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## **It's Not All Sunflowers and Roses at Home: A Narrative Inquiry of At-Risk Girls and Their Perceptions of Their Educational Experiences**

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It's Not All Sunflowers and Roses at Home: A Narrative Inquiry of At-Risk  
Girls and Their Perceptions of Their Educational Experiences

by

Jessica Aggeles Curtis

A dissertation in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of Doctor of  
Philosophy  
with a concentration in Special Education  
Department of Teaching and Learning  
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University of South Florida

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## **DEDICATION**

I could not be at this point in my life without the unconditional love and unwavering support of my parents Teddie and Butch. Dad, you have lifted me up, given me courage and never once doubted my potential. Mom, from the long nights of editing to the unending calls about how to manage all of the balls I was juggling; you are the mother all others strive to emulate. You pushed me forward when I didn't think I could go any farther and you carried me when I truly could not walk another step. There is no thank you that will ever suffice. You are my source of inspiration.

To my husband, Spencer, you are my rock. You have sacrificed so much to let me live this dream. You have wiped away my tears and celebrated my successes. You have been my comfort and soft place to land when I fell down over and over again. You have never let me doubt the process. Your undying support has catapulted me to the finish line. You are my partner in the truest sense of the word. I am so honored to be on this journey through life with you. You make everything sweeter.

Lastly to my children Carter and Elliott, my love for you brought me to this work. Do not ever forget your voices are just as important as anyone else's but no more important than anyone else's. To my son Carter, it was you who made me think about life differently. I am so grateful for your insight and curiosity. Thank you for rekindling my thirst for knowledge. To my daughter Elliott, you made me remember to have fun. I so admire your ability to see that life is full of wonder and goodness. Thank you for

reminding me that being unique is how we honor our spirit. Carter and Ellie, I am so grateful that the universe chose me to be your mother. I look forward to seeing what happens in the next chapters of your story.

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## **Abstract**

The population of girls being incarcerated continues to grow amidst the decline of boy offenders. While society has seen an increase in violent offenses perpetrated by these girls, the majority are still detained on status offenses or for non-violent crimes. For many girls, school is a place to seek solace and safety. Yet, for a growing population of girls, the bond they once shared with school is denigrating. This disconnect has proven to be a critical turning point in these girls' lives. The purpose of this study is to give girls who have been removed from the general education setting a platform to share their educational experiences.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

*“In the first place, the delinquent girl is much less frequent than her male counterpart and...she is less interesting. Her offenses take predominately the form of sexual misbehavior, of a kind to call for care and protection rather than punishment...Delinquency in the male at an equivalent age is very much more varied, dangerous and dramatic.”*

*(Cowie, Cowie & Slater, 1968).*

#### My Story

I was raised in a cozy Florida town, in a cozy little home, to a cozy lower middle class family. The first and final child of a mechanic and a nurse, I was doted on throughout my life. I never went hungry and I always had a roof over my head. I never endured any suffering first-hand.

My schooling consisted of good grades and high hopes. My father badgered me, constantly, about my future aspirations from as early as I can remember. I use the term badger in a loving way. I think he thought it would ignite something within me to find a passion of some sort since he never found his. To this day he will wonder out loud about what could have been if his parents pushed a little harder, or at all for that matter. Where he needed the pushing, I found

it to be a daunting at 5 years old to decide what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. We laugh about it now, but it was serious child rearing at the time.

My mother left her job as a nurse to pursue her true love, writing. But her past would not allow her to sit at a computer for long. She began a small non-profit organization that worked with abused women long before identifying and preventing domestic violence was in vogue and decades before it became a national effort.

Her work would bring me into contact with children who were suffering; really suffering. These children, many times under the age of two, had been beaten, raped and witnesses to horrible atrocities that would make the most seasoned adult cringe. Their mothers were women who took part in secret meetings. These meetings were about feelings, plans of action to get away from violent partners and the ramifications of plans that had already gone well or not so well. While the women talked, cried and calculated their escape, I played with their children. Although the rooms were dank and musty, the children played care free. I was their babysitter.

Next door the women would pour their souls out to the only people they could trust to not judge them, other women who would understand their plight. I did not know the details of their lives at the time, but it didn't take an experienced adult's pair of eyes to see the sorrow in the children and their broken mothers. I think my desire to know more started there in the basement of that old house, with those battered women and their tattered toddlers.

I began working at age fourteen after answering a local help wanted ad for a tutor. As I interviewed for the position I realized that this job, if I got it, would have nothing to do with academics like I originally thought. I would be a different kind of tutor. One that I never knew existed. I was offered a position as a peer mentor for a non-for profit organization that helped kids, my own age, who had run away from home. Once I received notice that I was chosen for

the position, I was flown to Atlanta with only my new boss at my side and for one week was trained in the ways of a mentor.

When I returned home and subsequently to work, I would once again come into contact with kids who were suffering. This time however, I did not simply babysit. I worked with my peers to identify risks they were taking and help give them options. Each day brought a new person and a new experience to the forefront of my life. I was blessed to know the 13-year-old prostitute who later would die of AIDS, the boy who was in my third and fifth period class in high school and had run away from his abusive family, to the young girl I met who was so tortured in her life she swallowed a razor blade. I worked diligently to get to know them, their issues and to identify what the organizations needed to do to make something positive out of their situations. Some of the children would move on and have positive life outcomes; most did not.

I could not see then what I see now. I could not know how each of their stories would build my story. How each of their struggles would propel me forward and lead me to my own mental struggle. I did not realize how I would bask in each one of their successes or how each peer lost to their demons would haunt me.

When I graduated high school and began the journey of choosing the path for my career, that early work experience with those young people would compel me to seek a degree in education. When I learned more about education, what it was and what it was not, my focus became sharper. I wanted to work specifically with kids who were struggling emotionally. The case studies discussed in my special education classes I recognized as true life stories, some of which I had witnessed. I remembered the scenarios from my babysitting days at the domestic violence shelter all the way through to my last day working at the runaway shelter. These stories



were not new to me. I had previously seen and worked with that type of suffering. I was drawn to those kids in the midst of chaos. I was determined to help them. And so I earned a special education degree with an emphasis on emotional behavioral and learning disabilities.

As a special education teacher I began to see inequalities in my day-to-day work. Those issues encouraged me to ask questions. I took noticed that the vast majority of my students who were labeled emotionally behaviorally disabled were African American males. Those who were not African American were poor. Conversations regarding inequalities were questions that simply were not discussed in my education classes in college. Sure, we talked about maltreatment and how that leads to some children being labeled. But we did not discuss race. We did not discuss a student's sex and how it might affect the chances of a boy or girl being labeled emotionally disturbed (ED).

I had seen kids in heartbreaking situations my whole life. As a teacher, they were in my class, a part of my everyday life. The suffering was as evident then as it was to me working all those years ago as a caregiver in the abuse shelter. My naiveté and curiosity would lead me into a world of research. I am now committed to investigating and unearthing the details and stories of marginalized youth, inequality in education, students in special education trajectories, and students stuck in the school to prison pipeline.

As I discuss my journey of becoming a researcher and seeker of social justice for marginalized youth, it is imperative that I situate my own story within the context of "theirs". Through my personal narrative I have fashioned meaning from the stories shared with me by children, friends, and finally students. An integral part of this phase of agency is the understanding that no one story stands alone. The ability to make some meaning of it all happens as a summation of other stories and their impact on the one that came before. It is because of the

young children, peers, students and lastly participants whom I have worked with, that I am privileged to create a richer meaning of my story through theirs and for that I am eternally grateful.

### **The Story of Narrative**

Everyone has his or her own story. Stories and our interpretation of them make us who we are; in short they portray our version of our identity (Riessman, 2008). Stories are constructed by us through our vision and our perceptions of our life's experiences. Our stories help to construct other's stories and vice-versa. The powerful tool of narrative (story telling) has been used throughout the millennia and began as simply a way to survive.

Before language existed, people drew pictures on cave walls to tell stories. As the years progressed, humans left legacies through their hieroglyphics telling tales and making meaning of their life experiences. Today, we regularly use social media to tell stories about our lives. We construct meaning from the stories we read or hear (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). We connect, analyze or criticize as we build the stories of our own lives. So much of what a researcher studies is directly related to him/herself (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There is no need to parcel one's self out of the research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Part of the research *is* the researcher and there is a symbiotic relationship that evolves during the process of conversational interviewing and analyzing. Narrative inquiry is a useful tool to interweave the ideas, stories and interpretations of both the researcher and the participant (Iannicci, 2007).

Through storytelling we learn about ourselves and make meaning of our experiences (Riessman, 2008). Narrative is based on the idea that humans are natural born story tellers who interact with each other through their storied lives (Holley & Coylar, 2009). Other people's voices and personal experiences can resonate with our own personal experience and at that

moment evoke powerful responses. For some, it might be a moment of enlightenment, while for others it might incite rage. In either instance, the moment that the connection is forged, there is an unbreakable bond between two humans; humans who may never have connected before. With that connection something inside may stir enough emotion to elicit social justice agency (Tierney, 1994).

This is a research study that was based on participants' stories and reflections of their experiences. Parameters on narratives tend to put unnecessary constraints on the participants and the researcher due to the fact that they are nonlinear or laden with discourse (Ochs & Capps, 2001). Using narrative inquiry I relayed the descriptions of my participants' life events which have impacted their schooling. Utilizing narrative inquiry allowed my participants to convey their experiences through conversations and stories while I attempted to co-construct meaning of the story being told (Josselson et al., 2003).

While there are alternative ways to collect data on girls who have come in contact with the juvenile justice system they have stated that they just want their voices to be heard (Chesney-Lind, Morash & Stevens, 2008). One of the best ways to gather stakeholder's perceptions of their experiences is through the use of narrative. I labored over attending to the nuances of the girls' stories. I wanted the importance of each salient detail to be determined by them. I wanted to work alongside the girls to gain a deeper understanding of their pathways to an alternative center. The ability to understand youth offenders and their lives as they perceive them can provide critical insight to program changes in both the juvenile justice system and the educational system (Wikstrom & Loeber, 2000).

## **The Statement of the Problem**

Juvenile offenses have steadily risen over the last 15 years (Sherwin & Schmidt, 2003). Policies and legislation, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and zero tolerance policies are designed to keep children safe yet they have had a multitude of unintended consequences specifically for students of color (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009). More arrests have been made in the past 10 years in direct relationship to no-tolerance policies enacted by school districts across the nation than ever before (Sullivan, 2011). School administrators are forced to contact authorities for issues that at one time were dealt within the school setting such as threats, fights, and petty theft (Skiba et al., 2009).

There is a new phenomenon we are facing as a nation. The number of adjudicated girls are growing at alarmingly fast rates and make up the fastest growing population to clog up the school-to-prison pipeline (Edelman & Watson, 2012). When the desire to succeed in school wanes, problem behaviors begin to emerge or escalate (Tille & Rose, 2007). The literature suggests that poor educational opportunities allow for high risk behaviors to develop significantly (Young et. al., 2010). “Girls continue to break down barriers and diminish the differences between their level of achievement and that of boys in many areas, and violent behavior is no exception” (Prothrow-Stith & Spivak, 2005 p.3). Girls are becoming involved in the juvenile justice system at a younger age and for more violent crimes than ever before (Kakar, Friedemann & Peck 2002). In order to better understand why these girls are committing these crimes and engaging in delinquent behavior we must examine their previous experiences.

Each girl has taken part in compulsory schooling and their attachment (or lack thereof) to the school is a deciding factor to their success. It is under this premise that this study was designed. It is critical to discern what made these girls detach from their schools. The

educational community (schools, service providers and detention prevention programs) must better understand how to engage girls to identify detachment at an early stage. These girls hold the key to the answering the questions concerning how to better support them and others who are headed towards the school to prison pipeline.

### **Rationale for Conducting Research on Girl Offenders**

As I began my research into the inequalities of students with disabilities and their educational experiences, and their likely entrance to the school to prison pipeline (Gagnon, Shippen & Murphy, 2012) there was a central theme that could not be denied or argued; African-American males have increasingly dismal graduation rates and are ushered in droves through the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) (Osher et al., 2012). Young men of color enter the STPP more frequently than their white peers (Morris, 2012). While there is a considerable amount of support and research on this topic, the voices of those adolescent men are still unheard. They are not talked to; they are only talked about in most research. While this disconnect is so obvious in some research, one might think I would choose to focus on young African-American men, but I did not. I chose to work with girls for a several reasons.

First, girls are forging ahead in the school to prison pipeline (STPP). Second, I am a woman. My research of at-risk girls will help me to better understand my own story and potentially resonate with other women (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Third, there is a copious amount of research (albeit quantitative) on adolescent boys, but there is minimal research on adolescent girls in the STPP. This investigation is especially critical since the adjudication rate of girls has increased twofold since the 1980's (Prothrow-Stith & Spivak, 2005). Last, a negligible amount of research has been done to better understand the lived experiences of these girls and that is happening in a handful of an already limited scope of research.

