sets standards for one's self based on the identity-, and behavioral-selves. Conclusions of self-approval or disapproval are drawn based on these assessments, including the attractiveness of the traits one possesses (Fitts et al., 1971, p. 17). By determining one's satisfaction with his or her identity, one's self-perception caters to self-esteem. Just as self-perception and, thus, self-esteem are influenced by one's own features and judgments of self, so too are they influenced by others (Fitts et

al., 1971, p. 19). This is done by taking in or internalizing the attitudes and judgments about an individual that are held by his or her social groups (Mead, 1934, p. 138).

The Looking-Glass Self

One aspect of how individuals come to an understanding of who and what they are is based on internalizing the perceived judgments of others. This essentially means that an individual's perception of self stems from the belief that "I am what I think you think I am." Known as Cooley's theory of the Looking-Glass Self, this process requires three steps to take place in order for an individual to examine one's self and draw conclusions. The first step involves the person imagining how he must seem to others. This includes physical appearance as well as such internal traits as intelligence, charm, and so forth. Then, the person envisions that others must be passing judgment about his appearance and he concocts what these judgments must be. Once he has developed what he believes to be others' perceptions of him, he internalizes these perceived judgments and, as a result, feels pride or shame (Cooley, 1983). These feelings go on to weigh heavily on the individual's self-esteem, as well as perceptions of self-worth (Harter, 1999, 12).

The use of socially reflected images to develop a primary self-understanding and self-perception speaks to the self's being highly social in nature as well as socially founded in its construction (Harter, 1999, p. 8). Value is placed on the opinions of others, particularly those with authority and/or importance in one's life. Given that these relationships, be they positive or negative, are significant to the individual, so too are the values and standards held by influential figures. These values and standards are often internalized and used as a basis for assessing one's self (Harter, 1999, p. 13).

Self-Perception Development and Adolescence

Identity development during adolescence focuses on making connections between self-images and how one is perceived by others (Erikson, 1968, p. 128). An adolescent will strive to negotiate those two perspectives in an effort to understand who she is (Brown, Bank, & Steinberg, 2008, p.1163). Generalizing and identifying markers (known as trait labels) to understand the self is utilized at this stage as a means of grasping notions of self-value (Harter, 1999, p. 9). As limitations of age diminish and cognitive abilities for self-reflection increase, new labels and symbols from which the individual is able to further develop his identity also become available. These labels and symbols are context-specific, as the adolescent finds herself in new circumstances with a newly developing ability to identify as a different self in different circumstances (Harter, 1999, p. 12).

Just as with the Looking-Glass Self concept, adolescents look to the perceptions others have of them in order to understand who they are. In adolescence, this occurs through peer groups. These groups consist of others who possess a similar primary image. Peer groups are founded on a basic identity image, so essentially the groups provide a "prototype," which an individual can use to compare and measure himself against as well as understand his position and identity among his peers (Brown et al., 2008, p. 1163). A recent study of peer group opinion and status suggests that those with lower status in a particular peer group (or in the present hierarchy of the peer groups in a school) were more at risk of having low self-esteem than those with high status who were to attain high self-esteem (Brown et al., 2008, p. 1163). Also, those who did not associate

with a particular peer group and the reflected images thereof had stronger self-images and self-esteem than those who did (Brown et al., 2008, p. 1168). This speaks to how influential the opinions of peer groups can be, as well as the importance of this stage of growth in developing an acceptable perception of self.

Parents and other significant figures in the adolescent's life also play a key role in a similar fashion. Perceived judgments, labels, standards, and values extracted from these persons are internalized and negotiated with as the adolescent attempts to determine who she is (Harter, 1999, p. 18; Mead, 1934). The significance of how one is perceived by other times in her peer group and valued others is heightened at this age more so than others because of the natural "preoccupation with identity development" that occurs (Erikson, 1968, p. 128).

Adolescence is a recognized time of significant exploration of identity characteristics. Research suggests that those who explore and adopt alternatives to their previously-adopted (and often parent-derived) identity are more likely to display healthy and complex personality traits, behaviors, and cognitive stages than those who make identity commitments without exploration (Archer, 1994, p. 4). However, just as the opinions of others can have a positive or negative effect on the individual, so too can the exploration of and experimentation with identity characteristics. Experimentation with a socially-perceived negative identity trait, such as criminal or drug user, can result in negative consequences. Tannenbaum (as cited in Thio, 2007) states that behavior and traits can be experimented with innocently as the individual may not be aware at a young age that what he is doing is unacceptable in the eyes of valued others or the greater society as a whole. This is called primary deviance. However, once the individual is

informed of the undesirability of the experimental behavior or trait, should he continue to pursue the identity aspect in question, he will receive the associated label, with its implications. This is known as secondary deviance (Thio, 2007). Through the processes of exploration and the development of identity through interaction between society and the individual, identity develops meaning in how it positions the individual among those he will interact with in society. This phenomenon occurs more as the adolescent gets closer to adulthood and, thus, begins to be regarded in society as a complex individual (Archer, 1994, p. 12).

Stigma

The concept of stigma is built on the notion that society sets up categories and expectations therein that people use to anticipate and attempt to understand the social identities of others. These categories and expectations comprise a perceived virtual social identity for the person in question, which may differ from his or her actual social identity (Goffman, 1963, p. 2). When signs become visible that the individual possesses different and undesirable traits that are attributed by others, the individual is devolved from a "normal" and wholly perceived individual to a "soiled," partially considered one. The attribute that caused this diminishing to occur is the stigma, or "blotch" that is deemed undesirable by others and causes conflict between the virtual identity and the actual identity (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). However, it should be noted that stigmas are value-based; in that regard, standards and social identity determine whether or not an attribute is unacceptable. This is to say that something that is stigmatized by one category of people

may be a commonly accepted attribute for another (Heatherton, Kleck, Hebl, & Hull, 2000, p. 3).

Three types of stigma exist: bodily, character, and tribal. For the purposes of this review, the focus is on stigma associated with character. Stigma associated with character can include having a criminal record, a mental disorder, undesirable habits (such as alcohol abuse), or the inability to find employment (Goffman, 1963, p. 4). If an individual possesses one of these character traits and it is not part of the accepted norm of his social category, he is often perceived not only as inadequate but, depending on the severity of the trait, as less than human (Heatherton et al., 2000, p. 4). The possessor of this trait is then "discredited" and viewed as such because he does not fit within the normative expectations of the ideal virtual social identity. It is on this ground that discrimination against the stigmatized individual occurs. Further criticisms are spawned off of the original stigma, such as being defensive, and a theory in the minds of others is developed that justifies perceiving the stigmatized individual as inferior (Goffman, 1963, p. 5).

How Stigma Influences Self-Perception

Because stigma brings about negative perceptions of the individual on the part of others, naturally it also brings about negative self-images for some stigmatized persons and often the label is internalized. As a result, self-esteem may be affected as well. The extent to which self-esteem is affected by stigma depends on the meaning of the situation. A study of college students applying to graduate school and their self-esteem levels as a result of getting accepted or rejected to the program suggests that self-esteem and, therefore, global self-perception can take a negative or positive turn depending on the

circumstance (Heatherton et al., 2000, p. 158). If individual values or assigns meaning to the context in which he finds himself labeled with a stigma, then the impact of the stigma on his self-esteem will be greater than if the context did not matter.

Stigma and Labeling

Just as others can label an individual as having a stigma, so too can individuals label themselves through the internalization and acceptance of such a label. Individuals can also assign this label to themselves based on their own view of their identity or behavior as being deviant (Mead, 1934; Thio, 2007, p. 34). This can result in part because of the perceived reactions of others who find out about the perceived flaw.

"Recognizing" and "placing" are also factors that may account for the individual to view himself as possessing an undesirable quality and thus labeling himself accordingly (Hayes, 2010, p. 276). "Recognizing" involves an individual becoming aware that the quality in question is not acceptable at the time. Just as acceptable qualities are observed and reinforced by positive reactions, events and resulting encouragement, recognizing undesirable qualities is activated by stressors, events and resulting strains that suggest the need for a change in behavior and/or attributes (Mead, 1934). Stressors can result in lowered self-worth, negative assessments of the self, and lowered perceived competence as the individual desires to change and does not find satisfaction or pride in his current state (Kiecolt, 1994, p. 51). "Placing" occurs when the individual accepts the desirable quality in that situation. This may or may not alleviate some of the negative self-perception, depending on whether or not the individual is able to attain the desired features (Kiecolt, 1994, p. 53).

Alternative Schools

Alternative schools essentially serve to meet the needs of students who do not find success in a traditional school setting or may not be able to return to their original school for disciplinary reasons or credit deficiency. Not only do these schools serve as a means of giving these students a second chance to continue or complete their education, but also they act as a form of drop-out prevention for students at risk of doing so (Albers, 2002, p. 24). Also schools attempt to satisfy the more basic needs of students, such as daily meals, counseling, and some financial relief, which can help students focus more on school instead of being concerned with meeting such needs themselves (McGee, 2001, p. 591).

Functions and Goals of Alternative Schools

As many of these students' academic, social, and personal needs are not adequately met in a traditional classroom structure, teachers and administrators in alternative education use unique and flexible methods of addressing students' needs. Classrooms and teaching styles tend to be more informal; class sizes are generally smaller; and teachers attempt to address the emotional and behavioral as well as the academic needs of students in a supportive manner (Lange, 1998, p. 183). If need be, teachers can make more individualized assignments and set at a pace designated by the student.

Achievement, then, becomes based on personal goals, completion, and performance rather than competition through grades (Beken et al., 2009, p. 51). By making the setting and style of classes more flexible, teachers are better able to provide students with the personalized help and attention they need in order to be successful.

However, recognizing the need for boundaries and consistency in children and adolescents, alternative schools also set straightforward and well-defined codes of conduct, which students are to know and practice at all times (Foxx, 2013).

Also specific programs, such as reading assistance, daycare, job training, and life skills, are offered to fit the unique needs of these students (Frediani, 2002, p. 38). Programs such as these also help students who are behind in credits to attain them and, therefore, get back on track to graduate (Albers, 2002, p. 24). Juvenile detention, truancy, and previous academic failings can, among other reasons, cause students to be deficient in the number of credits they have completed, either toward graduating or advancing to the next grade level. Some students, particularly the younger ones, are uninformed of the credit requirements to graduate, which can also cause them to be deficient (Jordan, McPartland, Legters, & Balfanz, 2000, p. 162). Summer school, independent study, and courses offered before and after regular school hours allow these programs to be adaptable in meeting the needs of students who need to make up these credits, yet, for example, who may also need to work in the afternoons (Frediani, 2002, p. 38).

Identifying Types of Students Who Attend Alternative Schools

Alternative schools typically support students from grades 9 through 12, though some include 7th and 8th grade as well. While technically many alternative schools are public and, therefore, open to anyone in the school district who wishes to attend, the majority of students who attend do not, for a variety of reasons, find success in their original schools or in the traditional school setting in general (Beken et al., 2009, p. 50). Some toil with personal, social, and/or behavioral difficulties, while others may have

struggled academically for some time. This may include students who have significant instability and/or substantial responsibilities at home, such as taking care of a sibling, being incarcerated, having uninvolved or absent parents, or working to support the family. It also includes those students who are parents themselves. A recent survey of 100 alternative school students suggests that nearly one in four has at least a part-time job (Poyrazli et al., 2008, p. 551). Another study of pregnant and/or parenting teens shows that the desire to complete 12th grade of teens is lower in those who attend traditional high school or have dropped out than it is in those attending an alternative school (Amin, Browne, Ahmed, & Sato, 2006, p. 182). This likely speaks to their circumstances and their needs not being met in the traditional school setting.

Alternative school populations may also include those who have an unacceptable record of truancy, as well as those who have been suspended or expelled from their original school. Drug addicts (recovering or those who have been caught and reprimanded for use), gang members (past and present), and those on probation from the Juvenile Justice System contribute largely to this population as well. These students are frequently recognized in traditional school settings as being disruptive, troubled, and/or problematic to the point where they are thought of as being distractive to other students (Lange, 1998, p. 184). Students with learning disabilities, those who are behind either in academic credits or material, and those who simply do not find satisfaction in the traditional classroom teaching style may also attend an alternative school (McGee, 2001, p. 588). These students, be they the teen parents or the expelled students, are essentially recognized as being “at-risk” of failing in school and dropping out. While some may elect

to attend an alternative school, some are required to go by the school district, Juvenile Justice System, and/or parents (Lange, 1998, p. 183).

Perceptions of Alternative Schools

Many students attending alternative schools find the flexible, supportive, and autonomous atmosphere to be less frustrating than that of their original school. A recent study of the effectiveness of public alternative schools on dropout prevention found that schools that focus on support and education and have smaller teacher-to-student ratios were more effective in preventing students from dropping out than the other schools surveyed (Franklin et al., 2007, p. 140). It is argued that success in a more autonomous environment such as that can also lead to an increase in self-esteem, which further helps prevent dropping out (Kratzert & Kratzert, 1991).

Traditional School Students' and the Public's Perceptions of Alternative Schools and Their Implications

Widespread negative perceptions of alternative schools tend to make students discouraged to attend or, in some cases, even go to the campus. These schools are often viewed as "dumping grounds" for disruptive, troubled, and delinquent adolescents, who in traditional school settings are viewed as bothersome and detracting to both their own educational experience as well as that of other students. In part, this is the product of governmental efforts to solve the problems of juvenile crime, school violence, and declining school enrollment through the use of alternative schools (Raywid, 1983, p. 192). As a result, assumptions are drawn that these schools are dangerous places filled with violence, drug use, and other various types of delinquency (McGee, 2001, p. 589).

That view tends to be upheld not only by members of the general public but also by students who attend traditional schools.

Images and stereotypes such as those result in hesitancy in students who attend alternative schools being hesitant to let others know where they are going to school. In “Reflections of an Alternative School Administrator,” the author recalls instances where students have felt unable to list their school on job applications for fear of not being considered for the position because of the negative reputation of the school (McGee, 2001, p. 590). This administrator also noted that, because of the commonly held negative view of alternative schools, students are regularly averse to attending school for fear of being labeled “a problem” or as having behavioral issues (McGee, 2001, p. 589).

Also, some school boards do not wish to advertise the presence of alternative schools and the programs offered there. This is due in part to the desire to hide the fact that some students in the district are unsuccessful. It is also owing to the stigma attached to alternative schools. That stigma stems from the perceived reputations of the attending students, as well as the schools themselves being perceived as poor in quality because at times they have lower standardized test scores than do traditional schools (Beken et al., 2009, p. 57). While technically test scores may be lower, typically critics do not take into account that many students attending alternative schools are academically behind in material and attendance. Focusing on the difference in scores further promotes the stigma associated with alternative schools and, thus, perpetuates negative views of the students attending them (McGee, 2001, p. 590).

Summary

A review of the available literature suggests that the development of identity and self-perception, particularly among adolescents, is largely social and partially cognitive (Harter, 1999, p. 8). As that is the case, others' judgments of an individual's behavior and identity, be they perceived or real judgments, have a significant impact on how an individual perceives herself, both in whom she is and her assessed self-worth. Further, the values and standards of valued others contribute significantly to a person's self-perception as they offer means by which an individual can measure himself. It is recognized that adolescence is also a time for identity development and exploration as the individual tries to find cohesion between how he views himself and how peers (and society) view him. Just as with the influence of the judgments of others on self-perception, this stage of exploration can result in positive or negative outcomes, as labels are often ascribed at that stage.

Stigma and the stigmatizing of an individual may not only challenge her behaviors and identity but also tends to belittle her in a manner that results in discreditization and discrimination. If internalized and accepted by the individual, this may result in a negative assessment of one's self and lowered self-worth. Stigmas can also be recognized by the individual, which may result in placing a label on oneself. This can be done through the individual's perception of the responses of others, should they find out about the perceived stigma. It is also done by recognizing the need to change in order to meet expectations and feeling pressure to do so.

Alternative schools are typically designed to provide a second chance for those who, for various reasons (be they behavioral or academic), are not successful in

traditional school settings. The needs and backgrounds of such students are diverse, which causes alternative school educators and administrators to take a flexible and accommodating approach to class structure and program offerings. Studies suggest that this style has helped these students to be more successful in completing their education and deterring them from dropping out of school. However, a common negative perception and stereotype held by many in the public, in traditional schools, and, in some cases, within the district school board is that alternative schools are dangerous “dumping grounds” for disruptive, troubled, and delinquent youths. That, in combination with the belief that these schools are poor in quality, has had repercussions on the students who attend alternative schools, as some students experience shame or unwillingness to admit where they go to school.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study explored changes in student perception of self and perceived stigmatization that resulted from having transitioned from a traditional high school to an alternative one, specifically, Fair View High School (FVHS) in Chico, California. The following questions surrounding perception of self were used: How do students attending alternative school perceive themselves? Has the perception of self changed as a result of transferring from a traditional to an alternative school? Does the perception of self change as the student acclimates to the alternative school and, if so, how does it change? The study also expands what is currently known about perceived/experienced stigma and stigmatization as it relates to students who have transferred to an alternative school by asking the following questions: Do students who transition from a traditional school to an alternative school experience stigmatization as a result? If stigmatization is experienced/perceived, are associated labels internalized by the student?

A case study technique was implemented to collect data from high school students who had transferred from a traditional school to an alternative one and are still currently attending the alternative school (Weiss, 1994). Using this qualitative method allowed for an in-depth look at the experiences and perceptions of students at the alternative school, FVHS. Approximately 5% of the FVHS student population participated in individual, semi-structured interviews that collected data related to the

above-mentioned questions. The interviews were digitally recorded, and later transcribed and coded based on relevant variables derived from the literature review, such as self-efficacy, self esteem, perceived judgments of others, experienced treatment by others, opinion of school experience, and internalization of the associated labels.

Definition of Terms

The terms used in this study correlate with the following definitions:

Alternative School

Any educational program or institution that leads toward a high school diploma or its equivalent that is geared toward students who are unable or unwilling to complete the requirements necessary to obtain those certificates in a traditional school setting. These programs or institutions include flexible and more autonomous classroom structures, as well as situations designed to meet the unique needs of students in order to best support student success in school completion. For the purposes of this study, continuation school and alternative school will be used synonymously (Foxx, 2013).

At Risk

Refers to a juvenile and/or student who is recognized as having the potential to drop out, fail, or not complete a high school education. In turn, this term then refers to a juvenile and/or student with the potential to have “poor life outcomes” (Wooden & Blazak, 2001).

Label (Labeling)

An ascribed term with social implications used to identify and categorize (typically negatively) an individual based on a certain trait or behavior (Mead, 1934).

Looking-glass Self

The perception of self that is determined by how an individual believes he is perceived and judged by others. This perceived judgment is internalized and, therefore, believed by the individual to be an accurate observation about his identity (Cooley, 1983).

Perception of Self

Who a person thinks she is in terms of identity and self-judgment, as well as how she thinks she ought to behave and how she fits in the world around her (Fitts et al., 1971, p. 3).

Self-efficacy

The belief or confidence in one's own ability to achieve goals and accomplish tasks. The measure of one's own aptitude to reach a desired outcome (Erikson, 1968).

Self-esteem

Belief in one's own value, abilities, and the quality of one's behaviors (Harter, 1999).

Self-perception Development

How one's perception of self is developed through interaction with internal and external factors. As this study focuses on adolescence, self-perception development will refer to the building and validating of connections between identity, self-image, and societal influence, which are the primary emphases during adolescence (Fitts et al., 1971, p. 2).

Stigma

A social discontentment with an aspect of one's body, character, or background, which causes an individual to be considered "less than" what is culturally expected and labeled accordingly once the trait is recognized or perceived by others (Goffman, 1963).

Stigmatization

The process by which an individual is deemed inadequate by social others as a result of possessing a trait that is considered to be culturally unacceptable. The results of this process may or may not be internalized by the individual it is directed toward (Goffman, 1963).

Traditional School

An educational institution that upholds mainstream teaching practices, classroom settings, and curriculum.

Valued Others

People in an individual's life whose opinions, beliefs, behavior, and judgments influence him and are respected by him or her (Goffman, 1963).

Population/Sample

The subject population of this study was continuation-school students in Chico, California, who transferred from a traditional high school to an alternative one. As this population consists predominantly of minors (those under 18), accessing a sample to interview had to be approached formally through the school district and administrators. Once permission was given by the school district, the principal of the only continuation

school in Chico, Fair View High School (FVHS), was approached. He approved the study and conducted a random sampling of potential subjects from the school roster.

Random sampling seemed to be the logical choice for this population as it prevented as much sample bias as possible in the sample and did not require any additional steps in the process for the principal. To do this, he turned to a random page in the student roster and pointed at a name, repeating this method until he had collected 20 student names. While 12 students was the intentioned sample size, 20 names were selected to provide a buffer for any declines/refusals to participate. Once the 20 names were selected, informed consent forms were given to those students, asking for their participation in the study. Of the 20 students asked, 13 agreed to participate, and 12 were interviewed. This sample size of 12 was targeted because it represents approximately 5% of the population at FVHS, which consists of 239 students. For a case study such as this, 5% of all FVHS students seemed to be a sufficiently large enough sample to provide an acceptable representation of the population.

Ethical Considerations

To provide potential subjects (as many of them were minors) and their parents or guardians with an understanding of the risks and requirements of participating in this study, an informed consent form was created (Appendix A). It provided a brief introduction to the study, the researcher's contact information, as well as that of the researcher's supervising professor in the event that the participant or parent/guardian had questions or comments about the student's involvement. It also included a statement reassuring the anonymity of participants' identities and an acknowledgement of the

potential for emotional stress during the process. The consent form also indicated that participation was completely voluntary, and no incentive was offered for contributing to the study. This form, along with the interview protocol, was presented to the Human Subjects in Research Committee (HSRC) at California State University, Chico, for approval prior to the start of the data-collection process.

As this study required interaction with minors, a full-board review with the HSRC was required in order to obtain the necessary permission to proceed with data collection. After a few minor modifications to the wording of both the informed consent form and interview protocol, approval to proceed with the research was given by the HRSC, pending the approval of the local school district (Appendix B). Approval from Chico Unified School District (CUSD) was also dependent on the examination of the proposed research by a full-board review from the HSRC. Thus, following the review, a meeting was scheduled with the Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services for CUSD, Dave Scott. The proposed research was presented, along with the informed consent form, interview protocol, and proof of approval from HSRC. Mr. Scott concluded that the students would be sufficiently protected through the security and ethical measures being taken, and he approved the study.

Once district-level approval (and, as a result, the final HSRC approval) was received, a meeting was scheduled with David McKay, principal of FVHS, where the data were to be collected. The proposed research was presented, as well as the ethical measures that would be taken to secure student safety and identity, and Mr. McKay permitted the data collection to take place on the campus. However, as he could not grant access to the school's full student roster for security (and logistical) purposes, he

conducted the random sampling of FVHS students, using the school roster to create a pool from which students could be asked to participate. These students were then given copies of the informed consent form, which they were to read and sign, as well as having a parent/guardian sign (if under 18), should they choose to participate. This form was then to be returned to Mr. McKay and, in turn, passed on to the researcher. Lastly, to protect student identity, alternate names were assigned to each interviewee to be used in all discussion of the data.