This is the fastest growing population of incarcerated youth (Hubbard & Pratt, 2002) and yet we do not know what they have to say about their educational experiences. Interest in women offenders has grown in the last few years, but there are still numerous gaps in the literature. The literature that does examine this upward trend in crime committed by girls has mainly focused on risk factors she may experience prior to her initial contact with law enforcement (Sherman, 2005; Zahn, 2009). While identifying risk factors is an important mission, there are so many more questions that need to be researched when it comes to delinquent adolescent girls.

Pajer (1998) over 15 years ago, suggested looking into whether young women continue antisocial behavior as they mature, yet her call for further research has been widely ignored. What I find most astounding is the lack of research examining delinquent juvenile girls' education, prior to, or after they have been involved with law enforcement. These girls have all encountered schooling and it is critical that both the fields of education and criminology work in collaboration to better serve this marginalized group (Lessen et al., 2000).

Schools are in a unique position in these girls' lives. Schools have the capability of identifying students who are at-risk and consequently implement programs to support them in the areas in which they are most likely to be struggling (Zahn et al., 2002). This connection to the school, otherwise known as school bonding, is an important protective factor for girls, specifically (Hartman et al., 2009). However, many schools lack the funding or forethought to promote this bond even though we know it increases self-esteem and promotes positive relationships (Hirsch, 1969; Rovis, Bezinovic & Basic, 2016).

### **Purpose of the Study**

As the population of girl offenders continues to expand, little research is being conducted to address their personal journeys from their perspectives (Kakar et al., 2002). We know even

less about the perspective of these girls' educational journeys and how those experiences guided them to the STPP or alternative centers (Junger-Tas, Ribeaud & Cruyff, 2004). Due to a historically male centered understanding of delinquency and interventions, much of the previous research is dedicated to males in correctional facilities (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). The purpose of this study was to illuminate the effects of schooling on girls and the intersection of race, disability and gender on their pathway to an alternative center.

Previous research has focused predominantly on the risk factors in boys, the demographics of those boys and concerns about detaining them (Conklin, 2012). With male voices in the literature difficult to find, female offender's voices are nearly impossible to locate indicating further exploration is necessary to add to the limited body of knowledge that currently exists (Zhang, Hsu, Katssiyannis, Barrett & Ju, 2011). This study aimed to answer the call of a myriad of researchers to open a dialogue between educational researchers and those girls who are or have been incarcerated (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Chesney-Lind, 2007; Hubbard & Pratt, 2002; Kakar, et al., 2002; Sanger, Ritzman, Stremlau & Snow, 2010; Zahn, 2009) .

### **Research Questions**

1. What stories do girls being educated in alternative settings tell about their education?
2. To what extent does race feature in the stories of these girls' educational experiences?
3. To what extent does disability feature in the stories of these girls educational experiences?

4. To what extent does gender feature in the stories of these girls' educational experiences?

### **Significance of the Study**

These girls hold insight to effect change and reshape public school interventions. Ultimately, they can support other girls like themselves and make an impact on other's lives (Holsinger, 2008). The intersections of race, education and ability many times are inexplicably linked to incarceration. Other key factors related to perception of ability and disability directly impact girls and their possible introduction into the juvenile justice system (Annamma, 2013).

Understanding educational journeys of incarcerated girls can better inform schools and service providers with strategies to help these girls make decisions that positively impact their lives (Sanger et al., 2010). The voices of each girl offender documents authentic experiences which they found significant in their journeys. Each experience is laden with details of how to help the next generation avoid becoming part of the phenomena of incarcerated girls and this crucial data has been untapped (Chesney-Lind et al., 2008).

Schools can potentially utilize findings to identify risk factors and effectively provide services for those girls exhibiting certain characteristics or patterns. Quality education and early detection of risk factors, along with implementation of services, can arguably be the key to changing the trajectory of would-be adolescent girl offenders (Sherman, 2005). Service providers may also find patterns of education for their program development helpful (Sanger et al., 2010).

There are many variables within each of these girls' lives. One experience they all share is compulsory education. The information they offer of their experience can be helpful for students as well as the professionals who create programming and policies (Kakar et al.,



2002). Allowing the girls to describe their perceptions of their schooling contributes to the field by connecting what has been previously explored through data bases with the decidedly human element of experience (Sanger et al., 2010). The significance of that human element cannot be overstated.

In a qualitative analysis of 154 life histories of poor and working class young adults, Fine and Weis (1998) attempted to learn about urban crime and violence; however, the narratives uncovered a more disturbing fact. The perceptions that these young people had not only a fear of violence and crime in their neighborhoods homes, but also in the way authority figures dealt with resolving those issues. There was a sense that they could not look to their teachers, police or others in authority for help or safety which had everything to do with their race, ethnicity and sex.

If students feel their voices can be heard, that what they say matters and can make a difference, the impact on schools and crime will be changed from the inside out. If girls who are most at risk to enter the STPP, due to their exposure to violence and aggression outside of the classroom have a chance to discuss their journey that in itself can translate into positive change (Hatt, 2011). It will mean their voices matter and they matter.

When discussing the significance of girls' voices discussing their educational experiences, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2003) issued a statement calling for the end to Zero Tolerance. The statement contends that disciplinary measures that allow students a sense of participation and belonging while working to improve their own behavior would be more constructive and beneficial. Since juvenile girls are becoming delinquents at an ever increasing rate, this study would add hope to these girls' that they can make a difference in the school system (Ochoa & Eckes, 2005). To elicit positive changes, these girls' must voice what they

have experienced and their perceptions of those experiences. The stories they tell must be studied, shared and acknowledged if the STPP is going to cease operations.

To engage in research in a way that allows these girls and opportunity to speak rather than to further act out and become permanently trapped in the pattern of juvenile delinquency is significant. The girls' voices and their stories may serve as a catalyst to spur change in education as a system, in educators and even the girls.

The field of criminology has as much to gain from these types of qualitative studies as does the field of education. The conception of juvenile justice was to protect young offenders from the walls of an adult prison (Twomey, 2008). However, the evolution of zero tolerance laws has refocused the mission. Education and juvenile justice once worked in the child's best interest and that interest was upheld by "*parens patriae*" (the state as the parent). It has now moved towards a more punitive position.

These young offenders are still students. They precariously straddle both worlds of school and crime. The lack of collaboration between the two entities charged in caring for them, the school and the juvenile justice facility, is astounding. The bridge that should exist in order for students to cross back into the education system seems to be burned down upon entry into a juvenile justice facility. According to Gagnon, Houchins and Murphy (2012) collaboration between multiple agencies is critical in supporting students. The disconnect between juvenile justice and education is personified in each juvenile who enters into a detention program. They become cutoff from the rest of society. The tension between the two worlds is palatable and the division is unacceptable.

## **Definitions of Terms**

In order to conduct this study, I had to reach across multiple disciplines and their bodies of research and decipher each field's language. From special education, juvenile criminology, feminist criminology to gender studies, many times the meanings cross over, but the terminology is quite different. In order for my work to be clear, I will define the terms as I have conceptualized them for the purpose of this research.

**Adjudication, Detainment or Confinement.** There are several terms used to discuss juvenile justice and the process that students go through once coming in contact with law enforcement. I want to clearly define these terms for the purpose of this study. The term adjudication refers to the decision making period that a judge has to determine placement or treatment of an offender (McGarvey, 2012). Detainment and confinement are synonymous with physical isolation of the youth offenders from their families, friends and schools (Conklin, 2012). This phase of the process comes after adjudication of guilt. However, for many juveniles who offend, detainment can also occur prior to adjudication. This is in complete contrast to the justification set forth for secure detainment of juveniles which is to ensure court appearances or to limit the possibility of reoffending before adjudication (National Juvenile Defender Center, 2004).

**Alternative Education Center.** According to Flower, McDaniel and Jolivet (2011) alternative education settings are a last chance educational experience. Alternative education centers can be residential settings, day treatment centers, housed within juvenile justice centers or a separate public or private school. The primary purpose of these schools is to educate students whose behaviors are non-responsive to the interventions provided in a general education setting in a typical school. Students are placed at alternative centers through various means;

through parent/guardian placement, through an individual education plan, through disciplinary action through Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), or through legal action (Simonsen, Jeffrey-Pearsoll & Dugai, 2011).

**School to Prison Pipeline.** The school to prison pipeline (STPP) does not have a singular definition. However, the concept can be clearly stated as a process of involving the justice department in school matters, which consequently introduces youth to the juvenile justice system (Gonsoulin, Zablocki & Leone, 2012). These behaviors warranting possible legal action can range in severity from a kindergartener having a massive temper tantrum to a student bringing a weapon to school.

Having worked in schools, I have seen the damage a five-year-old can do to a classroom when he/she is having a temper tantrum. I have cleared a classroom full of students to protect them from flying objects and harmful words. But I have never called the police. These incidents were typically taken care of within the school setting (Sokolower, 2012).

Behavior referrals and functional behavior assessments used to be the route taken when students with severe outbursts stifled classroom learning. Today police are handcuffing kindergarteners who throw tantrums and yes, charging them with crimes ranging from assault to property damage (Chesney-Lind & Jones, 2012).

The pipeline begins when teachers and administrators push students out of the classroom and ends with a court date introducing students to the juvenile justice system. Students who wind up in trouble, those who break the rules set by the established school system, are often looked at as criminals and are treated as such by those in charge. The addition of zero-tolerance policies on educational home fronts further supports that mentality (Hirschfield, 2008). Students who were

in trouble might have, at one time, been given a second chance or sought behavioral remediation; schools are now enforcing zero-tolerance policies.

According to the laws, schools must treat rule-breaking students as criminals who are in need of punishment rather than children who might need mentoring, guidance or even differentiated instruction. Many schools today are replicas of prisons with metal detectors at entrances, school resource officers policing the hallways, fenced in school yards and cameras at every turn (Advancement Project, 2010).

Before we can delve any further into the school-to-prison pipeline, we must dissect its clogged entry way by answering such questions as: What avenues have students taken (or been guided through) to direct their lives to such a seemingly irreversible place? What is the larger societal context that allows such a pipeline to exist in the first place (Sokolower, 2012)?

The STPP is a negative school experience that most frequently impact youth-of-color (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). This STPP disproportionately affects African-American students and as a result, these students are either dropping out or entering prison at alarming rates (Alexander, 2010). These young men come into contact with law enforcement in disproportionate numbers when compared with any other ethnic group or the girls (Alexander, 2010). However, adolescent girls are closing the gap (Zahn, 2009).

Clearly, STPP is a disturbing phenomenon that affects more than one population of students. The effects of the STPP are far-reaching and its impact on students can be life altering. While traditionally boys have outranked girls in entering the STPP; that is changing. According to data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the arrest of girls increased more than arrests of boys for most types of crimes by the year 2000 (Zahn, 2009). The gateway to prison is now wide open to both sexes.

Research indicates that girls who are connected to their schools tend to experience school success (Freidenfelt Liljeberg, Eklund, Fritz, & Klinteberg, 2011). Conversely, those girls who feel disconnected from their schools encounter higher rates of school failure. Many times school failure for adolescent women equates to delinquency (Emeka & Sorensen, 2009). Educators need to know what to do next if circumstances are to change for girls. If girls are to escape a school life that prepares them for entrance into the penal system instead of a world of higher education and career choices, educators will need to be an integral part of their school lives.

### **Overrepresentation of Students of Color**

In 1968, Dunn described what he saw in public schools across the country; overrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education. Almost fifty years later and not much has changed in education as far as overrepresentation in special education is concerned. In fact, overrepresentation is also apparent in the context of juvenile justice. Overrepresentation, in this study refers to, a disproportionate amount of one population receiving treatment, placement, or attention over others. We know that race plays a major role in determining who may be caught up in the STPP. Gregory and Fergus (2017) purports that white students do not offend less however; they are differentially selected for disciplinary action than students of color. Black and Latino/a Americans are subject to disproportionate school discipline than their white peers (“Are Zero,” 2008). This disciplinary action based on zero tolerance policies many times leads to an encounter with law enforcement creating an unnecessary connection between schools and juvenile justice (otherwise known as the STPP).

The higher level of students of color with high incident disabilities that Dunn (1968) described can be found today in school systems across the country. It should come as no surprise that these marginalized students who enter into special education under the labels of Learning

Disabled (LD) or Emotional/Behaviorally Handicapped (EBH) are more likely to encounter school failure than their peers (Gagnon et al., 2012). Students with disabilities are twice as likely to drop out of school and are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system (Hogan, Bullock & Fritsch, 2010). According to Hagner, Malloy, Mazzone, & Cormier (2008) students with disabilities make up anywhere between 40-70 percent of the incarcerated population of juveniles.

With a disproportionate amount of students of color being negatively affected by zero tolerance policies the Center for Children's Law and Policy reported that the Juvenile Justice Detention and Prevention Act which was reauthorized in 2002 aims to lower further disproportionate minority contact (2013); however, that aspect of the legislation has yet to come to fruition. Furthermore considering the overrepresentation of student with disabilities in juvenile justice facilities one would posit that there would have to be more special education teachers in the facilities to meet the demands of the students.