Data Collection

Given that a qualitative study such as this (on stigmatization and perception of self in high school students who have transferred from a traditional school to a continuation school) has not previously been conducted, an interview tool was developed for this research (Appendix C). Surveys and questionnaires from quantitative studies of continuation school students, as well as from other studies measuring stigma and self-perception, were used as a basis for developing a 20-question tool for use in semi-structured interviews. Questions from those previous studies were altered to fit the needs of the research, yet their function remained intact.

Zurkovich's (1979) study, "A Normative Survey of the Attitudes of Graduates of Wilson Continuation High School Currently Residing in the Yuba-Sutter County Area," was used to develop introductory questions (#s 1-6), pertaining to the student's age, gender, and durations at both their previous school and their current school. Inquiries were developed regarding the perceived views of others about attending a continuation school, including family, friends (both from the previous school and current), coworkers,

and new acquaintances; as well as alternative-school student stereotypes. These questions were based on Zurkovich (1979) (#s 7, 11), a study of alternative school students by Kratzert and Kratzert (1991), and Mead's labeling theory (1934) (#s 8-10, 14).

Questions relating to perceived changes in others' opinions about the student, as well as a student's willingness to tell others where they go to school (#s 12, 13), were developed based on Goffman's (1963) theory of stigmatization. To inquire further about any stigma that may be attached to one's going to an alternative school, students were asked how they viewed FVHS prior to transferring to the school (#15) (McGee, 2001).

School performance and student perception thereof have been noted in several studies to be an indication of student self-efficacy and perception of self. Questions were designed to determine if students' opinions of themselves as students (i.e., work habits, attendance, attitude) changed in transitioning from a traditional school to an alternative school (#s 16, 17), including how they have changed as a person and their opinion of those changes (#s 18, 19) (Kratzert & Kratzert, 1991; McGee, 2001). Happiness with one's self is also often directly tied to one's perception of self. The final question (#20) attempted to address that issue and was inspired by Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenback, 1989).

The conducted interviews were semi-structured and questions were asked throughout the interviews in combination with relevant follow-up questions to specific responses. Many of the follow-up questions probed for further detail or explanation of the student's experiences. Some of those included asking about the student's first day at FVHS and his or her reactions to certain events, among others.

While the interviews themselves went smoothly, scheduling times when students could leave class to participate in data collection proved somewhat difficult. Students' schedules varied drastically, as some were not on campus for the full school day. Though this eliminated only one student from participating of the 13 who returned consent forms, it caused the data-collection process to take considerably longer than anticipated. Despite this, 12 of the 13 students willing to participate were actually interviewed (92% of willing participants). This sample was 60% of the original 20 students asked to participate and approximately 5% of the greater FVHS student population (totaling 239). The interviews were recorded digitally and took an average of one half hour to complete and approximately three hours to transcribe.

Data Analysis

Once the recorded interviews were transcribed, each participant was given a pseudonym to protect his or her identity in the discussion of the findings. These transcripts were then coded, using various key words, phrases, and concepts indicated in the literature review. The coded material was then sorted by categories of self-efficacy, self-esteem, perceived judgments of others, experienced treatment by others, stereotypes of alternative school students, first impressions of the school, opinions of their school experience, and label internalization (See Tables 1 and 2). Findings associated with self-efficacy and self-esteem were then used to explore changes in perception of self. Data related to perceived judgment by others, experienced treatment by others, stereotypes of alternative school students, first impressions of the school, opinions of school experience,

Table 1

Categories and Codes for Sorting and Analyzing Perception of Self

Category	Operationalization of Codes
Self-Efficacy	Goals Belief in Own Skills Independence Enthusiasm for Future Self Worth Valuing Accomplishments Hopes for College Plans for After Graduation Confidence in Ability to Accomplish Tasks
Self-Esteem	Pride School Involvement Success in School Importance of School Self-Confidence Dignity Happy with Self Self-Respect Confidence in Choices

and label internalization were used to determine the existence and impact of stigmatization.

The coding and categorization process was performed manually. Two copies of the interview transcripts were printed: one to make notes and act as an archive, and the other to be taken apart for coding and sorting. The transcripts were read thoroughly and coded simultaneously, with notes made throughout the process. Each category was then assigned a file folder with the applicable code written on the front. The transcripts were then cut up according to the codes and sorted into the labeled category folders. Each

Table 2

Categories and Codes for Sorting and Analyzing Stigmatization

Category	Operationalization of Codes
Perceived Judgment by Others	Support from Others "_____ thinks…" Discussion of School Reputation Reactions to Finding Out Student Attends FVHS "People think…"
Experienced Treatment by Others	Opportunities (Granted or Denied) "People say…" Interactions Changes in Relationships Inquiries About Going to FVHS Apprehension Assumptions by Others Treated According to Stereotypes
Stereotypes of Alt. School Students	What Others Think About Alternative School Students What is Said about FVHS How FVHS Students Are Viewed Bad Kids School Student Feelings About Stereotypes Student Perceived Validity of Stereotypes
First Impressions of School	Belief in Stereotype Worries Fears Thoughts About FVHS Before Attending Reaction to Transition to FVHS Reaffirmed or Disproved Thoughts about FVHS on First Day Acceptance of New School
Opinion of School Experience	Stereotypes are True/Not True Support on Campus Success in School Happier at New School Getting What is Needed Second Chance Not What People Say It Is Positive/Negative Experience
Internalizing Associated Labels	Looking-Glass Self Belief That They (Self) are Now a "Bad Kid" Rejection of Associated Labels "Not True" Belief That Behavior Should Change According to Stereotypes Labels Not Valid

transcript piece was labeled with the participant's assigned name for identification them throughout the analysis and discussion. Once the chosen data were put into the relevant folders, the contents of each were then interpreted as they related to perception of self or stigmatization. The folders were then arranged into a coherent order to prepare to discuss the findings and results of the research.

Summary

One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted using a constructed interview tool to gather data from students currently attending Fair View High School. These interviews posed specifically designed questions to gather information regarding the student's perception of self, perceived judgments about him or her by others, treatment by others as well as the existence of stereotypes about alternative school students. The interviews were then transcribed, coded, and sorted to answer the following questions regarding perception of self: How do students attending an alternative perceive themselves? Has the perception of self changed as a result of transferring from a traditional school to an alternative school? Does perception of self change as the student acclimates to the alternative school? The interviews were also coded and sorted to examine the following inquiries about stigmatization: Do students who transition form a traditional school to an alternative school experience stigmatization as a result? If stigmatization is experienced, are associated labels internalized by the student?

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

For this study, 12 Fair View High School students were interviewed about their experiences with stigmatization and perceptions of self as they relate to their having transitioned from a traditional high school to an alternative school. To demonstrate themes in the data, several illustrative quotes are included from the participants to highlights the theme's validity. Perception of self will be explored first, looking at self-efficacy and self-esteem, and the specific codes and findings therein, as its major components. Stigmatization will then be discussed, exploring first the perceived judgments of others and experienced treatment by others to determine if the students do, in fact, experience stigmatization. This will then be followed by an examination of the stereotypes of alternative school students, first impressions of FVHS, opinions of school experience, and, lastly, internalization of the associated labels to determine what the negative labels associated with attending an alternative school are, and how the students responded to them.

Demographics

General information was collected from the participants including gender, age, length of time at FVHS, and their grade level when they started there. Of the 12, 8 were female (approximately 67%) and 4 were male (approximately 33%). Table 3 shows

Table 3

Distribution of Participating Student Age

Age	Number of Students
16	2
17	5
18	6
19	1

the distribution of the participants' ages, which varied between 16 and 19. The number of years each student had attended ranged from six months to more than three years (Table 4). Students were also asked their grade level when they began attending FVHS, which spanned all four grade levels of high school; yet, the majority were sophomores and juniors (Table 5).

Participating students were also asked to provide the reason they transferred to FVHS from their previous traditional high school. Responses varied significantly; however, a slight majority indicated that a deficiency in credits needed to graduate caused them to attend FVHS. Within that, students indicated that the transition was required by their previous school and/or parents, though some chose to change schools themselves, believing FVHS would be a better fit for them academically. Other reasons for attending FVHS included the need for childcare (which is provided by the school), not feeling safe at a previous high school, and family responsibilities. One student also cited getting in a

Table 4

Distribution of Years Participating Student Has Attended FVHS

Years in Attendance	Number of Students
.5 Year	2
1 Year	2
1.5 Years	2
2 Years	4
3+ Years	2

Table 5

Distribution of Grade Level at Which Participating Student Began Attending FVHS

Grade Level	Number of Students
Freshman	1
Sophomore	4
Junior	5
Senior	2

fight at the previous school as the reason for being required by the school district to transfer to FVHS.

Students in the sample also came from a variety of family and living situations. This included two being responsible for others, such as one student, Liz, a is a teen mother, and another student, Jane, is emancipated, living on her own, and raising her younger brother. Three other students indicated that they lived on their own, and one described that he was currently living in a group home but making the transition to his own apartment soon. The remaining seven students indicated that they currently live with one or both of their parents.

Perception of Self

Perception of self is comprised of several components, including identity, self-judgment, one's place in the social world, and behavioral choices. These are, in turn, developed through interaction with others, the social world, and one's self. This study sought to answer the following questions: How do students who attend alternative schools perceive themselves? Has the perception of self changed as a result of transferring from a traditional school to an alternative school? Does perception of self change as the student acclimates to the alternative school? If so, how does it change?

These students' self-perceptions were explored by applying relevant variables from the literature review in both the interview questions and the coding process. These included self-efficacy and self-esteem, particularly (but not limited to) relation to success in school and opinions of school experiences. To obtain this information, students were asked directly if they believed that they had experienced a change in how they view

themselves and also were asked to compare themselves now to how they saw themselves before the transition to FVHS, in terms of student performance, self-perception, and overall happiness with themselves (Interview Questions 16-20).

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is essentially a belief in one's own ability to execute tasks and accomplish goals. All of the students interviewed for this study demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy; however, many noted that this was not something they had experienced prior to attending FVHS. This was predominantly demonstrated in the form of newly developed goals. Regarding goals, students believed that they are attainable now, whereas, at the previous school, they were not. This was particularly the case as it related to the goal of going to college. One student, Ryan, explained:

> *Before, I really didn't have goals. I thought college was something I could just dream about. I mean, I wanted to go to college but it's something that I thought it won't happen. I didn't really have a plan after high school, I just thought I'll see what happens when I get there. But now, after Fair View and (school based clubs and organizations), I have a goal and I know I want to go to college and I know I want to succeed in life. So I feel like Fair View has changed me for the better.*

Another student, Anita, also expressed newfound confidence in her ability to attain her goal of going to college, which she did not have prior to transferring to FVHS: "*[Before] I didn't want to go to college, I didn't want to do anything. I just wanted to stay home. Now, I'm going to college. I do everything I can to like be the best 'cause like, at my house, no one went to college. And I'm going to college.*"

A change in confidence was also present in an expressed enthusiasm for life after high school. Harry explained:

> *I'm way more excited about my future now than I was before I came here [FVHS]. But thankfully a place like Fair View came into my life and it just completely turned*

> *my perspective around and now I actually have plans for the next few years like college and stuff.*

Another indication of high self-efficacy was several students' discussion of an increased sense of responsibility, both at home and at school. Beatrix noted this as one of the most distinct changes in how she currently views herself:

> *I feel more responsible now and accountable for what I do. I feel a lot more mature because a lot of the kids here have similar situations like me like they're all their family really has . . . and it's definitely changed me as a person. It's changed my perspective on life and other things.*

Jane, another student, indicated an increased sense of responsibility and independence as a result of transferring to FVHS:

> *[P]retty much from here [FVHS], they kind of taught me that I can be independent. Like I don't need anybody. [Once parents were no longer present] I got an apartment. My brother stays with me. I have a job. I'm looking for a second job. And they pretty much taught me how to go at it and I just keep getting better and better.*

Other students, such as Tom, suggested that they felt more responsible but that may be partially a result of maturing as well as his attendance at the school: "*I feel like I'm a lot more responsible than I was before. Maybe that could have been Fair View, that could have been maturing cuz it's been two years since I started coming here so you never know.*"

While the students indicated that they possessed new goals, beliefs in their abilities to achieve them, and the desire to take on more responsibility, they also expressed having found a new sense of self-esteem as a result of their transition to FVHS.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem was examined in the transcribed interviews by looking for indications of pride, happiness with one's self, confidence, and the belief that one is a

good person, both academically and overall. To determine if their self-esteem had changed as a result of transitioning from their previous high school to FVHS, participants were asked to describe themselves as a student and a person, both before and after transferring to Fair View High School. They were also asked how they feel they have changed as students and as people since coming to FVHS, as well as if they are happy with who they are now.