According to Young, Phillips and Nasir (2010) there is indeed an overrepresentation of students with learning disabilities who are incarcerated. We know there is a much higher probability of a student who has special needs (specifically high incidence disabilities such as emotional disorders or learning disabilities) being incarcerated then their non-disabled peers (Emeka & Sorensen, 2009). Additionally, compounding the issue of overrepresentation, those students who are labeled with high incidence disabilities (i.e. learning disabled and emotionally, behaviorally handicapped) are all too often students of color (Waitoller, Artiles, & Cheney, 2010).

## **Disability**

The Individuals with Disabilities Act was most recently amended in December 2015. Disability according to IDEA includes thirteen categories (Strassfield, 2017). Those categories include: specific

learning disabilities, other health impairments, Autism spectrum disorder, emotional disorders, speech/language impaired, visually impaired, hearing impaired, deaf, deaf-blind, orthopedic impaired, traumatic brain injury, intellectual disabilities, and/or multiple disabilities. It is important to note that within each category there are variances of abilities and severity of impairments or disorders. Each category contain multiple dimensions. For instance, emotional disorders can include challenges such as depression, anxiety, or schizophrenia just to name a few. When discussing disability within this study, I am referring to the IDEA categories unless otherwise specified.

### **Gender vs Sex**

As the conversation of girls who enter the justice system continues, I feel it is necessary to clear up some confusion in regard to the terms sex and gender. Although there is a myriad of articles that use these terms interchangeably, I am here to defend the proper use of each term as separate but equal. Sex is biological. These biological differences determine a person's sex. Sex makes a person either a man or a woman (respectfully boy or girl) (Galambos, 2004).

Gender on the other hand is a more complex concept. Gender is based on characteristics that a sociocultural construct delineates as masculine or feminine (Nobelius, 2004). Those who score high on both femininity and masculinity scales are considered androgynous (Laner, 2000).

For the purpose of this study these terms will not be used synonymously. That is to say, gender will refer to characteristics associated with societal norms and sex will refer to a participant's biology (Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2011). The term female at times can be utilized in scholarly writing; however, most would agree that "female" should be used for animals and not human participants (as well as men instead of males) (Lanner, 2000). I will use the term *girls* to describe my participants. Gender norms and the effect on each girl's educational trajectory is a focal point of this study.



In addition to the discussion of gender versus sex it is critical to address the term I use for the participants in this study. I refer to my participants as girls. From first glance this may seem to go against the critical feminist lens of the study however, this was a conscious decision. It is my aim to re-associate my participants into the minds of the reader as children and not as offenders or juvenile delinquents. By using the term girls I encourage the reader to remember the biological age of the participants and further humanize their experience. Using the term girl will implore the reader to look at the participant as they would a loved one and less as a perpetrator. While each girl has played a role in her decision making process, they are both still relatively young and have been through more in their short lives than many of their women counterparts.

### **Theoretical Rationales**

Understanding who these students are and what they bring to the proverbial table is how we can begin to heal the damage done by a decade of addressing student discipline through crime control (Hirshfield, 2008). A closer examination of the students funneled into the STPP is critical to begin to permanently seal the pipeline altogether. This study utilized a critical theory lens to not only research the phenomenon at hand but also elicit social change in the realm of juvenile justice and education. Within the theoretical frameworks lie the necessity of reflexive action which is taken from the research to identify ways in which I am not only complicit with the way things are but an actual producer of the injustice (i.e. special educator and teacher educator) that I am researching. Critical theory methodology's most important role is to determine the purpose of the social research and not just to be a spectator of the phenomenon (Leonardo, 2012). By employing narrative as a methodology for this study, in conjunction with critical theoretical lenses, the stories of these girls could potentially cultivate social change regarding girls and the STPP.

## **Critical Race Theory**

When approaching race research, the researcher is not attempting to gain a better understanding of the issues. Race research is done in part by “liberating people from accepting their race knowledge as natural and neutral” (Leonardo, 2012, p.601). Leonardo (2012) argues that western-based research has long touted itself as producing knowledge about a particular population when many times those people’s experiences and voices are left out of the research altogether. This argument is exemplified by the research conducted around overrepresentation of students of color in special education since the inception of special education itself. Throughout the research, voices of teachers can be heard (Waddell, 2011); however, the voices of students are but a whisper (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Brown, 2011; Hagner et al., 2008).

Currently, the research and conversations of the STPP and how it adversely affects mostly African-American students is played out daily in classroom’s and juvenile justice facilities across our nation (Kupchik, 2009). Once again those adults with power have their voices heard. You can see them on television, read their opinions in an article in the newspaper or in a professional journal yet the student’s voices that are most affected by the policies are silenced. This disparity has led to a newly developed framework titled DisCrit (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). DisCrit combines Disability studies with Critical Race Theory to examine the construction of disabilities in education and their intersection with race.

One can no longer turn a color blind eye to these atrocities committed by our schools and supported by legislation. Zero tolerance policies have allowed policing to seep into our nations’ schools under the guise of protecting our youth. “The link between race and crime is as enduring and influential in the twenty-first century as it has been in the past” (Muhammad, 2010 p. 1).

Schools using metal detectors have been found to be positively related to those schools with a large population of students of color (DeVoe et al., 2005). Youth who are subject to multiple school resource officers patrolling their hallways are more likely to be encounter to pat downs, locker searches and metal detectors further characterizing them as potential criminals (Hirschfield, 2008). Since Columbine there is a police presence in schools across America the likes of which we have never seen before. This cohabitation of students and law enforcement has inevitably led to more frequent arrest and removals of what the schools deem disruptive students (Kupchik, 2009).

Removal from schools is associated with disengagement which leads a student to drop out of school (Brown, 2011; Townsend Walker, 2012). Since dropout rates are associated with race with over half of all African American males not graduating from high school (McMillian, 2003; Townsend Walker, 2012) it is critical to examine these connections with a fine tooth comb. One of the focal points of this study is race and it is critical to acknowledge students of color encounter a disproportionate amount of contact with police their White peers. Ignoring the sociocultural context of the STPP would be careless and negligent.

### **Critical Feminism**

Criminology “remains one of the most thoroughly masculinized of all social sciences” (Britton, 2000, p. 57). As a woman who identifies on multiple levels with my participants, it is fair to say that I come into this research with my own assumptions of who I am, who my participants are and who they could be. A critical feminist lens allows me to investigate the experiences of these girls while questioning the paradigm they have been placed in by both themselves and society (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2007).

As the issues of gender surface regularly throughout the literature, it seems a likely framework considering my heightened sense of awareness to the decidedly gendered nature of the issues regarding these girls. The power structure which is inherent in both the justice and educational system is cloaked with yet another layer of tension when the issue of the prisoner's sex is brought to the forefront. Radical feminism states that judicial, political and religious realms embrace a unifying theme of patriarchy (Hopkins & Koss, 2005). This patriarchy creates a dominance factor over women. This view is inherently pessimistic pitting the man as the dominator against the woman as the victim. Foucault's theory of power tempers radical feminism without watering down the theory that all humans are subject to dominance and this phenomenon is not simply sexed but dominance is everywhere (Munro, 2003). However, when discussing women who are imprisoned, especially girls, the image of a woman as a victim arises and therefore the realm is perceived as reality.

These girls negotiate their development from girls into women in a setting specifically created to oppress (Hirshfield, 2008). According to Daly and Chesney-Lind (1988) it is critical to determine the individual experiences of each woman and tread carefully on the groups of essentialism. Essentialism is a critique of radical feminism from many feminist criminologist who feel that the white, heterosexual voice of "oppression" is the one who speaks for all (Andersen & Collins, 2004). However, the benefit of the romance approach to feminist criminology (radical feminism) branches into discussions of inequality and social justice for all (Burgess-Proctor, 2006).

As the number of offenses and subsequent confinement for young women continue to increase, the question of the societal impact must be addressed. According to Sullivan (2007) juvenile detention centers must determine what their mission is; to detain or to rehabilitate.

## **Delimitations**

As a former special education teacher I am acutely aware of the intersection of race, disabilities and gender in education and juvenile justice. This basic foundation instilled a desire to better understand the connection between these factors and ultimately has led me examine the pathways leading youth to the STPP. Lurking in the shadows of the current research base on students entering the STPP are girls. While their numbers are far fewer than their male counterparts, their increased presence in the juvenile justice system (thirty percent increase according to Emeka & Sorenson, 2009) over the past 20 years is striking. All of the aforementioned points culminated into the conceptual framework I put forward.

My framework integrates theory in critical race and critical feminism. These theories, utilized together, allow for broader understanding of the sociocultural context in which these girls live. Narrative as a methodology allowed for those context and stories to be explored and heard from the participants themselves. This context does not; however, mean we are bound by our cultural experiences. We can grow, change and evolve (Cavendish, 2011), which was the premise of this study.

I propose that we listen to others who are engrossed in the movement of modern institutionalization (Houchins, Shippen, & Murphy, 2012). These stories may help us to effectively implement better programming based off the ideas of the most vital stakeholders; the offenders, the students, the youth. While research seeks to identify risk factors or hypothesize the trajectories of the participants, this study was not dichotomous in nature. Parceling out identity or risk factors has been the subject of both juvenile justice research and educational studies. Each field has explored the pieces to a notability large puzzle; however, my aim is to examine intersectionality. This study assumed a central purpose which was to explore the

multidimensional intersectionality of race, disabilities and gender and the relationship with both the education and juvenile justice system (Crenshaw, 1993).

The tenet of the present study was to better understand students' pathways as they marched towards the STPP and how their perspectives of their education determine their trajectories. It is essential to note, previous research on identity suggests singular views regarding identity can actually limit understanding (Annamma et al., 2013).

In order to better understand the students who have already entered the STPP, I conducted semi-structured interviews (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011) with a sample of two girls. These girls were between the ages of 11-17 who currently attended a day program, alternative education center located in a southern state. The girls were being educated at the alternative setting. One girl had been ordered to go to the center by her school in conjunction with a judge, while the other girl volunteered for the program.

The ages of these girls varied due to the age range being serviced at the center. I recognize that while working with younger adolescents (11-14 years of age), that their perceptions of their schooling may not be fully formulated and even those who are older may have difficulty articulating their experiences. For this reason I incorporated a reflective journal for my participants to utilize.

## **Conclusions**

As the STPP continues to see an influx of students, those interested in the well-being of those students, and our society as a whole, are called to action. It is time to dissect this cycle of socio-cultural warfare and open a dialogue with those students who are so grossly, unjustly and negatively affected. Zero tolerance policies and a decidedly tough on crime approach to the discipline issues regarding youth today have been proven ineffective. These policies have

contributed to littering the halls of juvenile justice facilities across the nation with the dreams of a generation of young people.

The reasons girls have been increasingly detained in juvenile detention centers continue to be argued amongst the fields that work to support them. The reasons range from the intolerance of non-compliant girls (Morris, 2016) to the “protection” of these juvenile offenders (Sherman, 2005). The literature proposes possible risk factors that girls may exhibit prior to entry into a detention facility; those tend to be very different from the risk factors of their male adolescent counterparts (Pasko, 2010). An in-depth knowledge and understanding of those risk factors may help those who work with these girls to better address girls’ needs and assist in creating effective educational interventions or strategies. Further studies exploring those girls’ voices would allow the field to better understand the perceptions of education these girls bring with them as they matriculate through an academic institution, as well as a correctional institution.

Further research will allow these girls an opportunity for self-reflection about their lives. They will take a critical look into the choices they have made and the circumstances which have led them to the alternative center. The value of their experiences for service providers, juvenile justice workers and educators alike, cannot be overstated.

Much of the information needed to make viable changes throughout multiple systems lies within information gleaned from the perspectives of girl offenders. Studies utilizing girls’ voices to examine issues directly related to the research seek to add much to the paucity of this subject in the literature (Zhang et al., 2009).

Identification of the key issues surrounding this disturbing upward trend of girls being incarcerated have been established (Hubbard & Pratt, 2002); yet, suggestions of how to change

this trajectory is lacking (Sherman, 2005). The research base on adjudicated adolescent girls is sparse. The most obvious limitation is the lack of these participants' voices within the research.

This study aimed to unsilence the voices of these disenfranchised girls in order to better understand their educational experiences prior to being at the alternative center. The literature states that educational outcomes are directly related to high-risk behavior. High-risk behaviors are directly related to entrée into the justice system. Therefore, understanding the first step onto a slippery slope for these girls can only better inform the field and broaden the literature base.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Overview**

Adolescence has long been touted as a time of tumult and a cross roads from childhood to adulthood (Hall 1904; Arnett, 1999). This time of life either leads students towards educational success and becoming a productive member of society or educational failure and becoming adults on the fringe of society (Roeser et al., 2008). To many students, education is seen as a waste of time or not a pathway to achieve the kind of lifestyle they hope to lead (Hatt, 2011). Though one may contend that boys and girls share many similar risk factors on the road to delinquency, and that fact has been substantiated, there are risk factors specific to girls which have been mostly overlooked (Kerpelmen & Smith-Adcock, 2005).