Upon being asked to compare themselves as students before and after transferring to FVHS, 10 of the 12 participants indicated that they noticed a significant change in grades and school involvement. One student, Homer, also suggested that he was not as active at his previous school as he currently is:

> *Since I've gotten here, I think I've accomplished a lot. Like at my old school I wasn't really active in their programs and stuff but now here I'm on the leadership team and in other group programs and it seems like I really do accomplish a lot of stuff and get involved in school events.*

Other students provided similar responses, such as, "I wasn't focused. I didn't care as much as I do now," and "I get my work done now," as well as suggestions that there has been a stark shift in behavior and outlook on school. For example, here's Beatrix:

> *When I first started here, I didn't care about school at all. I liked to fight a lot. It just didn't matter. Now I'm the opposite. Now I'm the one who's always getting the assignments done, who's, like, if there's a substitute teacher and our teacher's not there and everybody's talking, I do my work.*

Similarly, Ryan noted that while he did not notice a substantial difference in his work habits, he did notice that school participation began to take on greater importance to him once he began to acclimate to Fair View High School:

> *I wasn't doing the best in school and when I came here, I didn't do worse but it just didn't matter as much but after I've gone here a bunch, it's started to matter to me. I would describe myself as a good student . . . and I'm involved in a lot of groups on campus.*

Also, when asked about feelings of pride in their accomplishments and changes as students since transferring to FVHS, the interviewees all stated that they were proud of themselves and what they were able to do. Responses were predominantly variations of simple "Yes, I am very proud" statements.

Once asked how they felt they have changed as a person since transferring to FVHS in comparison to how they saw themselves at their previous school, several indicated an increase in confidence. However, it was not until they began acclimating to the new school that this and other perceived positive changes occurred. Tom explained: "*I'm more outgoing now too. I was really shy when I first came here. They told me, 'You don't have to be shy, we don't judge.' So I feel like I've really come out of my shell since I moved here and came to Fair View.*"

Another example of this is Jane's response: "*Me being able to talk to people is so much better. Just like knowing what to say and knowing how to go at stuff and, like, I'm just happy when I come to school.*"

Others demonstrated this degree of confidence with responses such as, "I came here with nothing and I'm pretty popular now because of everything I do." Ryan explained that the teaching staff at FVHS helped him to develop confidence: "*When I first got here I was really shy . . . [but] you definitely get comfortable. I definitely do think that was because of them [the teachers] I was comfortable enough to get out of my comfort zone and approach people and make friends.*"

Two other students also indicated that they noticed changes in their attitudes since acclimating to FVHS. Liz explained:

> *When I first started here, my attitude really wasn't all that great. You know, teenager type. My attitude changed a lot because like now all I want to do is finish school and it just changed me, made me a better person. Made me see life differently.*

Karen also described her perceived change in attitude: "*I don't get into trouble anymore. I'm not rude. I don't know why I was. I think about things more, like what I'm gonna say before I say it.*"

Though some did not view themselves as being any different as a person at their previous school, none expressed any negative changes in how they viewed themselves since acclimating to FVHS. When asked, 5 of the 12 interviewees indicated that they also felt that their self-motivation or "drive" had increased upon adjusting to FVHS.

In regards to the interviewees being happy with how they currently view themselves, all of them responded that they are happy with who they are and their identity. While 10 students simply stated that they are happy with themselves, the other two elaborated that they are happier with themselves now than they were at their previous school. Ryan explained further that his increased happiness with himself was also related to new feelings of pride: "*I'm definitely a lot happier. I'm more proud of myself and I take more pride in myself. I want to be healthy. I care about myself more. I feel like Fair View has made me the person I am today.*"

Beatrix also indicated that her happiness was related to pride in her accomplishments since attending FVHS: "*I mean there's always room for improvements*

but I'm happy with what I do because I know how hard I worked to do it. I'm proud of myself."

While only two specified that a change occurred in how happy they are with themselves since transitioning to FVHS, all of the interviewees' suggesting that they are happy with who they are is another indication of high self-esteem.

Discussion of Perception of Self

The data collected suggest that students who attend an alternative school, specifically Fair View High School, may predominately perceive themselves in a positive manner. Strong demonstrations of self-efficacy in the form of having goals and the confidence in his or her ability to attain them, along with increased sense of responsibility, both academically and at home, were visible in all of the accounts. Further, all students offered various indications of high self-esteem, such as pride, self-confidence, happiness, and the belief that they are both good students and good people.

Most of the students also indicated that this positive perception of self, and that which comprises it, is at least partially a result of having transferred from their previous traditional school to FVHS. Through comparisons of themselves before and after this transition, both as students and as overall people, many indicated that they did not possess high self-efficacy prior to attending the alternative school. It was also suggested that elements of self-esteem, such as pride, self-confidence, and perceived maturity, were not present in many of the students' perceptions of self prior to transferring to FVHS. Many of the students that experienced this change outwardly identified that this was a positive shift in self-view. All of the students expressed

happiness with themselves; however, some suggested that this sense of happiness was increased as a result of transferring to the alternative school.

One important variable to note in this positive shift in self-perception that many of the students experienced is that the change did not occur with the initial transition to FVHS. Rather, the data suggest that students had to acclimate to the school before they experienced those changes. According to their own explanations, through academic accomplishments, increased involvement with school programs, and the setting of goals, pride and confidence developed. Those attributes, in turn, created greater levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy than previously existed. This suggests that this process may be the way in which students' perceptions of self change after having transferred to an alternative school.

Stigmatization

While exploring perception of self, experienced and perceived stigmatization of these students was also examined. This study posed the following questions relating to stigmatization: Do students who transition from a traditional school to an alternative school experience stigmatization? If stigmatization is experienced, are associated labels internalized by the student? To explore these questions, it was necessary to investigate perceived judgments by others and experienced treatment by others to determine whether stigmatization was experienced. Exploration of the stereotypes about Fair View High School students, first impressions of the school, opinion of school experience, and the retention of associated labels was also needed to determine which labels are associated with the stigma and how they affected the students.

Interviewees were asked to identify perceived judgments by others (or fears thereof) about them and their school, along with experienced treatment by others that caused them to feel stigmatized because they attend an alternative school. In this regard, they were asked to look especially at interactions with their family, friends, coworkers, new acquaintances, and the Chico community as a whole (Interview Questions 7-12). Students were also asked to identify what they perceived to be the commonly held stereotypes of FVHS students and the school itself. To obtain data pertaining to the concept of internalization of labels associated with the stigma tied to attending an alternative school, students were asked (1) whether or not they agreed with this stereotype (did it fit them and other students at the school?), (2) their first impressions of the school when they were about to transfer and/or had just transferred there from their original school, and (3) their opinion of the school (Interview Questions 13-15).

Perceived Judgment by Others

When the students were asked how they believed their family (parents, siblings, and extended family) viewed their attending FVHS, all of the participants indicated that they had at least one family member whom they felt was supportive of his or her attending the school. They also suggested that these supportive family members see the changes in them from their previous school to their current school as being positive. Carrie explained: "*My mom is happy that there is a school that I am compatible with . . . she is definitely more proud of me than she was last year*."

Three students, including Homer, indicated that his entire family was supportive of his transitioning to FVHS: "*Yeah they were very supportive in making the*

change. They felt that I would fit in more here than over at [my old school] . . . they wanted me to go here before the counselors did."

Other interviewees believed that their parents were satisfied with their attending the alternative school, noting their parents' positive reactions to the opportunities the school offers students, along with their improvements in grades and behavior. Tom explained, "*Yeah, they're just happy that I'm caught up and that I'm where I'm supposed to be.*" Because of the widely held negative view of the school however, five interviewees indicated that they experienced mixed sentiments among family members about their attendance at FVHS. Liz, for example, explained that, while she believed the rest of her family viewed her transition to FVHS as a positive change, she saw her father as having reservations about her attending the school:

> *Well, my dad thinks that it's not the best school 'cause of all the types of people that go here and all the different things people say about our school. But my mom and my brothers and everything, they actually think that I've been doing better here than I would at a normal high school. Like here they help you out a lot.*

Another student, Anita, believed that the reputation of the school affected how her aunt viewed Anita's attendance at the alternative school: "*She thinks it's a bad idea coming here. She thinks it's for bad kids. She worries about what people are going to say about it.*" She also explained that her cousin believed that Anita's transitioning to the school would negatively affect her future: "*My cousin . . . was telling my mom that if I graduated from Fair View that I'm not gonna have a job. I'm not gonna be smart.*"

Marge also believed that even though her extended family was supportive, her parents viewed her attending FVHS as both negative and positive because of their beliefs about the other teens in attendance there: "*They were really pissed that I had to come*

here. They'd never liked Fair View. They like it 'cause it's a second chance but they also just don't like it because of the people. The kids."

Upon inquiring about how the participants believed their friends viewed their transition to and attendance at FVHS, responses were sufficiently mixed. Some, such as Tom, believed their friends were supportive of the transition: "*They [friends at old school] were bummed I was leaving, but they were supportive about me catching up and doing what I have to do.*"

Homer also viewed his friends' responses to his move to FVHS as being a positive change: "*They're supportive because they understand the reasons people go here and they understand that people go here for personal reasons or educational reasons and they're glad I'm here.*"

Several students indicated that they perceived their friends' judgments about attending the alternative school as neutral. They gave responses such as, "They really don't care." Three students, however, viewed some of their friends' judgments about their attending FVHS as being negative. Liz felt that several of her friends viewed her transferring to the alternative school as having a detrimental impact on her: "*It's like they don't think that I should be coming here because of all of the people that are around me and they're bad influences.*"

The interviewees were also asked how they perceive the judgments of acquaintances, coworkers, and new people (recently met). Four of the 12 students indicated that they had not felt judged in a negative or positive way when others heard about their transition to FVHS. Six participants, however, did express sentiments that new people initially questioned or judged the students in a negative manner upon hearing

where they attended school. Several did note that once he or she was able to explain away the commonly-held beliefs about the school and its students, this negative judgment seemed to be lifted. Lisa explained one of her recollections of this: "*[I get asked] . . . why are you going there? What did you do to get there? I'm like no, it's my choice because I want to go there. And they're like, oh, you didn't do nothing bad right?*"

Homer described having similar interactions with new people and coworkers:

> *Their reactions are usually surprised because they understand what Fair View is and they don't expect it because I outshine most people and they're more surprised because they think it's a low education and then I just explain to them that it's not a low education, it's for different learning types and stuff and they are just understanding about it.*

Ryan also described an instance where he believed he was judged negatively because of the widely held beliefs about alternative schools:

> *Like at a [conference] that I went to, we'd have an [event] and that's where we meet with community leaders and when some of them found out I go to Fair View, some of them asked me was I scared there or was I safe and why didn't I want to go to a regular high school.*

Beatrix also expressed having felt judged by people she just met, though she specifically felt that it was her intelligence that was questioned because of where she attends school: "*They just thought, like, what did she ever do to go there? Just kind of . . . people they just think that if you go here, it's because you're not smart or you're incapable of doing work and stuff.*"

Two students, however, believed they had been judged in a positive manner as a result of their transition to Fair View High School. Jane explained that she believed one of her clients at work saw Jane's changing schools as a positive decision: "*[L]ike at my job, one of my regulars asked me what school I go to and I said Fair View and she told*

me she wished she sent her kids there. So there's lots of people that do agree with Fair View being a great school."