Feminist scholars have asserted that explanations of crime theories are not only conceived by male criminologists, but those theories are used as general theories as why offenders commit crimes in the first place. However, women's offenses and pathways to incarceration are vastly different than men (Chesney-Lind, 1989). Therefore, those theories and the practices within the justice system are inherently flawed due to the unique experiences of young women (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). Daigle, Cullen and Wright (2007) propose that specific theories must be created that incorporate girls' stories in order to illuminate their participation in criminal behavior.

While the number of girls committing crimes has increased over the past several decades, males still comprise 93% of the inmates in state and federal prisons (Diagle, et al., 2007). The

steady increase in women offenders and their subsequent placement into detention centers begs for research to determine why this is happening and investigate ways society can work to rectify the trend.

To thoroughly examine the rationales for the increase in girls' detention, this chapter will explore the differential socialization of girls in our society (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988), environmental and biological factors that increase the risk for incarceration and recent policy changes that expedite the pathway to detention.

### **Socialization of Girls in our Society**

Indications show that the behavior of girls is determined by social and cultural expectations (Chesney-Lind 1989). Girls who abide by societies' rules and accept the traditional definitions of femininity tend to report fewer delinquent acts than by girls who confront society's restraints on girls' behavior (Heimer 1996).

Galambos (2004) found that girls' futures may be limited not only in their occupational desires but realities by how they and others see themselves in as early as high school. One aspect of self-perception that may be important for girls is their self-esteem. While home life and peers certainly have an effect on the ideals of gender roles, research suggests practices and experiences within schools should be researched to determine if gender differences are being increased or diminished. Teacher behavior and attitudes, school climate and the validation of gender stereotypes and pressures for conformity by classmates are among school variables that likely contribute to gender socialization (Sherman, 2005). Among the social constructs of femininity include the perceptions of women being weak, nurturing and submissive (Robinson-Awana et al., 2001).

One researcher notes that parents, schools and society in general must consider the differences between girls and boys if they are to be effective in their roles (Prothrow- Stith & Spivak 2005). That statement is integral to both juvenile justice and educational system if it is to implement valid processes in preventing girls from becoming juvenile delinquents.

In order to design a program that deters delinquency and intersects girls' needs, those needs must first be defined. In the past, girls' voices were silenced. Previous social services established to assist girls have only mimicked what society perceived as fundamental to rehabilitation, which may in actuality, been a continuation of gender stereotypes (Goodkind, 2005).

That masculinized image of bad girls (common with the current "bad girl" hype) serve a number of important societal purposes. Notably, they serve to warn all girls and women of the negative consequences of seeking political and societal equality with men while also justifying harsh new controls on certain girls – daughters of the powerless. In a race and class biased society, the demonization of certain girls and women as gender outlaws justifies their harsh control and punishment, all the while cautioning the daughters of the powerful about the downside of challenging male dominance. (Chesley-Lind & Irwin, 2008, p. 2-3)

According to McEachern and Snyder (2012), there is a complicated relationship between relational aggression and social status amongst girls. In a 2003 study conducted by Prinstein and Cillessens, middle school students identified popularity as being directly linked with relational aggression. However, there is a definite disapproval from peers in regard to girls' physical

aggression. This censure may be the catalyst for the underground world of covert defiance and aggression for girls in school (Crawford & Unger, 2004).

Girls who are involved in relational aggression tend to be popularized. This type of offense has only recently received any spotlight from both media sources and researchers. Relational aggression has long been considered behavior from simply girls-being-girls (Crapanzona, Frick & Terranova, 2010). Physical aggression amongst boys and men is not only acceptable but many times encouraged. Physical aggression is a masculine act which is unbecoming in a young woman a deeply discouraged by those people in power who set the norms. However, when a girl or woman turns to physical aggression, society shuns her. She has broken a cardinal rule that woman fight with words, and typically against other women, yet, anything more than that is seen as masculine and therefore undesirable behavior for a girl (McEachern & Snyder, 2012). A recent study also determined that girls who are physically aggressive tend to struggle with depression (Benarous, Hassler, Falissard, Consoli, & Cohen, 2015).

### **The Criminalization of Girls of Color**

Examining the juvenile justice developments in recent years, girls, and specifically girls of color have become the target of “tough-on-crime” policies such as zero tolerance and mandatory arrests for youths. Girls’ arrest rates have continued to climb since the early 1980s while boys have leveled off (Zahn et al., 2002).

Moreover, girls of color are taking the brunt  
of tough policies on youth when they often are  
being educationally neglected, have severe housing  
and employment issues and often have situations

complicated by early motherhood and growing

health problems (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008, p. 180-181).

According to Johnson (2003) there has always been a distorted lens which society uses to view African-American women using definitions such as subservient, inept, oversexed and underserving to explain and prove that these are the types of women who belong behind bars. In 2009, the American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU of Mississippi filed a federal civil rights case filed against police and county school officials. This lawsuit claimed that officers and school staff were assaulting and racially discriminating against Black children riding home on a school bus. An argument on a school bus was turned into a police incident after a fight between three students led to two officers being summoned by the bus driver. The officers proceed to use excessive force by not only threatening to shoot 30 students between the eyes, but by but choking and tackling a Black girl on the bus (ACLU, 2009). The incident was caught on video tape and the shocking revelation proves as a testimony to the way girls of color are discriminated against.

While Holsinger (2000) adds how research is consistent in finding that girls of color are given harsher and less chivalrous treatment than White girls by the criminal justice system due in part to racial difference along with gender stereotypes.

Research on implicit bias uncovered that a racially stratified society tends to create racial stereotypes and norms that affect decision-making (Nolan, 2011). Subconsciously acted on, the reactions to those beliefs have created a perception of a “racial threat” which ultimately affects girls of color. The implementation of policies for stricter punishments in schools has led to the use of surveillance, metal detectors, cameras and an increased police presence in schools (Kupchik, 2009). To further obfuscate the problem, having a police presence in schools has

distorted the lines between the two institutions discourse. Daily exchanges and interactions with law enforcement expand the surveillance of [girls] of color and normalize prison terminology and culture within the school setting (Nolan, 2011).

Such reactions have also led to the egregious applications of zero tolerance policies in cases where five and six-year-old Black girls are documented as public safety threats (Darcy, 2012). One study suggested that Black girls are subject to the racial profiling that happens with adults, and that bias can change those girls' futures forever (Smith & McIntosh, 2007).

Black girls have been criminalized by strict school policies, linked to law enforcement (Fyfe, 2012), due heavily to stereotypes of promiscuity. Hypersexualizing Black girls based on their so called inappropriate dress allows for schools to deny these girls access to education. They are suspended or referred to administration for this type of infraction far more than their White female counterparts (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darenbourg, 2011).

Bad attitudes in school are a common teacher complaint against Black girls. These issues are directly connected with being considered too loud, using profanity, wearing revealing attire and confronting people in authority. Black girls tend to come in contact with law enforcement due to suspensions or even expulsions due to the infractions (Blake, et al., 2011; Steinberg & Lacoe, 2017). Some researchers purport that the girls are becoming victims for qualities that have historically been associated with their survival in the face of racism, sexism and classism such as being an advocate for themselves (Davis, 1981; Lerner, 1972).

Chesney-Lind & Irwin (2008) contend that the zero tolerance policies have inexplicably been leveled against African-American youths and are adding to the derailment of educational success for girls specifically. The relationship between education attainment and school discipline is critical component that can open the barred door to incarceration for all girls,

but especially Black girls (Morris, 2016). Add to that the studies which posit the academic self-esteem of Black girls drops during their adolescence and there is a recipe for potential educational derailment.

The stories of Black girls have not been the focus of literature on victimization, yet research has revealed significant presence of abuse histories – physical, substance, emotional and sexual – among detained and incarcerated girls (Berlinger & Elliott, 2002; Chesny-Lind & Jones, 2010.) Yet without hearing and analyzing those narratives, which to a certain extent shape perceptions and interaction, society cannot be understood (Chadderton, 2013).

### **Environmental and Biological Factors that May Contribute to Incarceration**

Adolescents' interactions with their environment and the people around them in their daily life, are a central factors in their health and well-being. Most studies of incarcerated women posit that there are high rates of victimization among the women. This link with violence greatly improves their entry into the criminal justice system as defendants (Smith & McIntosh, 2007).

Richie observed (1996) in her study of African-American abused women in jail in New York City, that patterns of entrapment by abusive partners helped lead the women into a life of crime. Daly (1994) found several roads that lead mostly poor woman of color to become entangled with the justice system. Extensive victimization and exploitation in the lives of women who live on the street was also found (Chesney-Lind & Rodriguez, 1983). Mallett (2017) identified maltreatment as an antecedents to a student engaging in delinquent acts. The environmental and biological factors that lead to the incarceration of girls are varied. They include, but are not limited to: family dynamics, mental health, trauma, early menarche, and students with disabilities.

There is no shortage of risk factors that may contribute to the detention of juvenile women (Pasko, 2010). The professionals who work daily with these young women acknowledge that they are *damaged* prior to entering the facility (Pasko, 2010). The damage they refer to is what the field calls risk factors. The ability to identify a risk factor or multiple risk factors in students within a K-12 setting could prove to be helpful to those working in conjunction with these young ladies (Sanger et al., 2010). Once identified, strategies of how to manage or cope with the risk factor(s) could be determined (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). While research contends that boys and girls share many similar risk factors on the road to delinquency, there are substantial delineations (Zahn, 2009).

**Early Menarche.** Early pubertal development has been consistently linked to deviant outcomes (Beaver & Wright 2005; Haynie, 2003). While early puberty can be a risk factor for boys, the physical signs of early maturation for girls, coupled with the often still undeveloped cognitive and emotional ability, create particularly increased risks (Graber, Brooks-Gun, & Warren, 1999; Trickett, Negri, Juye, & Peckins, 2011).

It is reasonable to suggest that pubescent youth may experience greater difficulty managing strain in the lives since puberty is a time of pronounced biological change and hormone production accompanied by increasing societal demands (Beaver & Wright 2005; Haynie & Piquero 2006). Early maturing adolescents may experience a “maturity gap” where they rebel and sometimes offend in an attempt to gain autonomy in concordance with their biological development that society and parents will not yet permit (Moffitt, 1993).

The incidence of exposure to intimate partner violence also appears as a risk factor when girls mature at an early age (Foster, Hagan, Brooks, & Gunn, 2004). High risk behaviors



including substance abuse, running away and truancy are all related to early menarche (Caspi & Moffitt, 1991; Flannery Rowe, & Gulley, 1993; Stice, Presnell, & Bearman, 2001).

Therefore, early maturation can theoretically lead to diminished social controls, weakened coping functions and increased criminal incentives as girls who are not emotionally mature strive to deal with their mature bodies (Jackson, 2012).

### **Family Dynamics as a Contributing Factor to Incarceration**

The home lives of many girl juvenile offenders can be characterized by instability. Whether or not a juvenile participates in delinquent behavior appears to be greatly affected by family dynamics (Emeka & Sorensen, 2009). Literature documents the connection between complex family dynamics. Single-parent and low-income households describe 73% of the girls studied in Duval County who were incarcerated (Sherman, 2005). Their relationships with parents tended to be volatile. The girls purported that their parents abused drugs and/or alcohol. Those biological parents who did abuse drugs or alcohol, more than half had been convicted of a committing a crime. The stress caused by the absence of a stable home life many times results in emotional distress for the girls. Add that stress to the already turbulent years of adolescence and girls often begin to exhibit increasing at-risk behaviors.

A critical question in the field of girl offenders is “do girls have stronger bonds to their families than boys, creating a greater stressor when families are struggling with abuse, alcohol, and parental absence?” Some researchers think the answer is yes. They theorize girls who feel the deep family connection is a protective mechanism (Hirshi, 1969). When that bond is severed by various forms of abuse or instability, risk-taking behaviors increase (Gilligan, 1982; Leonard, 1982). Longitudinal studies show attachment to school has a greater influence on girls avoiding those risk-taking behaviors than on boys. Crosnoe, Erickson, and Dornbusch (2002) found that

girls who do have family concerns, but formed a bond with teachers, were more protected against delinquency, even when girls had delinquent friends

(Zahn, 2009). Chesney-Lind (1989) proposed that the specifics on characteristic of girls who enter detention are imperfect, at best. What is known is that girls who live in unstructured family lives look for that protection elsewhere.)

Girls feel the need to be heard (Sanger et al., 2010). While their voices have traditionally been silenced in society, girls typically rely on their family to verbalize their feelings and concerns. But when a break occurs in that family due to drugs, alcohol, abuse, incarceration of a parent and other factors, girls sense they have no one to talk to or who will listen. Girls will find another way to be heard. Many will turn to an older boyfriend to meet their basic needs. Schaffner (2006) found when that happens the girls can become exposed to pressures by those boyfriends to use drugs, alcohol or engage in illegal activities that could end with the girl's incarceration.

### **Mental Health as a Contributing Factor to Incarceration**

Depression, anxiety and psychiatric disorders are also especially high in girls who are in detention facilities (Zahn, 2009). Many girls who exhibit high-risk behaviors struggle with mental health disorders. Post-traumatic stress syndrome is a common disorder among girls in prison due to trauma. Although this is one of the more common mental health issues the juvenile justice system is faced with addressing, for young women in custody, it is certainly not the only disorder (Sherman, 2005). It is important to note that girl offenders are more likely than male offenders to have mental illness.

Teachers are usually the first identifiers of a student's behavior and educational problems. Mental health screening and support in schools depends on teacher referrals for girls

they determine to be at risk. Gender has been identified as a variable that impacts that referral. One national study of randomly selected schools and districts (Foster et al., 2005) found that school personnel rated anxiety and adjustment problems as top reasons for girls to be referred for mental health services. Boys were referred more often for academic and behavioral concerns.

### **Trauma as a Contributing Factor to Incarceration**

While previous literature discussed issues of adolescents, what was overlooked were how issues of trauma and the role trauma plays in leading adolescents down a path of delinquency. During the past decade the discussion of trauma in the lives of incarcerated women has opened. Literature states that many of these young women have been traumatized at some point in their development (Gilfus, 2002). But their voices are still missing in the discussions. Smith and McIntosh (2007) depict a story of a young girl who was adjudicated.

Michelle spoke out loud for the first time in two and a half years when she cursed at a judge. She was fifteen years old and had been in 30 foster homes. The first time she stole was to get a lock to put on her door to keep her brother from sexually molesting her. Authorities put her into the Minnesota juvenile justice system. There she finally got the help she needed. (p.79)

Through their deeply personal stories we may learn about the trauma these girls have sustained on a daily basis. Via those stories, educators can ascertain the knowledge to assist them in becoming true advocates through the educational system. If better relationships are created through the understanding of their students, stronger bonds are created so girls feel worthwhile and develop higher self-esteem. Only then may school and the road to higher education become

more influential than the delinquency and prove to be a protective factor for girls (Rethinking Schools, 2011). The literature base acknowledges the dire importance of school success (Smith, Park, Ireland, Elwyn & Thornberry, 2013). What happens to these young women does not occur in a vacuum, yet they are expected to leave all of their baggage at the classroom door.

Interpersonal Violence (IPV) affects everyone in the family. In homes where IPV occurs between parents, 30 to 60 percent of children will be abused by that same parent (Hartley, 2002). Even if the child is not harmed physically but is a witness to the abuse, children can sustain mental and emotional trauma. This translates into issues at school through lowered learning ability, poor academic performance and behavioral problems. Many young girls, who live with abuse, run away from home. While girls may be running away due to family disputes and disagreement, they may also wind up in jail because of those disagreements and the policies set to keep them off the streets (Chesney-Lind & Irwin 2008).

Children who live within that cycle of violence are more likely to perpetuate the cycle (Mace et al., 2001). Yet many cases of assault, in one study of a thousand girls from California counties, found a high percentage of charges of person offenses involved assault that were more of a non-serious mutual combat situation with parents. For example, Acoca & Dedel (1998) discovered the details of an assault that was actually a father lunging at his daughter as she called the police about a domestic dispute. She hit him as he lunged at her and she was arrested. Or another girl arrested for assault when she threw a Barbie doll at her mother (Belknap, Winter & Cady, 2001).

Girls who live with or witness abuse and reach adolescence, may either become an abusive teen in a relationship or submit to a boyfriend or girlfriend who is abusive. Early sexual victimization and runaway leads to a pattern of “risk amplification” (Chen et al., 2004, p.1). A

study interviewed 361 homeless and runaway girls in four Midwestern states and found drug abuse on the streets concomitant with early sexual abuse. The girls ran away at an early age and used whatever methods they could to survive on the streets (Chen et al., 2004).

One study contends that one in five high school girls experience physical and/or sexual abuse in their relationships. Those girls who report abuse had a significantly elevated risk of using alcohol, tobacco and cocaine, unhealthy weight control and attempted suicide (Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001). Approximately 20 to 25 percent of girls and young women between the ages of 13 and 20 have experienced physical or sexual dating violence (Surprenant, Jezierski, Bauer, & Taliaferro, 2002). Literature also suggests that girls may be more sensitive to the abuse and trauma that occurs in the home than boys (Zahn, 2009). The reasons for this discrepancy are unknown.

A history of abuse (physical, sexual or emotional) is one major contributing factor to girl offenders currently detained in the nation. “An overwhelming, 92 percent of girls interviewed in four California counties in 1998 had suffered some form of abuse...” (Sherman, 2005, p. 21). Trauma and abuse are common characteristics of girl juvenile offenders, which is not always the case when looking at male juvenile offenders. Research suggests that girls are at a higher risk of being abused than boys (Holsinger, 2000). She also suggests girls who are abused often run away from home and become offenders (Siegel & Williams, 2003). Such statistics support this proposal’s focus on girls’ stories as a valuable research tool.

### **School Factors**

Issues of wealth, race and gender disparities still plague the educational system (Redfield Nance, 2016). More than ever before, schools have a crucial function in educating young people, however, today schools also play key role in fast-tracking or intervening on the school to

prison pipeline (STTP) (Osher, et al., 2012). Today, schools in America respond to student misconduct and disobedience in radically different ways than in the past in the form of School Resource Officers, surveillance cameras, random searches and swift punitive actions (Kupchik, 2009). Such strategies to implement punishment is as common in some schools hallways as phone calls home once were as a response to students misbehaviors.

**Teachers.** Society assumes that teachers come to work because they want to help children grown and reach their full potential (Byrnes, 2009). In effective schools, teachers set the bar high for students to succeed and translate those expectations into teaching actions, setting objectives, and striving for the mastery of those objectives, spend more time on instruction and actively monitor students' progress. "They plan and they know their students will succeed" (Sadker, Sadker & Zittleman, 2013, p.13). However, Pesky and Hancock (2006) suggest that the very children who need to be taught by the most qualified teachers are often assigned the teachers with the least experience, education and skills. There are achievement gaps that attest to Pesky and Hancock's purport.

Part of the rationale for gaps in academic achievement of students of color, may be the shortage of teachers of color. While 45% of the 49 million public school students in the US are students of color, only 16.5% of the 3.2 million teachers are of color (Coopersmith, 2009).

Researchers suggest the education of teachers working with culturally diverse students is of vital important since schools and the teachers they hire have a direct role in accelerating or intervening on the school to prison pipeline (STPP) (Cornbleth, 2008; Osher et al., 2012). Those educators who strive to have good relationships with their students families make an attempt to learn about each student and then relate that knowledge in their professional interactions with the families help to ensure student achievement (Osher et al. 2012). Teachers also need specialized

professional development and ongoing preparation in evidence-based practices if there is to be any changes in the classroom that leads to a slowdown in students being funneled into the STPP (Shippen, Patterson, Green & Smitherman, 2012). Teachers can and do make a difference in whether students' succeed or fail in their academic life, which often effect their future outside of the education realm (Zahn, 2009).

**School Bonding.** The term school bonding is used in the study to showcase the unique attachment, commitment and connection students have with teachers, staff, officials and peers at school. School bonding may also be referred to as belonging, attachment or involvement. I utilize the term school bonding as it encompasses all of the aforementioned aspects.

School bonding has been shown to reduce dropout rates (Peguero, Ovink, & Yun Ling, 2016). Low bonding to school is one of the factors that researchers site in adding to the risks of girls becoming prone to violent behavior. The formation of a bond between students and school involves four elements: attachment, commitment, involvement and belief (Hirschi, 1969).

Attachment is defined as relational ties which bind youth to significant others. Commitment refers to a youth's desire to aspire to something higher than they currently seem themselves as which typically leads into involvement. Involvement requires youth to participate in socially valued activities that more than likely will benefit in their successful completion of his or her commitment. A belief system is determined to be a critical piece of the social control theory. Belief simply stated suggests that the youth adheres to and accepts social value system which is mostly created out of a sense of morality (Hirshi, 1969). Without these four components Hirshi postulated that youth would offend as there is nothing to metaphorically ground them.

Poor attachment has been associated with the inability to form and maintain stable relationships (Pajer, 1998; Peguero et al., 2016). If students do not have a reason to attach to

school, the chances of them dropping out increases (Cavanagh & Fomby, 2011). While many youth have been labeled as drop-outs, the reality is that many low-income students and students of color are the ones being pushed out (Strassfield, 2017; Valenzuela, 1999). Many students of color are also inappropriately placed in high-incidence special education class which limits their connection to school and increases their risk of dropping out (Harry & Klinger, 2006).

**Students with Disabilities.** Special education was born out of a debate about who belongs in schools and how far schools need to stretch to meet student needs (Byrnes, 2009). The controversy is far from over. Byrnes (2009) discusses about what has changed. How in the past, 35 years ago children with disabilities were not welcome in their local schools and parent's choices were limited to teaching their child at home, looking for a spot in a religious school or send a child to an institution. Unlike today, there were no laws to protect students with disabilities.

The history of special education in American public schools is relatively new and has been created through legislation with laws such as IDEA (1975, 2004) (Byrnes, 2009). Today students with special needs make up 13 percent of the school population or almost seven million students with the largest number of students considered to have a learning disability (Turnbull, 2015). Students with disabilities are twice as likely to drop out of school and today are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system (Hogan, et al., 2010)

It is estimated that between 40 to 70 percent of incarcerated youth have disabilities (Bullis, Yovannoff, Mueller & Havel, 2002; Mishna & Muskat, 2001). Two out of three students who enter a correctional facility have been identified as a student with a disability and have received special education services prior to incarceration (Soliz & Cutter, 2001). According to



Lenssen, Doreleijers, van Dijk, and Hartman (2000) a majority of girls who are incarcerated have also received special education.

Ninety percent of youth arrested have met criteria for at least one or more disability (Neville, 2001). Young et al. (2010) affirms there is indeed an overrepresentation of students with learning disabilities who are incarcerated and purports an inconsistency in the numbers of students with learning disabilities and emotional disorders reported according to the Office of Juvenile Justice (2009). The possibility noted for this discrepancy is the differing definitions researchers impose on youthful offenders and the fact that researchers are often working in different fields of study with differentiating jargon and definitions.

The jargon used by the different service providers has limited accurate statistics on exactly who is in correctional facilities (Young et al., 2010). What we do know is that there is a much higher probability of a student who has special needs (specifically high incident disabilities such as emotional disorders or learning disabilities) being incarcerated (Gagnon et al., 2012).

One study concerning the number of students who offend and enter the juvenile justice system are classified as disabled, as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, (IDEA) approximate that 12.6 percent of juvenile offenders have intellectual disabilities and 35.6 percent have learning disabilities (Casey & Keilitz, 1990). Solitz and Cuttler (2001) purport students with emotional disturbance and specific learning disabilities have the highest rate of adversarial interactions with the law and 20 percent of students with disabilities are arrested at least once before finishing high school. Abrams and Haney (2004) found graduation rates for special education students is only 50 percent. Adding to these students' struggles, researchers suggest that despite the increasing number of students with disabilities being incarcerated,

special education services, although mandated under federal special education policy, are lacking in correctional facilities.

Therefore, this failure effectively “locks out” countless students from receiving a quality education, and perpetuates their journey through the school-to-prison pipeline (Caldwell, & Curtis, 2013). Academic programs must be further funded to ensure this student population has the services they are entitled to in accordance with state and federal mandates.

### **Consequences of Educational Policies Expediting the Pathway to Detention**

Several educational policy changes that were meant to help students succeed in the classroom have accomplished just the opposite. Many youth who would have at one time been disciplined in school, now find themselves on the road to incarceration through juvenile justice services. Legislation such as Zero Tolerance policies which were implemented in the 1990s, has been one major factor in the rise in students suspended from school and encountered law enforcement, which has nearly doubled, since the 1970s (Hatt, 2011).

Many state legislatures and school districts have expanded The Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, to include mandatory expulsions for drugs and alcohol, fighting, gang membership, threats, and /or swearing. By 1995 most states had legislation to prosecute juveniles as adults. These laws increased the likelihood of any adolescent acting out in school to being expelled (Skiba & Knesting, 2002). Much of the rationale for the discrepancy between adolescent development research and the reality of the harsh punishment laws for juveniles comes directly from the perception that there is a public mandate to be tough on crime (Hirschfield, 2008).

### **Zero Tolerance**

Zero Tolerance policies have had (un)intended consequences for at risk youth and have led to a constant flow of students who at one time might have been disciplined within the walls

of their schools to be guided directly to jail (Kupchick, 2009). These consequences disproportionality effect African-American students (Knaus, 2007).

Critics of zero tolerance policies suggest that providing a police presence in schools actually leads to the arrest of student for misconduct, such as fighting. Previously disciplinary action would have meant school punishment and perhaps a mark on the student's file rather than the start of an arrest record (Kupchik, 2009).

In current American schools, the process in which discipline is defined, managed, and implemented closely resembles methods used in crime control (Hirschfield, 2008). Researchers Chesney-Lind & Irwin (2008) contend that an increase in rates of male youth violence in the eighties and nineties were the impetus for strict "law and order" codes written by schools and the advent of increased surveillance over students. The researchers suggest that such rigid rules for suspension, transfer or expulsion for rule breakers, led to the "no-exception" mentality of school today. An unfortunate consequence of those policies, are that schools most effected by such surveillance and the use of zero tolerance, are those that serve poor, youth of color.