Although only two students reported instances where they felt judged in a positive way for attending an alternative school, more indicated that they had actually experienced positive treatment from members of the community.

Experienced Treatment by Others

Seven of the 12 participants in this study experienced positive community support in regards to their attending Fair View High School. This support was predominantly demonstrated by local businesses and community members providing students with unique opportunities. Several students, such as Ryan, described the efforts of a local martial arts dojo:

> *If I didn't go to Fair View, I don't think that I would have started martial arts and become involved in the program . . . and that's because [the owner/instructor], he wanted to help focus on the kids who are, not in danger but who have less of a chance of succeeding and going places than the other kids that are just in regular high school. It's been positive.*

Jane also described several internship experiences that she explained have been offered only to FVHS students: "*I did the first internship with them [a local restaurant] and they like loved us so they continue to do it. Like [the dojo], a whole bunch of kids did that and they loved them so they continued to work with our school.*"

Carrie also noted that several local businesses offer preference in hiring FVHS students because of the programs the school offers to the students:

> *Some businesses know that Fair View has the youth and employment program here. [The teacher] teaches us how to type up resumes and fill out applications . . . and helps us get ready for the workforce. And when businesses know that about Fair View, they hire us quicker than they would other students.*

Two students also noted that some community members have presented unique awards to FVHS students. Beatrix explained this and its positive impact:

> *The people who give the awards out. We have two sponsors or something like that, and they are always talking highly of Fair View and it feels nice because these are two community members who, they're not paid to be here, they're actually giving us opportunities and stuff. They appreciate us.*

Despite having several instances of positive community treatment, all of the participating students described instances of having been stigmatized by various community members because the student transferred to and/or was attending an alternative school. Many of these recollections were generalized statements regarding what "people" have said or how they have treated the student. Some comments, however, related to specific relationships or interactions, which will be focused on first. For example, Anita described an instance where she was stigmatized by her former employer for being a FVHS student:

> *My boss, 'cause I was leaving to [home] for something that happened, so I told her I wasn't going to work there no more and she told me something that really hurt me. Saying Fair View kids don't get this opportunity so I don't know why you're wasting this and that hurt m.*

Carrie also recalled losing friends during the transition to FVHS because of the stigma and status attached to attending an alternative school:

> *I had a handful of friends that just literally stopped talking to me. I think a couple friends deleted me from Facebook, too, just for posting, "Hey I just started at Fair View today." Like two or three friends . . . they were like "I'm too good to hang out with a Fair View student."*

Homer also explained the treatment he experienced with local law enforcement once he transitioned to FVHS:

> *[I]f you are downtown during the Thursday Night Farmers Market, there's usually lots of kids, and officers will ask you what school do you go to. They'll treat the kids*

> *that go to Chico High and PV way differently than the kids that go to Fair View because of the stereotypes and because they think they're all on probation and stuff which is not even true.*

Several participants described experiences where they were treated poorly because of assumptions made about them as alternative school students. Lisa described an instance with an ex-boyfriend where she had been treated as if she were less intelligent because of attending FVHS, "*He just started saying, like, oh, you're slow for going to this school, you don't know what this is. And I was, like, I understand everything.*" Beatrix discussed having similar experiences: "*Some people, when they talk to you they try to dumb it down and stuff. And you're just like I'm not disabled, you can talk to me normally. Like some people try to dumb down their words . . . their approach [to FVHS students] is not normal.*"

Jane also described a situation where she was treated differently because it was assumed that she (and most students) attends FVHS for disciplinary reasons:

> *I remember when I was in foster care. I told them I went to Fair View and some of the new staff were, like, oh, why do you go there? What did you do? What did you get in trouble for? And I was like, I didn't get in trouble at all, what do you mean? And they were, like, the only reason people go there is if they're in trouble.*

Two other students reported experiencing apprehensive treatment from peers in connection with attending an alternative school. Carrie recalled two instances of this, the first involving her boyfriend: "*My boyfriend, before I went out with him, was a little apprehensive, he was, like, you go to Fair View? Is she a real BAD girl or something?*" The other experience Carrie had was with an old friend: "*[I] was, like, hey, why did you stop talking to me? Did I do something? And they're, like, well, I don't know if you're gonna change or anything because you go to that school.*"

Nearly all of the students described accounts of having been viewed or treated differently based on the common stereotypes about Fair View and its students. Four students described a "look" that is given to FVHS students. Liz said: "*Some people look at me differently because I go here. Like they're like "oh, you're at Fair View so you must be a bad person.*" Like a bad kid, you must do all this, you hang around all those people."

Beatrix described similar treatment:

> *It's always just that look they give. They're, like, oh good, but then they give you that look like how did you end up there? What did you do to go there? They think of it as a jail or something. I don't know. They just give you that look, like, what are you doing with your life?*

The participants who described this disdainful look suggested that it was the result of assumptions being made about FVHS students and the validity of the stereotypes tied to them, particularly as it relates to how a student ends up at an alternative school.

Stereotypes of the Fair View High School Student

All interviewees had a description to offer of their view of the stereotypes of FVHS students. Congruously, none of the students agreed that the stereotype held validity in relation to their school and its students, though some noted that elements of the stereotype were true about high school students in general. Beatrix summarized the stereotype of the school:

> *Gangbangers, stoners Mexican people, Black people, sluts, pregnant girls. When you tell someone you go to Fair View, they're just, like, oh, does that "ho" still go there or whatever. They're never just, like, oh, does that brilliant kid still go there? No, you never hear anything like that.*

Marge also described what she believed is the community's stereotype of a FVHS student: "*They think of trashy druggies, alcoholics.*" Homer explained further:

> *The stereotype is that, like, criminals go here, pregnant girls go here, and just people that really aren't that smart. But really, it's that smart kids go here, but they just screwed up and maybe they went to juvenile hall for a little thing and they just had to go here. It's, like, they're not stupid, they might have made a little mistake, but they're really bright.*

Other responses included such images as fighting, troublemakers, kids that performed poorly or misbehaved at other schools, those who don't listen to authority, and generally bad kids.

All the students were adamant that the stereotypes were not valid for all FVHS students, providing basic responses such as, "It's not true at all" and "It's just rumors, just talk." Several students also went on to explain how it was incorrect. For example, Carrie said, "*the entire time I've gone to this school, I've only seen one fight.*" Ryan stated:

> *I definitely do think that there are kids that fit the stereotype, but I also think that there are a lot of kids who are the exact opposite. There are a lot of kids involved in [campus organizations] and mentoring who want to help change that stereotype. At Fair View, I had heard the stigma, that it was a bad kids school. But once I came here and I saw that there were bad kids here, but there are bad kids at every school and that sort of changed me.*

Three other interviewees suggested that many elements of the FVHS student stereotype could be found at any high school. Their responses included, "That's just teenagers," "Fights happen everywhere," and "I mean, there's bits of truth, but honestly, it's nothing you don't see at other schools." These students indicated that they did not feel that FVHS possessed any more students who fit one of the negative stereotypes than do any of the traditional high schools in Chico. Interestingly, two participants suggested

that FVHS receives more media and community attention when an instance that could be viewed negatively, such as a fight, occurs at their school.

First Impressions of Fair View High School

Participants were asked to describe how they viewed FVHS prior to transitioning to it. With the exception of the three students who transferred from outside of the Chico area, all interviewees reported having worries about attending FVHS because of a belief in the stereotypes about FVHS students that they had heard. Responses included, "Uh oh, I'm going to the bad kid school" and "I was afraid to fail because of that." Liz explained her fears about transferring to FVHS:

> *At first I really didn't want to come here because just, like, the things that I'd heard and, like, I didn't know anybody so I didn't want to come here because I didn't know if it was just full of people that were, like, in juvenile hall and, like, stuff like that.*

Homer's fears about attending FVHS were more of a physical nature: "*I actually did believe in the stereotype when I first got here. I was, like, oh, god, I'm going to get shanked.*" Carrie had similar worries: "*I was scared, honestly, because everybody was telling me don't get beat up, don't piss off the wrong person, watch your mouth, you know? I was really scared. I thought, oh, my god, if I say the wrong thing, I'm going to get beat up.*"

Predominantly, without being asked, however, all of the students who expressed concerns about going to the alternative school also added that their fears and previous notions of what the school would be like quickly faded once they arrived at Fair View High School. Jane explained:

> *I felt like it was going to be ridiculous, like I was going to be in fights every day and I just felt like it was gonna be bad. But it turned out to be the opposite. My first day*

> *was great. I was really welcomed. And a lot of the kids did, too, 'cause I knew some of them, but I had like a lot of people to hang out with the first day.*

Ryan had a similar experience: "*Yeah, it was hard at first. I was scared and I was sort of hesitant, but after awhile I got to know the people and the teachers and I felt more comfortable and that this was the best choice for me.*"

The students' prior concerns were alleviated by what they described as a supportive teaching staff, welcoming classmates, and a predominantly positive experience at FVHS.

Opinions of School Experience

All of the participants indicated that they viewed their experiences at Fair View High School as being positive. Ten of the 12 students expressed that it was the supportive and inclusive nature of the school, and its staff, faculty, and students that created this positive impression and experience. Liz explained:

> *They're [the teachers] really helpful. Like, when I first walked into one of my classrooms, she [the teacher], like, came over to me and helped me start from where they're starting, get my work, how to do this. And even other kids actually. They would tell me this is how you do this and this is how you do that. It makes you feel so welcome when you first get here. That's why everybody kind of takes their first day not that bad 'cause there's a lot of people that will help you.*

Ryan also described the supportive faculty, something that he felt was perhaps lacking at his previous school:

> *Like, the teachers at Fair View are one of the things that make Fair View so great. They love and accept you, they're a shoulder for you to cry on when you need it, and they want you to succeed. It's not just a paycheck for them. They go so far out of their way just to make sure that you succeed. I feel that the teachers do care, whereas at other schools I feel like maybe the teachers don't care, it's just a job.*

Students also suggested that part of their positive school experience stemmed from some of the unique features and programs that the school offers. Liz, a teen mother,

indicated that the school's being the only in the area to offer daycare has been helpful in her ability to finish her education:

> *It's [the school] helped me a lot because this school is, like, the only school that has daycare provided so I'm able to come to school and bring my baby with me so, like, that's a big help because some people don't have people to take care of their babies for them so they can't go to school. But this school helps you a lot in so many ways.*

Karen also discussed how beneficial such classes (and their related teachers) art and career preparation have been: "*Like, if you've gone here or something, you're really going to get the help you need 'cause they help you with things. Like, the art room is amazing or the careers teacher, she helps you get anything: a job, a place to stay, like, all that stuff.*"

In describing how their opinions and beliefs about FVHS changed once they began attending the school, that type of support that was noted the most as being the source of the change in opinion. It also played a role in the students' self-acceptance as an alternative school student, as well as determining whether or not the negative labels associated with attending the school were valid.