### **School-to-Prison Pipeline**

The STPP is a set of policies and practices that increase the chance that children and youth will become criminalized and incarcerated and decrease the chance that they will attain a high-quality education. It focuses on punitive consequences, student exclusion, and justice-system intervention over a student's right to an education. The number of students affected by STTP is rising and students of color and students with disabilities are being funneled into jail at alarming rates (Advancement Project, 2011). "While educational policies profoundly shape young people's experiences, policy analyses are often not extended to their "on-the-ground" implications for K-12 students, within the everyday contexts of their lives (Brown 2011, p. 814).

It is that missing knowledge of what transpires in the daily lives of students of color that aids in the siphoning of children from schools and sends them on the pathway to incarceration. According to Houchin, Shippen, and Murphy (2012) this diverse group of students who share similar backgrounds of being underprivileged, of color, disabled, mentally ill and having poor school academic and behavioral experiences are being pushed from the halls of our schools into the cells of our prisons. But program based changes have the ability to make a difference in the education of youth offenders (Mathur & Schoenfeld, 2010). Even while in detention facilities, youth are entitled to education services which includes access to special education services (Board of Education v. Rowley, 1982; Leone & Meisel, 1997).

The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) is bulging and the pathway that leads from school to prison is disproportionately filled with students of color (Osher et.al. 2012). In the U.S. in 2009 1.9 million juveniles were arrested (OJJDP, 2011). Half of that number are guided through juvenile justice facilities with about 100,000 committed to that system (Shippen, et. al, 2012).

### **Issues within the Juvenile Justice System**

Juveniles and their detention began as a way to ensure the safety of young offenders by removing them from the walls of adult prisons (Twomey, 2008).

**Educational Services within JDC.** Students housed within detention facilities have a unique set of needs (Gagnon et al., 2012) yet students are missing critical instruction time as they transition either into or out of a facility (Young et al., 2010). The majority of these students have already experienced school failure at some level prior to their incarceration. Negative attitudes toward school along with school failure are viable predictors of criminal activity in girls. That disconnect that occurs when a student experiences school failure affects girls more directly than boys.

It is unfortunate that tensions often arise between the mission of the public school system and the mission of detention facilities. Both organizations are required to provide educational services for these young offenders (Gagnon et al., 2012); however, education is rarely the priority of a detention center. A detention facilities main focus is to detain. Education then becomes an afterthought.

Research conducted by Morrison and Epps (2002) suggests that there is a lack of quality education within juvenile justice settings. This educational/juvenile justice fail is unacceptable and according to NCLB legislation against the law. Students who are incarcerated are covered under the far-reaching arms of the NCLB. Those children who are incarcerated bring with them into a facility the same rights to a quality education as their non-incarcerated peers. One might go as far to say, these students need this protection most. They are no longer at-risk for being incarcerated; now their futures are in question. They require the best, brightest and most dedicated teachers.

Teachers within a juvenile facility require training that will assist in the day to day issues that many times are at higher intensity levels than those in a public school setting (Houchins, Puckett-Patterson, Crosby, Shippen, & Jolivet, 2009). This means the juvenile justice facility and the school districts must work together to ensure that the detained youth have not only the opportunity receive a quality education but they also can leave the facility ready to be productive citizens. Training on collaboration is critical as there are multiple agencies who work within the wall of a detention facility (Gagnon, et al., 2012).

**Gender Bias.** The juvenile justice system was made in the image of adult confinement with a decidedly different mission, to rehabilitate, boys (Liddell & Martinovic, 2013). Girls have been but an afterthought in the world of juvenile justice. While we understand that there are

differences between the sexes and how each offend and the risk factors involved in their decision making (or lack thereof) minimal has been done to comprehensively change the justice system and services for girls (Sherman, 2005).

Females make up the minority of the prison population for both juveniles and adults but have seen the fastest and highest percentage of arrest rates in the past 20 years (Chesney-Lind et al., 2008; Daigle et al., 2007; Zahn, 2009). Risk assessments are tools used to better understand the specific risks related to women offenders (Emeka & Sorensen, 2009).

When discussing gender vs. sex in scholarly literature, gender is used to indicate characteristics that are believed to be absorbed and acquired by males or by females as a result of his or her social experience, whereas sex indicates the biological status of male or female. According to Spence and Helmreich, (1978) gender role is defined by shared cultural expectations about appropriate behaviors for males and females and gender typing is the way each develops those roles and the attributes consistent with male and females, which leads to gender-typed behaviors, personality characteristic, beliefs, preferences and attitudes.

Hubbard and Pratt (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of predictors for delinquency in girls. The analysis revealed that historically there has been little significance in gender differences, as they relate to risk for delinquency. However, in recent studies, predictability of delinquency was strongly linked to family relationships and previous abuse. Females who experience “family disruption” were more likely to be delinquent (Steketee et al., 2013; Mattell, 2017). The findings of the meta-analysis also showed that since there has been an increase in females entering the prison system, it is crucial to better understand why females are offending.

Because of that more recent discovery, many authors have suggested that the older, generic risk-factor assessment tools, which tend to mainly have utilized male samples, are more

prone to steer toward classification errors when used with girls (Schwalbe, Fraser, Day & Cooley, 2006).

In contrast to Hubbard and Pratt's study, Sherman (2005) posits that girls bring with them a different set of issues than their male counterparts. These conflicting accounts suggest that there is more work to be done since there is not a consensus in the field about potential risk factors being gendered or not.

Many times females are incarcerated based on status offenses which are offenses based solely on the age of the offender (i.e. truancy, smoking, drinking, running away) (Chesney-Lind, 1989). Reasons for detaining girl offenders range from violent offenses to the more common practice of "bootstrapping," which refers to detaining girls for their own protection (i.e. prostitution, runways etc.) (Zahn et al., 2002). Young women also often end up back in prison based on technical violations, such as violating probation (Edleman & Watson, 2012).

Many of the girls who are incarcerated have been victims of many forms of abuse. Sherman suggests that detention may exacerbate those issues for these adolescents, who often enter detention centers many times, are victimized all over again. She lays out the importance of focusing on how to change the system for girls. She suggests ways to eliminate gender bias in the detention centers and how to appropriately respond to the needs of these young women.

What is clear is that girls and boys offend for different reasons. They are also detained for different reasons. Many times boys are detained for violent, aggressive behavior whereas girls continue to be detained for offenses that are related to their juvenile status. Girls' delinquency varies from boy offenders too, in that girls' offenses are less chronic and often less serious. One in-depth study of a large urban court system found that 73 percent of the girls, as opposed to 54 percent of boys who enter the juvenile justice system never return on a new referral (Synder &

Sickmund, 1999). What is also evident is the causes and correlates of delinquency in girls cannot be addressed with gender specific research alone research must dig further to find similarities and differences among offenders other than simply gender or sex (Klein & Corwin, 2002).

Even as the topic gains traction in the media very little research investigating what is actually happening for these young women is being conducted (Sanger et al., 2010). Chesney-Lind, Morash, and Stevens (2008) reviewed the literature addressing the issue of girl's incarceration and the programs available to them. It was noted that there was not one program focused on education dealing with either previous experiences or difficulties the girls were currently facing.

What cannot be ignored about this common practice of placing girls in detention centers for non-violent status offenses, is that they typically serve longer sentencing times than the boy juvenile offenders who are sentenced for the same (or at times more severe) offenses (Morris, 2016; Sherman, 2005; Wun, 2016). This is a failure of multiple systems attempting to work together which creates a type of inter-system "detention dumping." "Detention dumping" refers to different agencies having difficulty figuring out what services girls may need, so they place them in a detention facility since there is no other place to ensure their safety (Sherman, 2005).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Research can help to refute the claim that Western-based epistemologies create an objective knowledge when it rules out a particular knowledge from the stories of people of color (Collins, 2000). The theoretical framework of this project is positioned among critical theories of race, gender and disability. My voice and perspective is intertwined throughout the discussion to justify the use of the frameworks chosen.



## **Critical Race Theory**

I first started teaching students ranging from kindergarten through third grade. My students were considered emotionally or behaviorally handicapped. My classroom was a self-contained classroom, meaning my students spent less than 20 percent of their day with students who were in the general education classes. In my first year as a teacher, I had 13 students. One was white. She was also a girl. So, that meant 11 African American children; 10 boys and 1 girl in my class. It struck me as odd, even then. My lone Caucasian girl had been diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder via a psychiatrist. All of my other students found themselves in my classrooms via teacher referral and school placement.

Even when intersectionalities are examined; race is at the forefront (Leonardo, 2012). First and foremost is the assumption of race. Race assumes that there are commonalities between phenotypes and genotypes and that those similarities matter (Bonilla-Sylvia, 2014). Critical race theory states in order to make noticeable changes in sexism, class disparity, and connections between families and schools, race must be explicitly addressed (Leonardo, 2012). Our notions of race and how they are used are so ingrained in who we are as a society, that many times we do not realize the injustice or absurdity of our actions (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

I was schooled in the age of colorblindness and my whiteness as a power structure of “normal” (Ladson-Billings, 1998) was not even a blip on my psyche let alone a course in my education classes. I had what I would call watered-down multicultural infusion within my course work but the connection to pedagogy was lost on me. I take responsibility for that. I am not sure that I could have fully comprehended the brevity of the curriculum at the time. What I eventually would come to learn on my own was that colorblindness was a movement that proved

to be detrimental to the educational success of the students who sat there on a balmy August morning in my self-contained, emotionally behaviorally disordered portable (Alexander, 2010).

My portable was located as far from the school as possible. Literally, my portable was the last structure on the campus, by a busy street, with not even as much as a fence holding us in to symbolize that we were a part of a larger whole. We were alone; figuratively and physically. I was a well-educated, albeit young, but well educated woman, yet the disproportionality I saw before me was jarring. The lack of diversity in my classroom did not require any theoretical lens to identify something was amiss.

As I began my doctoral studies almost a decade later, the memory of my boys (and my White girl) pushed me to explore why I felt a pang that morning in my classroom. Diving head first into the literature it was to my surprise (embarrassingly so) that there was and continues to be an entire theory as to why I saw what I saw in my pitiful excuse for a classroom all those years ago. I found answers to questions I was asking in critical race theory. I found declarative statements to the significance of race (Ladson-Billings, 1998) which were in direct contrast to the *multicultural* teachings of past (think “melting pot” and “we are all the same” rhetoric).

I could not help but wonder if I as the right person to do this research. I am not African-American. I am not Latina. I am not Native American, Portuguese, Jamaican, or Asian. I am white. My ancestry speaks to a more cultured definition of who I am, but my skin screams my race...loudly. So I struggled with my position as a white person and my assumed “white privilege” (MacIntosh, 1990).

An important component of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is addressing the culture of power (Berry & Stovall, 2013) and how those power structures play out in society. A principle of CRT is that race permeates all aspects of society (Chadderton, 2013). I know what I know from

my experiences, even if they are white. My perceptions of my experiences make up my reality (epistemology). I came to recognize that being a white woman did not exempt me from experiences of race (Chadderton, 2013). My experiences were different than those of all other girls and yes that included girls of color as well as other White girls. My experiences are uniquely my own. Multiplicity is part of the human experience. While some experiences are similar, all are unique to the individual and therefore important to the master narrative (Berry & Stovall, 2013).

Although my experiences are white, that does not exclude me from the conversation. In fact, critical race is about confronting race and looking at it head on. So my internal dialogue about my race and how it plays out in my research is the very crux of what critical race theory is made of. Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) unequivocally call out all researchers who have interest in examining the issues related to Black girls, in particular, to do just that. They suggest there is not enough research being done to address the needs, stereotypes and stressors associated with young women of color and invite all interested scholars (women and men of all races) to explore the lived stories of girls of color.

Wolcott (1994) suggests turning to theory when qualitative researchers are attempting to either interpret or analyze data. “Coming from various racial experiences and histories, subjects live race realities as a relation between their objective and subjective world” (Leonardo, 2012 p. 600). Researchers are now calling for students and practitioners to dig deep and reexamine our concepts of race and their implications (Daniels, 2011).

While the conversation of race and education typically revolves around African-American males, this study intends to expose the injustices done to girls of color who are arguably on the fringe of the issue (Austin, 1995). “There is a need for more scholarship in the

field of education that looks at the educational experiences and schooling process of African-American girls” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p.12). This study did not speak to African-American girls exclusively, the research does however show that most girls who are considered at risk or have been removed are disproportionately African-American.

Looking at the overall picture of the students involved in the juvenile justice system it is clear that African-American experience a disproportionate amount of encounters with law enforcement than any other population of students (Office of Juvenile Justice and Detention Prevention, 2002). The judicial system coined a term to describe this phenomenon; disproportionate minority contact or DMC. With the judicial systems acknowledgement of this disproportionate contact with students of color it seems as though the education system who disproportionately introduces students of color to that system would also have a coined phrase. It does not. Although the discussion of the school to prison pipeline focuses broadly around students of color the connection of school, race and criminal justice, has been largely been left unexplored (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

**Pieces of DisCrit.** The intersectionality of race, school based disability, and the school to prison pipeline are inexplicably linked. This connection is complex and using one without the other ignores the importance of how society’s conception of race and disability work together (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). Therefore a new theoretical framework meshes the work of disabilities study (DS) with Critical Race Theory (CRT): DisCrit. The purpose of this framework is to explore the ways in which students are both raced and dis/abled (Annama, et al., 2013, p.5). The tenets of DisCrit focus on how racism and ableism work interdependently in order to endorse notions of normalcy. DisCrit acknowledges the social construction of race, class, gender, sexuality and dis/ability and values the individuality of each person and their sense of identity.

However; DisCrit suggests that social construction of identity has an impact on the psyche of those who are set on the fringe of western cultural norms. DisCrit seeks to review the historical phases of dis/ability and race while recognizing these have been used separately and together to subjugate the rights certain individuals. This framework requires upholding the voices of those populations who are typically marginalized within society as well as ignored within the research. Lastly DisCrit “requires activism and supports all forms of resistance” (Annamma, et al., 2013, p.11). Annamma and colleagues (2013) insist that this framework does not imply that those who are dis/abled, are of color or that those of color, are dis/abled. They also make clear that DisCrit acknowledges all experiences, colored, dis/abled or otherwise, are varied (2013). This theoretical framework is a newly developed structure which utilizes theories of two historically disconnected contexts to explore the connectivity of race and ableism. This framework can also be employed while exploring the issues of gender, race, disability and juvenile justice which have been largely ignored (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

### **Critical Feminist Theory**

Engaging heavily with profuse amounts of literature makes one doubt and reflect their position more than one time throughout this process. To say I negotiated and renegotiated my theoretical lens for this project would be a gross understatement. I fell madly in love with the word of Gwendolyn O’Neal (2000) as she fumbled through her discovery of herself as a feminist.

If feminism is about destroying boundaries that  
keep people from each other and correcting the  
power imbalances in society through forms of resistance  
and opposition regardless of factors such as gender, race,

ethnicity, age class and religion, then the label fits me. (p.197).

As far back as the 1800's and early 1900's research began with sexist social beliefs that were based on gender stereotypes and later padded with facts found to support those researcher's particular social or political beliefs (Gould, 1981). Up until the 1970's girls were rarely included in the criminological studies by researchers (Belknap, 2001). Today those studies still tend to use males as the focus of research (Thornberry & Krohn, 2003). Jennifer deSaxe (2016) posits that critical feminist theory is a paradigm that educators can use to shed a light on forms of resistance, empowerment, and experiences within the educational system. It is certainly true and necessary if one is to look through a focused lens at girls who are at-risk of educational derailment.

The feminists of the 1960s and 1970s brought to light women who were indeed governed by the rules of a patriarchal society, as they tackled issues of rape and domestic violence. However, the criminal justice system was staunchly founded and run by males. So it should be of no surprise that research on women and the justice system (a male dominated system) has been largely overlooked (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). Researchers recognize that even at the dawn this new millennium, qualitative studies are still needed to better determine motivations and processes that deal with girls and their experience with inequalities of the criminal justice system and beyond (Holsinger, 2000).

Mainstream criminology has not focused on girls' journeys into the criminal justice system, the consequences of victimizations, or the experiences of girls which are undoubtedly unique from boys (Holsinger, 2000). Most scholars do agree that much more detailed, specific and descriptive qualitative analysis is needed to comprehend that pathway for girls into the

juvenile justice system (Robinson, 1994). According to Miller (2007) in order to better understand crime and delinquency we must attest to the role that gender roles play in the behavior and social interactions among students who are delinquent.

From the time girls are little, they are faced with many contradictions about what they can and cannot do. Their roles are set by subservience and dependence, yet they are youth and there is an expectation of exploring their independence (Alder, 1997). A major part of this exploration is a girl's sexuality. Chesney-Lind contend that even today the concern for girls' morality and sexuality result in unequal treatment by the juvenile justice system.

Research on girls' delinquency has primarily concerned itself, with few exceptions, with environmental and behavioral risk factors for antisocial behavior (Hartman, Turner, Diagle, Exum, & Cullen, 2009; McKnight & Loper, 2002). Attributes and positive factors that may affect the girls' outcomes and keep a girl from ending up a delinquent have been relatively ignored.

While this project is situated within the realm of critical feminism, I recognize that MacKinnon's take on feminism inherently pessimistic (Munro, 2003). She states that all women are victims to the male domination pitting one sex against the other (Munro, 2003). Foucault's theory of power helps to temper the radical feminism rhetoric without watering down the message of dominance. Foucault theorizes that all humans are subject to the power struggle (e.g. dominance) so while indeed the masculine dominate the feminine, the masculine are also dominated by the more masculine.

Feminist have been criticized that they uphold a myopic view that all women experience dominance (O'Neal, 2000). Feminist counter that the inability to acknowledge one's dominance, is in fact, the evidence that dominance exists (Munro, 2003). For girls in detention centers or

alternative education centers “subordination and hierarchies of knowledge constructions” abound (Presser, 2005, p. 2067). What is clear is that critical feminism contends that girls who are incarcerated, are so do to the subservient patriarchal society in which they are dominated and ultimately victimized (Liddell & Martinovic, 2013).

Yet feminism is formulated on the notion that women must see themselves as agents of change who are dedicated to ensuring that all women’s choices are actualized, even though they may be a result of inadvertent patriarchy (Chambers, 2005). Therefore in this research project, I recognize the subtleties of hierarchal male dominance within an alternative center of education; however, my participants may not be able to identify this dominance and may even reject the idea.

## **Conclusions**

The reasons girls have been increasingly detained in juvenile detention centers continue to be argued amongst the fields that work to support them. The speculation of reasons for increased presence of girls in detention centers range from, the intolerance of non-compliant girls (Morris, 2012), to the “protection” of the female juvenile offenders (Sherman, 2005). The literature proposes possible risk factors that girls may exhibit prior to entry into a detention facility; those tend to vary from the risk factors of their male adolescent counterparts (Pasko, 2010). A deeper understanding of their lived experiences may assist in creating effective educational interventions or strategies.

Quantitative studies allow researchers to examine girls who are detained in the centers from databases and survey data (Sanger et al., 2010). However, each girl comes to the center with very personal experiences, each one different from the others. Further studies exploring girl



adolescent voices would allow the field to better understand the perceptions of education they bring with them as they matriculate through an academic institution.

Further research will give these girls an opportunity for self-reflection about their lives. They can then take a critical look into the choices they have made and the circumstances which have led them to an alternative education center. The value of their experiences, for service providers, juvenile justice workers and educators alike, cannot be overstated.

Much of the information needed to make viable changes throughout multiple systems lies within information gleaned from distinct perspectives. Studies utilizing these individual voices to examine issues directly related to the research seek to add much to the paucity of this subject in the literature (Zhang et al., 2009).

Identification of the key issues surrounding this disturbing upward trend of juvenile females being incarcerated have been established (Hubbard & Pratt, 2002) yet suggestions of how to change this trajectory is lacking (Sherman, 2005). The research base on adjudicated girls is sparse.

The literature states that educational outcomes are directly related to high risk behavior. High risk behavior is directly related to entrée into the justice system. Therefore, understanding the first steps these girls took towards contact with the juvenile justice system will better inform the field and broaden the literature base.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODS**

**“I think it’s important to encourage young people to tell their own stories and to speak openly about their own experiences...” (Alexander, 2010 p. 7).**

#### **Introduction**

Story telling is a way in which humans have connected since the dawn of mankind. Whether it is through hieroglyphics, mythology, folklore or fairy tales, stories have been at the center of who we are and how we understand our lives. People teach through story, they warn through story and they seek truth through story. However, “...narrative is everywhere, but not everything is narrative” (Riessman, 2008, p. 4). “It is a way of thinking about identities relationally” (Clandinin, 2013, p.21).

Narrative inquiry, as method and methodology elevates story telling for entertainment into a new realm. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry propels stories into “intellectual territory” (p. 21). Within this territory stories are carefully attended to, temporally organized and specifically sequenced. Riessman (2008) recommends that characters be developed and settings be described with painstaking detail.

This study engaged girls in storytelling that were at risk of being incarcerated. I was interested in the stories of their educational journeys and of their perceptions of how they ended up in an alternative center.

As the population of incarcerated girls grows, our knowledge about who they are (according to their perceptions and not societies) remains limited. Alexander (2010) advocates we have to encourage youth to tell their stories. There are copious amounts of research suggesting students' voices have been widely overlooked, especially when looking at the school-to-prison pipeline (Alexander, 2010; Smith & McIntosh, 2007; Tasca, Zatz & Rodriguez, 2012; Zahn, 2009) yet little is being done to rectify this issue.

This research focused on girls' perceptions of their own storied path through school in terms of race, disability, and gender. Engaging in questions that revolve around how those perceptions may have impacted their educational journeys opens a dialogue between service providers and those they service.

I assert that understanding these girls, who they are and how they identify themselves, would better prepare teachers and current service providers to work with girls who may be at risk for exclusion from school, incarceration or those who are recidivists (Stein et al., 2015).

## **Purpose**

Chase (2003) states, prior to the start of any narrative inquiry study, she asks her students to think of a population or group which they are interested in. Typically, they choose a population that they feel they belong to or have a broad understanding of and go from there.

As my interest in the school-to-prison-pipeline grew, so did my desire to know more about the girls who were sent through the pipeline. I wanted to know more, not about how society saw them, but about how they saw themselves.

Storytelling is a reflective process. First, choosing the specific story to tell indicates to the narrative that the teller of the story places significance on the event itself (Knight, 2009). This study intended to explore those significant stories of the educational experiences of girls and any intersectionality of their education with biological sex, race and disability from those students' perspectives. The study addressed calls from the fields of educational and juvenile justice for at-risk youth to be heard (Reid, 2014; Rich, Wilbert & Robertson, 2016; Sanger et al., 2010; Stein et al., 2015; Walker, Muno, & Sullivan-Colglazaier, 2015).

### **Narrative Inquiry**

There must be a common understanding of narrative inquiry prior to accepting my utilization of the method and methodology. This study was grounded primarily in the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1990). Narrative can simply be described as “the study of how humans make meaning of experiences by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future” (p. 21).

According to Clandinin (2013) narrative inquiry can be seen as “...an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experiences as a source of important knowledge and understanding.” (p.17). Narratives are stories told in first person with plotlines, and characters who are, most of the time, in some sort of predicament or struggle (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

This research was founded on those premises. The girls I interviewed had stories to tell. These stories will add to the scholarly knowledge base of how youth at-risk travel on pathways that lead them to the exit doors of school (Townsend Walker, 2012) and directed them to the school to prison pipeline.

## Using Narrative

Narrative inquiry engages participants in conversations that are pertinent to a specific topic. The topic is addressed through questions, be it a guided protocol or perhaps a set of semi-structured questions. The topics elicit the histories of the participants regarding their perceptions.

The work of narrative comes in the reflective process (O'Malley, 2014). The reflective process is where the narrator (or researcher) co-constructs meaning of the stories being told with the participant. Yet, narrative researchers understand that the co-constructors (and themselves) are in a constant state of change. The reflection of a particular story varies based on the context of life at the time the story is being told. John Dewey introduced the ideals of constructivist knowledge to the field of education and the work of Connelly and Clandinin (2000) is firmly rooted there.

Storied histories attend to personal reflections of participants and their perceptions of the cause and effects related to certain instances (Creswell, 2006). In the instance of this study, the story of each girl was critical to determining her perception of how her identity did or did not directly impact her educational journey.

Reflection is a powerful tool used to reexamine how a person's experiences have shaped their beliefs (Knight, 2009). Ultimately, narrative allows one to construct his/her own identity. Through this evolution of identity, the researcher or participant can potentially spur on social change (Riessman, 2008).

Narrative inquiry insists on the researcher exploring herself (past, present and future) within the stories of others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative research is powerfully autobiographical. "Narrative inquiry begins and ends with a respect for ordinary lived experience" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 18).

I was excited to see the terms “idiosyncratic and narcissistic” (p.121) written right there on the page, since all I kept thinking about since the conception of this research, was, is *this self-serving*? Am I just trying to figure out who I am?

The truth, in part, is yes. I came to realize, even though I had a relationship with my research interest, that alone did not negate the larger social issues examined through the lived experiences of others (Lather, 2007). When using qualitative methods of gathering data and analyzing the data “the overall emphasis is not so much on the ‘truth’ but on its pragmatic function in society at large” (Newbury, 2011 p. 338).

Polkinghorne’s (2007) suggestion for when to use narrative inquiry, clearly illustrates why I have chosen to use this method to answer the research questions. He postulates that narrative inquiry asks questions as to how do one’s experience effect what happened to him/her later. How is *the who*, of who we are today, affected by *the who* we once were? Gaining practical knowledge of situations, experiences or circumstances is often shared through story-telling (Orr, 1990). Using narrative inquiry allows us to understand our storied lives by thinking *with*, and not just through, stories. Narrative inquiry allows for deeper exploration of the impacts these girls’ identities have had on their life’s journeys (Clandinin, 2013).