Internalizing of the Associated Labels

To determine if students internalized the labels derived from the stigma attached to alternative school students, they were asked if they felt any of the associated stereotypes applied to them and whether they had internalized the perceived judgments and experienced treatment by others. Five participants indicated that initially, they had internalized some of those labels. Karen explained that at first she thought that if she was going to have the negative labels associated with being an alternative school student, she ought to become those things: "*I feel like the newer kids try and act like, 'oh, I'm going to*

Fair View so I'm gonna act tough and I'm gonna act like I'm a gangster or something stupid.' But, I mean, I did, too, when I first started coming here. I'm, like, well, might as well."

However, these students all went on to explain that they no longer associate with those labels. Jane explained how this affected her willingness to tell people that she attended FVHS: "*Sometimes I'm afraid to tell people I go to Fair View. Well, when I first came here, that's how I felt. But now, I'm, like, Fair View, that's my school.*"

Marge had a similar experience:

> *Yeah, sometimes [I wouldn't tell people where I went to school]. I met a lot of new people, like students, other kids, and they ask me where I go to school and I'd just tell them I really don't want to say. And as soon as I said that, they're, like, oh, you go to Fair View, don't you/ And I was like yeah, and put my head down in shame… I'm not afraid to tell them that I go to Fair View now.*

Beatrix also experienced concerns about telling people which school she had transferred to, but overcame it as a result of pride: "*Well, I'm pretty proud of going to Fair View, even though people frown upon it. I'm pretty confident when people ask me where I go. I mean, yeah, in the beginning I would hesitate to say it because I didn't know what Fair View was all about.*"

Other participants stated that they did not associate with these labels, which included responses such as, "That's not who I am" and "No, I'm a good kid who made bad decisions. That's it." Tom explained: "Just 'cause you go to a continuation school doesn't mean that you're a bad kid. It just means you need help. It doesn't mean you're a bad person. It just means bad stuff might have happened to you."

Liz said that not only did she not associate with the negative labels tied to the alternative school but also they frustrated her:

> *We teen moms come to school every day with our babies and I still feel like we get looked at bad because we have a baby at such a young age but they don't look past that. Like we come to school every day. We try to get our education. The school is helping us try to do that and we're taking advantage of it. And people just don't look past that. People just look at the bad things. They don't like looking at the good side of things.*

Summary of Stigmatization

While all of the participating students indicated that they had at least one family member who supported their attendance of Fair View High School, all of them also reported perceptions of having been negatively judged by either another family member, a friend, or members of the community. Several students reported having felt that they had been viewed negatively because of the commonly held negative views of the school and those who attend it. This included people inquiring as to why the student must attend FVHS, which was based on the assumption that no one would go there voluntarily.

All students also discussed instances where others treated them differently because they attended an alternative school. Some reported positive experiences with supportive community members; however, all participants described at least one occasion of having been treated differently in a negative way. For several, this included being approached by others with a certain degree of apprehension. It also included treatment that stemmed from the assumption that a student who attends FVHS must also have legal and/or disciplinary issues. Some also described a disdainful "look" that they would receive from others in the community that implied that the student must not be on a good track if attending an alternative school. A few reported more extreme experiences, such as losing friends because of their new status as a Fair View student and instances of being

treated as though FVHS students are substantially less intelligent than are traditional high school students.

Based on the combination of perceived negative judgments by others and experienced negative treatments by others, the data suggest that students who transition from a traditional school to an alternative school may experience stigmatization as a result. However, the fact that students experienced some positive treatments by various community members, as well as perceiving some positive judgments from others, may indicate that the stigmatization is not universally held within the Chico community.

While stigmatization may be experienced as a result of attending an alternative school, as evidenced in the data, to the contrary, no substantial evidence exists to suggest that the associated labels were internalized by the students. The provided descriptions of the stereotypes (from which the stigma is derived) are inherently negative. Several students admitted to having believed the stereotypes prior to attending FVHS, which, some expressed, had caused them to fear transferring to the alternative school. That being the case, seven students indicated having never internalized any of the labels at any point, while five students did explain that they had internalized labels associated with the stereotype. However, that retention of the labels occurred only upon the initial transition to FVHS. Students who indicated negative label retention explained that they no longer associated themselves with those labels once they acclimated to the school and/or saw the positive benefits of being an alternative school student. The positive benefits included a supportive and helpful school staff, faculty, and classmates, along with such unique programs such as daycare and career preparation.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION ON THE FINDINGS

Analysis of the collected data has allowed for several significant factors to be identified and conclusions to be drawn regarding both students' perception of self and their stigmatization as these relate to having transitioned from a traditional high school to an alternative school.

Students attending Fair View High School all demonstrated positive perceptions of self in the form of high levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem. Components of self-efficacy, such as having goals, confidence in one's ability to achieve said goals, and a high sense of responsibility, were described by nearly all of the interviewees. Similarly, all of the participating students discussed possessing various elements of self-esteem, including pride, confidence, and the belief that he or she is a good student and person. They all also stated that they were happy with who they currently are.

Fitts et al. (1971) explains that it is a variety of self-images, pieces of the self that are assessed and deemed acceptable or unacceptable, that comprise an individual's perception of self. If all or most of these self-images are approved of by the individual and viewed positively, then his or her perception of self will likely be high. The FVHS students who were interviewed indicated their approval of many of their self-images in

the form of possessing self-efficacy and self-esteem, as both require viewing various self-images as being positive in order to exist within an individual.

Kratzert and Kratzert (1991) indicated that higher self-esteem and self-efficacy can derive from the more autonomous environment present at many alternative schools, which can, in turn, help prevent students from dropping out. A correlation to this can be seen in this study's data as the majority of interviewees indicated that they did not possess many of the traits that comprise high self-efficacy and self-esteem prior to attending FVHS. This was recognized by comparing how they viewed themselves before and after the transition to the alternative school. Several students expressed directly that they believed this change was the result of having transferred to FVHS. However, the data also suggest that this positive change in perception of self did not occur immediately but, rather, after the students acclimated to their new school. For the nine participants from Chico who knew the stereotype and reputation associated with FVHS prior to transferring there, their positive perception of self also did not fully develop until internalized labels were shed and beliefs in the validity of the stereotypes were disproved.

The descriptions of the stereotypes, or widely-held negative beliefs in the community, of alternative school students that were offered by participants were nearly identical to those offered by McGee (2001) and Raywid (1983). This includes the notions that alternative school students are delinquents, drug users, violent, involved in gangs, unintelligent, and in legal trouble, among others. The stereotypes go further to envelop the school itself the image beliefs that it is a "bad kid school" that does not offer a quality education. Further correlations to McGee's (2001) work can be seen in his explanation that these stereotypes (in combination with the resultant stigma) may cause students to be

reluctant to tell others where they go to school and to have concerns about transferring to the school itself for fear of being labeled. However, the data here disagree with McGee's (2001) inference that these student-held apprehensions about telling others endure as he or she continues to attend the alternative school. Many interviewees in this study explained that while they may have initially believed the stereotype about the school, those apprehensions about FVHS disappeared once they began acclimating to the school. The data do support, however, McGee's (2001) statement that alternative school students do not perceive the stereotypes as being valid. All of the students in this study indicated that they did not see the stereotypes about FVHS students as being accurate, beyond the point that students in any high school may possess some of those negative traits.

Stereotypes consisting of undesirable traits tend to create a perceived negative virtual social identity in those individuals who are viewed by others as being associated with the stereotypes or elements thereof. In the case of the students interviewed in this study, simply attending the alternative school may cause others to associate the student in question with a negative stereotype held about students who attend alternative schools. This is to say that attending the school causes assumptions to be made by others about the character of the student. Once a perceived undesirable trait, such as attending an alternative school, is identified by others, a person's virtual identity may be different from his actual social identity. Goffman (1963) explains that the individual is now considered damaged, not normal, or "spoiled."[1] Within the context of societal categories and attributed expectations, stigmatization occurs as people treat the individual

[1] Goffman (1963) uses the term "spoiled" to describe an individual's identity as being unfit, unacceptable, or undesirable.

possessing a perceived negative trait according to the virtual identity associated with that trait. Data from this study support that concept, as all the interviewees expressed having felt judged by others and having experienced being treated differently in the community as a result of having transferred to FVHS.

Participants all expressed the belief that they had been judged by various others because they transferred to an alternative school. Though some reported that they believed certain family members and friends viewed them in a more positive light than they had previously (because of better grades and personal improvements), nearly all noted that they also believed negative judgments had been cast on them by others, including family, friends, and community members. Many interviewees indicated that they saw connections between those judgments and the stigma placed on alternative school students in the community as those judgments did not occur until they had transferred (or found out they would be transferring) to FVHS.

More than half of the students said that despite the negative perceived judgments by others in the community, they did nevertheless receive positive treatment from certain community members and local businesses as a result of having transferred to FVHS. This included special opportunities and awards that were not given to students at other high schools. Two students particularly noted that it was a boost to their self-esteem.

What was reported more frequently in this study, however, were instances of being treated differently in a negative or apprehensive manner by others in the community. Students described instances of being treated as deviants, as potential criminals, or as unintelligent, among others. Many also discussed occasions where it was

assumed that he or she must have been in some form of trouble to end up at FVHS, and they had to explain otherwise to clear themselves of a negative label. Those interactions are in keeping with Goffman's (1963) descriptions of the stigmatizing treatment by others of an individual who is perceived and, in turn, labeled, as inadequate or "spoiled." As this individual does not fit within the normative expectations of his social category (in this case, high school students), he is discredited. Discreditization may result in discrimination, as some students experienced.

In attempting to deflect the pain and shame associated with stigmatization, Goffman (1963) discusses the notions of in-group alignments and out-group alignments as means by which stigmatized individuals come to accept themselves and their social position. In-group alignments are groups created by individuals who possess the same or similar stigmas. They hold the belief that they belong with those groups and that attempts to belong among others, or "normals," is unwise. These groups, and the individuals in them, outwardly present with pride the traits that cause them to be stigmatized and do not attempt to cover them. They do not deny that these traits do not fit in a "normal" social identity, but rather embrace them and question their disapproval by others (Goffman, 1963, p. 113). Similarly, the data of this study suggest that FVHS students do not attempt to deny being an alternative school student (particularly once they have acclimated to the school) and instead become proud of their attendance there. Yet, the data do not support Goffman's notion that these stigmatized students (who have found acceptance among those like them, i.e., fellow FVHS students) do not desire or attempt to seek belonging among others outside of their group. Rather, the data indicate that students deny the validity of the justification behind the stigma and attempt to remedy the misinformation

held by outside others. This is done in the form of explaining to others that the school and its students are not what many believe them to be and disproving the widely-held negative stereotypes about alternative school students. While students expressed questioning their being disapproved by others, as Goffman (1963) discusses, it was not a question of why others disapproved of them, but rather the injustice of having the stigma attached to them in the first place.

Neither do the data suggest that the way in which these students deflect the internal and external ramifications of their stigma adheres to all of Goffman's concepts of out-group alignments. Goffman describes out-group alignments as being circumstances in which a stigmatized individual does not conceal his "undesirable" trait but, at the same time, attempts to be as "normal" as possible regardless of it (1963, p. 114). According to Goffman (1963), the stigmatized individual attempts to be normal in all possible areas of life, viewing himself as a full member of society, while simultaneously not attempting to deny his differentness. Consequentially, he must not attempt to include himself in milieus in which his stigma does not socially or physically permit him to be included; nor should he pity himself or make others uncomfortable because of it (Goffman, 1963, p. 115).

The findings of this study concur that these stigmatized students do not deny the trait that causes them to be stigmatized (their attendance at an alternative school); yet, in contrast to Goffman's view, based on the students' newly-acquired high levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem, they appear to already view themselves as full members of society. Thus, the data here do not support the notion that these students accept that they are different from others and, thereby, limit their behavior, community involvement, or goals accordingly. The interviewed alternative-school students noted that they do

acknowledge that they are viewed by many as being different; however, they reject the idea that their so-called differentness limits them in their ability to perform and succeed in the same manner as others do in society and life. Goffman (1963) notes this as being one of the common dilemmas of a stigmatized individual. Further, the students do not limit what they do or become involved with as a result of the stigma that is attached to them. Rather, they participate in many aspects of social life, such as seeking out employment and relationships with others; and when such involvement is questioned because of their stigma, they denounce the beliefs and ideas that put that stigma on them in the first place.

There is no question that Goffman's (1963) brilliant and groundbreaking work familiarized the world with the concept of stigma and all of its implications. Nevertheless, what the findings of this study suggest is that social and cultural developments since 1963 (at least in the United States) in the form of liberation movements, multiculturalism, and feminism, among others, have generated new pathways for stigmatized populations to explore in coping with their stigmatization, as well as new more liberalized attitudes among much of the general populace. This more open social atmosphere is perhaps what allows the FVHS students to embrace their new identity as an alternative-school student, while simultaneously not allowing it to limit them.

Goffman (1963) and Heatherton et al. (2000) explain that, just as stigma allows others to develop negative perceptions of an individual, it can also create negative self-images for the person on whom the stigma is pinned. This can cause associated labels to be internalized into the individual's perception of self. The collected data

support this theory to an extent, as five participants indicated that upon the initial transition to the alternative school, they had internalized at least some of the labels put upon them by others. This also supports Cooley's (1983) theory of the looking-glass self, which suggests that individuals understand themselves through the perceived judgments of others about them. The data further validate the socially dependent nature and construction of the self, as discussed by Harter (1999) as well. One student, Karen, described her belief that if she was going to be labeled as a "bad kid," she might as well begin acting like one. This is similar to Tannenbaum's (as cited in Thio, 2007) discussion of identity experimentation, in which an identity is innocently explored by the individual's taking on a particular identity (such as that of a gangster or criminal) as their own in order to gauge self-view and the reactions of others. In this case, however, the potential consequence that Tannenbaum discusses of obtaining the negative label associated with that particular identity is not a threat as it is already possessed.

While some interviewees stated that they did not internalize any of the labels tied to the stigma and stereotypes of alternative school students, those who indicated that they no longer associated with them gave up the label once they acclimated to the school. Many participants indicated that their rejection of the negative labels associated with attending an alternative school was due to their disagreement that alternative school students (and the school itself) possessed the negative traits from which these labels stemmed. This supports Mead's (1934) theory of labeling, as he argues that individuals assign labels on themselves based on whether or not their own view of their behavior, traits, or identity is negative. As the students indicated that they did not view their attendance at FVHS as being a flaw, they rejected labels that would indicate otherwise.

Mead (1934) describes encounters such as the reported perceived judgment and experienced treatment by others as “stressors,” or indicators intended to bring the individual’s attention to her possession of an undesirable quality. Mead explains that these stressors often lead to lower levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem, as they cause the individual to experience dissatisfaction with her identity. The data here suggest, however, that while such “stressors” were experienced, levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy in these students were predominantly higher than they were prior to transitioning to FVHS. This may be due to positive self-perception in combination with the rejection of the validity of the stigma and stereotype on which these “stressors” are founded.

The data also suggest that student disagreement with the stereotypes and stigma attached to attending an alternative school may also derive from their having positive experiences at the school. This was noted in the form of newfound individual success while in the school, as well as support from faculty, staff, and classmates that was not present at their previous school. Students also suggested that the unique opportunities offered at FVHS, such as daycare and career preparedness, and the teachers associated with them, were large components of their positive school experience. Another indication of this was their quickness to derail rumors and misunderstandings about FVHS students and the school. This also suggests that the students have pride in their school.

Limitations of Study

One of the largest limitations for this study was the geographic feasibility of conducting research at more than one alternative school. The nearest alternative schools to the researcher’s university, other than Fair View High School, would have required

substantial travel to reach them, which proved unrealistic in combination with the time constraints of the researcher's schedule. As a result, only one school is examined, precluding the option of data comparison. The study would have been enhanced by having student input from multiple schools in multiple communities so that data from each could be compared in order to determine greater commonalities.

Another limitation of the study was the small sample size. Twelve students were interviewed out of the 239 currently enrolled at FVHS (approximately 5%). This was partially the result of limited student interest in participating, as well as the need for minors to gain parental permission to take part in an interview. It was also the result of the limited window of opportunity granted the researcher between collecting all the necessary permissions to conduct the data collection and the research completion deadline. The study would have been enhanced by a greater window of time to conduct interviews, as well as, perhaps, an incentive to offer students to encourage more participation.

The third limitation is a potential bias that may have occurred as a result of the interviewees self-selecting to participate. Students who volunteered to participate in this study may have done so because they have had positive experiences at the school, were more able to talk about the associated stigmatization because they successfully overcame it, and/or possess the confidence to discuss their thoughts and experiences with a stranger. On the other hand, students who did not volunteer may have done so because they did not have positive experiences at the school, have been affected by the associated stigmatization, and/or the subject matter is more sensitive in nature for them. Though this

can be neither proven nor disproved, this factor may have potentially caused the data to be skewed.

Implications for Further Research

Although the fieldwork for this study went surprisingly smoothly, one suggestion for future studies similar to this where students are removed from class to participate in interviews would be to work with an administrator at the school prior to starting the data collection to set up an interview schedule. Advanced knowledge of certain dates and times, such as when the school has assemblies, the daily bell schedule, and school holidays, would allow for more efficient data collection.

Another suggestion to encourage participation would be to offer an incentive to students, be it tangible or academic (working with the school to determine what the incentives might be). While the students who did participate in this study did so out of personal interest, future sample sizes may be larger if the students also saw a benefit in participating.

This study collected and analyzed data from a single student population in one California community. This set of qualitative data and its findings could potentially be used as a source of comparison for a future, more expansive study of stigmatization and perception of self in alternative school students in other communities. It could also be used as starting point for further research on the impact of stigmatization on alternative school students, such as how the stigma affects students once they graduate and begin seeking employment and/or further education. More specifically, a follow-up study could be conducted in which the participating students are contacted and interviewed one year

after graduating from FVHS to examine attitudes, accomplishments, and struggles associated with graduating from an alternative school.

Use of this study as a foundation for further investigation of the origins of the widespread beliefs held by the community that lend to the stigmatization of alternative schools and their students may be possible as well, since that question arose as a result of the findings. This study could also serve as a base from which other alternative-school student-described stereotypes in other communities could be compared. While the collected data for this study indicated that FVHS students have a universal understanding of what the local community commonly believes about them, this poses the further question of whether or not those stereotypes of alternative schools are the same in other communities and could be the focus of a future study. In keeping with this concept, a future study could also be conducted that focuses on the impact of stereotypes on adolescents in general.

And finally, this study could be used as a source for developing further data-collection tools on the subjects of stigmatization and perception of self, particularly given that a qualitative tool to measure stigmatization in adolescents was not found prior to or during this research. As the study explores the reactions and changes associated with transition, it could be a beneficial source in a further study of the implications of transition on adolescents: be it in school, home life, or social status.

Conclusions

The findings here suggest that despite the commonly held negative stereotypes attached to alternative school students, students at Fair View High School in Chico,

California, perceive themselves in a positive manner. This conclusion is drawn based on students' possessing high levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem. By examining the students' views of themselves as students and people before transitioning to FVHS and their views of themselves afterwards, it may be concluded that for many students, a positive perception of self did not develop until they began attending the alternative school. This, in combination with direct student explanation, suggests that their perception of self had changed as a result of having transferred from their previous traditional school to FVHS. As the newfound self-efficacy and self-esteem indicate, this was a positive change for those who experienced it.

Based on student accounts of the perceived judgment by others and their experienced treatment by others, along with student explanation of the nature of many of those interactions as being connected to their attending an alternative school, it appears that students who have transitioned from a traditional high school to an alternative school do experience stigmatization as a result. However, the noted support from family members and friends, as well as various positive opportunities with local businesses and community members, suggests that the common view and associated stigma pertaining to alternative school students may be changing.

While many students attending Fair View High School may experience stigmatization, the associated labels only appear to be internalized by some students briefly, if at all. This may be due in part to the students' general disagreement with the validity of the stereotypes and the stigma associated with them, as well as the impact on the students of their positive experiences at the school. For those who did acknowledge internalizing any negative labels upon transferring to FVHS, that internalization lasted

only until the student acclimated to the school, began having positive experiences there, and came to the realization that the labels were based on false assumptions.

From this study, it can be argued that even though students experience stigmatization and are affected by it as a result of transferring from a traditional high school to an alternative school, the positive changes they are able to make in themselves, along with the positive experiences, support, and opportunities they expressed having at Fair View High School, outweigh the negative implications of the stigmatization.

Recommendations

Based on the positive encounters between students, community members, and local businesses discussed in this study, it would seem that continuing, and increasing, community interaction in which Fair View High School students are able to demonstrate their skills and qualities may serve to disrupt and positively alter the commonly-held negative stereotypes about alternative school students. Increasing interactions such as those may also be beneficial as they appear to further perpetuate high levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem in students.

It was observed in the data that much of the experienced stigmatization and the negative judgments by others that were perceived by students, particularly relating to upholding the stereotypes of FVHS students, stems from other high school students in the local district. That being the case, this researcher recommends that efforts be made on the part of the faculty at other high schools in the area, as well as by the district itself, to correct and remedy the negative perception traditional high schools students appear to have of FVHS and its students. While rumors and stereotypes are difficult phenomena to

contain, perhaps faculty simply correcting students when these concepts come up in conversation may be effective. Further, school-based interaction between Fair View High School students and students from the other high schools in the district, such as organized sports and combined community projects, may also help to "normalize" FVHS students in the eyes of students from the other schools, as well as create friendships.

Based on the findings of this study and the evidence that suggests that the level of support present at the school is highly beneficial for students, the faculty and staff at Fair View High School should continue to focus on maintaining the supportive and welcoming atmosphere that they have created. Students indicated that the ability to approach their teachers about personal problems, such as home-life and relationships, was highly valued; thus, faculty should continue to make themselves available to students. Faculty may even wish to further emphasize their willingness to assist students in the form of regular verbal reassurance. Students indicated that the one-on-one time with teachers was considerably more helpful than any help they had previously received, which implies that continuing to provide those opportunities to students would be beneficial. Although the structure of such one-on-one assistance is unknown to the researcher, I venture to suggest that teachers structure a regular (weekly or biweekly) meeting with each student for a few minutes to allow students to ask any questions they may have or may be hesitant to ask in front of classmates. Not only may such regular meetings be helpful, but also it may encourage students to further seek out one-on-one assistance.

Given that the opportunities offered at FVHS that are not offered at other schools in the area, such as daycare and assistance in preparation for college or

employment, are also highly valued by students, perhaps advertising those opportunities to the community, as well as other high school students, would be beneficial in that it would create greater visibility of the unique features of the school. It may also create a degree of comfort or interest in students who are about to transfer to FVHS or who are considering doing so.

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

Albers, L. (2002). How educational options can stretch budgets. *Leadership, 31*(5), 22-24.

Amin, R., Browne, D., Ahmed, J., & Sato, T. (2006). A study of an alternative school for pregnant and/or parenting teens: Quantitative and qualitative evidence. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal, 23*(2), 172-195.

Archer, S. (1994). *Interventions for adolescent identity development.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Beken, J., Williams, J., Combs, J. P., & Slate, J. R. (2009). At-risk students at traditional and academic alternative school settings: Differences in math and English performance indicators. *Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy*, *3*(1), 49-61.

Brown, B. B., Bank, H., & Steinberg, L. (2008). Smoke in the looking glass: Effects of discordance between self- and peer-rated crowd affiliation on adolescent anxiety, depression and self-feelings. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence, 37*(10), 1163-1177.

Cooley, C. H. (1983). *Human nature and social order.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity, youth and crisis*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

Fitts, W., Adams, J. L., Radford, G., Richard, W. C., Thomas, B. K., Thomas, M. M., & Thompson, W. (1971). *The self-concept and self-actualization. Studies on the Self Concept* (Monograph number 3). Nashville, TN: Counselor Recordings and Tests.

Foxx, S. (2013). *Indiana Department of Education individualized learning.* Retrieved from http://www.doe.in.gov/alted/altedlinkpg.html

Franklin, C., Streeter, C. L., Kim, J. S., & Tripodi, S. J. (2007). The effectiveness of a solution-focused, public alternative school for dropout prevention and retrieval. *Children & Schools, 29*(3), 133-144.

Frediana, T. M. (2002). Meeting students' individual needs. *Leadership, 31*, 24–25.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Harter, S. (1999). *The construction of the self: A developmental perspective*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Hayes, T. A. (2010). Labeling and the adoption of a deviant status. *Deviant Behavior, 31*(3), 274-302.

Heatherton, T., Kleck, R., Hebl, M., & Hull, J. (2000). *The social psychology of stigma*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Jordan, W. J., McPartland, J. M., Legters, N., & Balfanz, R. (2000). Creating a comprehensive school reform model: The talent development high school with career academies. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At-Risk, 5*(1&2), 159–181.

Kiecolt, K. (1994). Stress and the decision to change oneself: A theoretical model. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 57*(1), 49-63.

Kratzert, W. F., & Kratzert, M. Y. (1991). Characteristics of continuation high school students. *Adolescence, 26*(101), 13.

Lange, C. M. (1998). Characteristics of alternative schools and programs serving at-risk students. *High School Journal, 81,* 183–198.

McGee, J. (2001). Reflections of an alternative school administrator. *Phi Delta Kappan, 82,* 558–591.

Mead, G. (1934). *Mind, self and society from the standpoint of a social behaviorist*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Poyrazli, S., Ferrer-Wreder, L., Meister, D. G., Forthun, L., Coatsworth, J., & Grahame, K. (2008). Academic achievement, employment, age and gender and students' experience of alternative school. *Adolescence, 43*(171), 547-556.

Raywid, M. (1983). Alternative schools as a model for public education. *Theory Into Practice*, 22, 190–197.

Rosenberg, M., Schooler, C., Schoenback, C. (1989). Self-esteem and adolescent problems: Modeling reciprocal effects, *American Sociological Review,* 54(1989), 1001–1018.

Thio, A. (2007). *Deviant behavior*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Weiss, R. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Wooden, W. S., & Blazak, R. (2001). *Renegade kids, suburban outlaws: From youth culture to delinquency*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Zurkovich, G. (1979). *A normative survey of the attitudes of graduates of Wilson Continuation High School currently residing in the Yuba-Sutter County area*. (Unpublished master's thesis). California State University, Chico.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Students and Parents,

Hello, my name is Alexandra Kokkinakis and I am a graduate student at CSU, Chico. I am conducting a study that looks at high school students. This research will hopefully help to create a better understanding of the experiences of high school students, how they view themselves, and some of the difficulties they might encounter. Your help is needed to collect information for this research.

If you decide to participate, I will interview you, the student, in person. The interview should take no more than one hour and will take place in a quiet location at your school. The interview will be also be tape-recorded. Before the interview starts, I will collect this form, signed by a parent or guardian and the student, giving permission for the student to participate.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and your information will be entirely confidential. Identities and any possibly identifying responses to questions will not be revealed at any point in the study. There is a possibility that some of the questions asked may cause emotional or mental discomfort, and there are also no personal incentives for participating in this study.

Notes, tapes and any other information from these interviews will be kept strictly confidential and in a secure location. Only myself and my supervising professor, Dr. Janja Lalich of the Sociology Department at CSU, Chico, will have access to this information. These items will be kept for 9 months to complete the study. They will be destroyed afterward.

If you decide to participate in an interview, you may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to or do not feel comfortable answering. You may also end the interview at any time without any negative consequences.

This study will be used to complete my thesis for the M.A. degree in Social Science. The completed thesis will be available for circulation in California State University, Chico's Meriam Library, as well as online in the library's thesis collection.

If you have any questions or would like more information about this study, please contact me by phone at (530) 864-2839 or by email at akokkinakis@mail.csuchico.edu. You may also contact my supervising professor, Dr. Janja Lalich, at (530) 898-5542 or by email at jlalich@csuchico.edu. This study has been reviewed and approved by California State University, Chico's Human Subjects in Research Committee. If you have questions or comments about the ethics of this study, please contact Dr. John Mahoney at (530) 898-5413 or by email at HS&AC@csuchico.edu.

Thank you for considering helping with this important study.

Sincerely,

(signature here)

Alexandra Kokkinakis

I understand the guidelines of this study and agree to allow my student to participate in an interview. The information they give can be used in the completion of this study.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____Date: _____

I understand the guidelines of this study and agree to participate in an interview. The information I give can be used in the completion of this study.

Student Signature: _____Date: _____

APPENDIX B

California State University, Chico
Chico, California 95929-0875
Office of Graduate Studies
530-898-6880
Fax: 530-898-3342
www.csuchico.edu/graduatestudies

November 15, 2012

Alexandra Kokkinakis
695 E. 5th St.
Chico, CA 95928

Dear Alexandra Kokkinakis,

As the Chair of the Campus Institutional Review Board, I have determined that following your Full Board review, no further modifications are needed in your research proposal entitled "Stigmatiztion and Self Perception in Alternative School Students Who Transferred From a Traditional High School: A Qualitative Study of Students in Chico, CA". This clearance allows you to proceed with your study.

I do ask that you notify our office should there be any further modifications to, or complications arising from or within, the study. In addition, should this project continue longer than the authorized date, you will need to apply for an extension from our office. When your data collection is complete, you will need to turn in the attached Post Data Collection Report for final approval. Students should be aware that failure to comply with any HSRC requirements will delay graduation. If you should have any questions regarding this clearance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

John Mahoney, Ph.D., Chair
Human Subjects in Research Committee

Attachment: Post Data Collection Report

cc: Janja Lalich (445)

HUMAN SUBJECTS IN REVIEW COMMITTEE
Post Data Collection Questionnaire

2013014
Full board

Under Federal law relating to the protection of Human Subjects, this report is to be completed by each Principal Investigator at the end of data collection.

Please return to: Marsha Osborne, HSRC Assistant
Office of Graduate Studies
Student Services Center (SSC), Room 460
CSU, Chico
Chico, CA 95929-0875

Or Fax to: Marsha Osborne, 530-898-3342

Name: Alexandra S. Kokkinakis Chico State Portal ID#002918358

Phone(s) (530) 864-2839 Email: askokkinakis@gmail.com

Faculty Advisor name (if student): Dr. Janja Lalich Phone (530) 898-5542

College/Department: Social Science

Title of Project: Stigmatization and Perception of Self in Alternative School Students Who Have Transferred from a Traditional High School: A Qualitative Study of Students in Chico, CA

Date application was approved (mo/yr.): 11/2012 Date collection complete (mo/yr.): 03/2013

How many subjects were recruited? 13 How many subjects actually completed the project? 12

***HARM**--Did subjects have severe reactions or extreme emotional response? No.

If yes, please attach a detailed explanation: _____

Your signature: _____ Date: 3/15/2013

***Final clearance will not be granted without a complete answer to this question.**

Approved By: _____ Date: 3/26/13
John Mahoney, Chair

****

VERY IMPORTANT: If you will or have used this research in your project or thesis you are required to provide a copy of this form (with John Mahoney's signature in place) to your graduate committee.

Do you want a photo copy of this form emailed to you? Yes
If yes, provide email address: askokkinakis@gmail.com

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviewee #_____ Tape #_____ Permission slip # (if needed)_____

Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. With your permission, I will be recording our discussion. These interviews are strictly confidential; however, please tell me if you would like me to turn off the recorder at any time and I will stop it immediately. I will be asking a variety of questions about different topics relating to your experiences going to high school. Please take a moment to think about your responses if you need to, and you may choose not to answer a question if you prefer. If at any point you want to stop the interview entirely, please let me know. This should take no more than one hour to finish.

Let me start by getting some of your basic information.

1) How old are you?

2) What gender do you identify with?

3) What year did you start going to this school? (Freshmen, sophomore, etc.)

4) How long have you been going to this school?

5) Did you go to a different high school before you came to the school you are in now?

(If yes) How long did you go to that school before coming to your current school?

6) Why do you attend this high school?

Now I am going to ask you some questions about how you think other people feel about your going to this school.

7) How do you think your parents or family feel about your going to this school? What are some things they have said or done that suggest this?

8) What do your friends from your old school or outside of school think about your going to this high school? (If answered yes to question 5). Can you give me some examples of what they said or did?

9) What do you think your friends at your current school think about your going there?

10) What are some people's (new people you meet, acquaintances, coworkers, etc.) reactions when you tell them you go to this school? Can you give me some examples?

11) Would you agree or disagree that someone has ever treated you differently when they found out you go to this school?

(If agree) Can you tell me about some instances that come to mind of when this has happened?

12) Do you think someone's opinion of you has ever changed when they found out you go to this school?

(If yes) Do you think it got better or worse?

13) Has there ever been a time when you intentionally didn't tell someone you go to an this high school?

(If yes) Tell me about the situation.

(If yes) Why did you feel this was necessary?

14) Do you agree or disagree that people tend to have a stereotype of what they think students from this school are?

(If agree) Do you think it's a good stereotype or a bad stereotype?

(Either good or bad) Can you give me some examples of what you think that stereotype is?

Do you agree or disagree with this stereotype?

Now I am going to ask you some questions about what you think about yourself and your school.

15) What did you think about your current school before you started here?

16) How did you see yourself when you first started being a student here (behavior, performance, etc.)?

17) How would you describe yourself as a student there now?

18) Do you think you have changed as a person since you started at your current school? (If yes) Explain to me some of the ways in which you have changed.

19) In what ways has your opinion of yourself changed since you started at your current school? Can you tell me about some events or experiences, if any, that contributed to this change?

20) Would you agree or disagree that you are happy with who you are?

Conclusion:

Thank you again for your participation in this interview, you have been helpful. If you have any questions or comments about your interview or the study, please contact me, Alex Kokkinakis, at akokkinakis@mail.csuchico.edu or (530) 864-2839 or my supervising instructor, Dr. Janja Lalich, at jlalich@csuchicoedu or (530) 898-5542.