### **The Intersection of Ontology and Narrative Inquiry**

Ontology can be defined as determining the nature of reality (Creswell, 2007). Multiple realities and the construction of those realities depend on the individuals who create them (Guba, 1996). While conceptualizing this research project for the better part of two years, my personal narrative regarding my own constructed reality was naturally at the forefront of this research. “How we come to know ourselves, the world and how we operate in that world are all

products of narrative construction” (Wolgemuth, 2007 p.69). The researcher is part of the researched. It is the connection that draws the researcher to do the research in the first place.

### **Research Questions Revisited**

At the heart of each story is the interpretation of the multiplicity that is the human experience (Clandinin & Huber, 2002). It is the concern of a narrative inquirer to work with the participant to interpret the experience and make meaning of the past. This meaning making is natural and necessary (Clandinin & Huber, 2002).

We all live storied lives. We become entrenched in who we are or in relaying who we were when we tell or retell stories. The perspective changes through different spans of time (O’Malley, 2014). It is an iterative process. Each person’s interpretation of a story is a complex web of their stories entangled with stories they have once heard.

Co-construction in the midst of such entanglement is the nature of narrative inquiry and subsequently is what causes the method to be considered problematic by positivists (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013). This interconnectivity of researcher, participant, method and analysis allows the full scope of narrative inquiry (as a theory and methodology) to expose the research to all who are part of the social context (Lincoln et al., 2011). Co-constructing meaning from narrative inquiry is an epistemological assurance (Creswell, 2007).

A consumer of the research is bound to the story by resonance. Without resonance, the story momentarily hangs in the air around the consumer, never quite able to land and take root.

### **Research Questions**

In order to gain insight to the social context and subsequent educational journeys of the girls in this study, I proposed the following research questions:

1. What stories do girls being educated in alternative settings tell about their education?
2. To what extent is race featured in the girl's stories of their educational experiences?
3. To what extent is disability featured in the girl's stories of their educational experiences?
4. To what extent is gender featured in the girl's stories of their educational experiences?

### **Ethical Considerations**

**Informed Consent.** It is according to the ruling governance of the University of South Florida that the Internal Review Board (IRB) reviewed the proposal of this research prior to any collection of data. I adhered to all protocols set forth by the university, including, but not limited to: consent forms for guardians, assent forms for minors and interview protocol. Prior to conducting any research, I obtained a letter of support from the facility and had IRB approval.

**Anonymity.** In order to maintain confidentiality there are key descriptors in each narrative that have been changed to protect the participants of this study. I addressed these changes in a manner that kept with the concept of the story but changed the identifying details to ensure my participants and their alternative sites were protected (Laoire, 2007).

**Relationships.** As per most universities' standard operating procedures, researchers are required to grant assurances that they will do no harm to their participants. These particular participants have been categorized as a marginalized group creating a unique dilemma in the way the research is approached. These girls' interviews could not be viewed simply as data. We



inevitably formed a relationship which was fostered as the girls worked with me as co-researchers.

These girls were desperate for positive adult interaction. Not only was I someone disconnected from their pasts, but I wanted to know all about them. They allowed me entrée into some very dark times in their lives. They trusted me with their feelings, their hopes, dreams, and ultimately, trusted me to tell their stories.

**Confidentiality.** This type of research insists on anonymity, the utmost confidentiality and trust (Clandinin & Huber, 2002). For this purpose, the girls' names were changed and transcribed data was housed separately from any taped recordings of the interviews both of which were entered into computers with password protection. Printed transcripts were placed into a locked file cabinet.

Prior to the interviews, I discussed with the girls how we would be using pseudonyms for each of them, since their information would be disseminated (Bar-On, 1996). The girls chose their own pseudonyms and the spellings of each: Jocelyn (girl one) and Shay (girl two).

If at any time during the project a participant was uncomfortable with a question, she had the right to refuse to answer and was informed of this at the beginning of each interview session. She also had the right to remove herself from the study altogether with no repercussions from me or from the facility. To ensure each girl remained aware of her volunteer status, I stated at the commencing of each meeting that this interview process was voluntary and that if at any time she so desired, she could chose to leave the project without consequence.

**Bringing up the Past.** As an interviewer I asked my participants to retell stories that may have had a powerful impact on the way they viewed their current circumstances. Bar-On (1996) cautions that when meeting a new interviewee there are a series of questions you should

ask yourself before proceeding with the interview. “Do you really feel like interfering in his or her life? Will you be able to live with the consequences of this encounter and intervention?”

(p.9)

As we worked through the storied lives of each girl’s experiences, talking about the past could have brought up bad memories or issues she may not have yet dealt with fully. That is why for every interview session a behavior specialist/therapist was nearby. This behavior specialist was familiar with the girl and would have worked through any issues that might have arisen. No such incidences occurred during our interviews.

**Interviewing Ethics.** In order to ensure the highest standards of ethical practices when interviewing, I asked each participant at each interview for their permission to tape record our conversation. Once I received permission from the girl, I then tape-recorded her interview stating that I was recording her and that she had the option to stop the interview and the recording process at any time. Secondly, I discussed with the girls that I was a mandated reporter at each meeting. I explained that this meant if she divulged that she was being hurt in any way or had plans to hurt herself or others in any way, it was my responsibility to report this. Once I gave my explanation and she said she understood, we were able to move forward with the interview.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

As a woman born and reared in a *post-feminist* era, I bear witness to inequities which, in my female view, still plague our society. Consequently, I utilized a critical theory paradigm to engage in research with the purpose of fostering a society free from injustice (Geertz, 1973). My work with this project cannot be parceled out as researcher and the researched. I am a part of this work as it is a part of me. I cannot deny the fact that I am a woman who could have easily checked off a list of factors associated with girls who are at-risk.

This close connection to my participants would prove challenging at times during the interview process. I would hear stories that brought me back to a time and place where there was a definite fork-in-the-proverbial road of good choices and bad. Those discussions were the most difficult for me as a person. My researcher hat would inadvertently slip off. My past experiences collided with the stories my participants told and helped me to deconstruct my own beliefs and successive decisions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Stories are what tie people to places and connect personal experiences across spans of time (Caine & Estefan, 2011). As a narrative researcher, attention had to be given to time, place and societal context of the stories of both my lived experiences and the lived experiences of my participants (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2006). The co-construction of the shared relational work (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990) allowed me to be seen, not as an expert, but as a “co-researcher in relational narrative inquiry” (Clandinin & Huber, 2002, p.794). Therefore, my role as the researcher was one who engaged the participant in active questioning and listening while co-constructing meaning to unify stories.

## **Setting**

Setting is as critical in a narrative inquiry as the participants’ stories themselves. The setting can determine the tone of the story. Setting can maximize the ability (or inability) of the participant to be forthcoming with his/her story. It can also enhance or discourage rapport. Working with the girls in this study, my research was conducted within the walls of two separate alternative education centers which represented the same organization.

These facilities were and are located in a southern state situated in two discrete urban cities. The centers represented the same organization, but their locations were vastly different. The primary mission was focused on education and behavior management. The alternative

schools where the interviews were conducted were voluntary, as well as, mandated day-treatment facilities where students work to regain lost credits for middle school or high school.

The centers were highly structured facilities where the participants work primarily on computers to move through curriculum with a teacher facilitator. Participants also learned about community service and engaged in daily affective skills lessons.

The organization was originally established strictly to educate those students who were mandated by a judge to attend the alternative school. The center currently accepted students who either personally, or with the guidance of professionals (counselors, educational administrators etc.), felt they would be more successful there than at a typical public school.

All students in in both centers shared a history of expulsions and arrests for various reasons. Those reasons included, but were not limited to the following charges: drugs, weapons, battery, rape, and or theft charges. They ranged from misdemeanors to felonies. I identified this organization to conduct this research based primarily on my proximity and the possibility of gaining access to students.

**Table 1.**

**Outcome Report 2014**

| <b>Center 1</b>                              | <b>Center 2</b>                              |
|--|--|
| Total students: 104                          | Total students: 104                          |
| Completers: 79                               | Completers: 97                               |
| Priors: 100%                                 | Priors: 100%                                 |
| Average age of 1 <sup>st</sup> offense: 13.1 | Average age of 1 <sup>st</sup> offense: 13.7 |
| Minority: 73%                                | Minority: 48%                                |
| Females: 9                                   | Females: 8                                   |

## **Recruitment**

Center one: I originally met with the Educational Director and spoke to her about my study. She was very supportive. She suggested the best approach would be to meet with all of the girls at one time. I scheduled a time with her that I would be able to come in and speak.

I arrived at that scheduled date and time and was escorted to the conference room. All the girls that were at the center that particular day were in the conference room with me on that morning. I discussed the scope of the study and what it would entail. This conversation initially invoked a lot interest. I handed out consents with the proper protocols and gave each girl who was interested a packet to take home for their guardian's permission.

Center two: I had a phone conference with the director of the organization and discussed what the study would entail. He was also very supportive, yet cautious. He stated that his students struggled with truancy and was concerned that I would not get what I needed from them in a timely manner. I explained that I was willing to give it a try if he was. He gave me the consent to move forward with presenting the scope of the study to the girls at his center's location and I met with the five girls being serviced there in the main office. I presented my study within five minutes and gave each girl a packet for them to review with their guardian, if they were interested.

My discussion with the girls for both studies in essence laid out my inclusionary criteria. Those who were interested in participating needed to be at the alternative center receiving educational services. They also would have to identify themselves as girls. They had to be willing to talk to me about their educational experiences and any prior offenses or encounters with law enforcement. Participants also had to be willing to be a part of a minimum of five interviews which would last between 60-90 minutes each. I stated several times that this was

entirely voluntary. I closed with letting them know if they started the interview process and didn't like it, they could simply quit without any negative consequences.

I originally had a total of four girls who were immediately interested: two from each center. I sent four more consent documents home, as the original documents were misplaced by the girls. Two girls immediately returned their consent forms and provided assent for the interviews to take place: one girl from each center. One of the four girls never returned her consent while the last of the four girls, turned hers in a month later.

The program abruptly stopped servicing girls and I was unable to move forward with the third participant's interview. Ultimately I was able to move through the interview process with two girls: one from each center.

Center one participant was a fourteen-year-old girl. Center two's participant was a sixteen-year-old girl. My focus was with this age range in order to solicit significant descriptions. I relied on them to discuss their previous educational experiences in detail and also any life experiences they believed contributed to their placement at the center. I gathered extensive information about each participant's life and the context surrounding the stories told, which aided in providing rich description (Creswell & Creswell, 2007) for the results in the following chapter.

Although there are no set criteria for sample size, as it relates to narrative inquiry, generally speaking sample sizes are small (Creswell & Creswell, 2007). The purpose of narrative inquiry is to adhere to the minutiae of an individual's story. It is critical that the researcher does not attempt to generalize experiences. The experience or story is as unique as the individual who is narrating. The appropriate number of participants is not determined by the researcher, yet by the scope of the research, the methodology, and research questions (Tai & Ajjaw, 2016). The

sample size of two girls in this study allowed for variance in experiences without compromising the depth and breadth of the stories being explored.

## **Data Collection**

**Interviews.** In order to elicit life stories, it is vital that interview questions revolve around the story the narrator has to tell (Chase, 2003). Interviews were used as a way to engage the participants in deep and meaningful conversations. This exploration was developed to address the phenomenon they had experienced (Hatch, 2002). In order for me to keep the research questions as a focus of the interview, the conversation was guided. Broad questions were asked to hone in on the specific research questions being explored. Listening during interviews is a key component of narrative inquiry (Josselson et al., 2003). Being open to the story and actively listening are skills that take practice (Maple, Edwards, Plummer, & Minichiello, 2010).

I solicited stories pertinent to the research questions; however, to ensure active listening took place during the interviews, I asked follow-up questions that were closely guided by listening to the narrator's story and followed a logical flow (Chase, 2003). I was intimately familiar with my interview protocol, which was crucial to the fluidity of the interview. I knew if I was thoughtful in creating my interview guide I would be more likely to elicit stories and answers to my questions without having to directly ask the question (Chase, 2003).

**Interview Procedures.** Center one: All interviews were conducted in the conference space. This space could be locked from either end and had windows that looked out toward the parking lot. It also had an exterior door that lead to the parking lot. This room was utilized for all types of gatherings from administrative conferences to counseling sessions. The room was a multiple purpose space with little connotation.

My participant and I conducted all of her interviews in that one space. In the room there was a sink and a conference table that was surrounded by rolling chairs. The behavior specialist office shared a wall with the conference room and she was available at all times during the interview sessions.

There were five interviews conducted. All interviews were approximately sixty minutes in length. I started each interview with a reminder that this study was voluntary and if she decided that she wanted to no longer participate, she had the right to leave without any consequences. I also reminded her each time we met that I was tape recording our conversation with her permission and then I continued the interview.

Each interview was naturally transcribed within five to seven days. After the first meeting, the proceeding interviews began with a recap of our discussion and my understanding of the stories told in the previous session. Each of the interviews done with this participant were conducted during a time in the day when academic content was not being taught (i.e. lunch or activity time).

Center two: This participant's interviews were done in two locations within the center. The first was a common room we were able to use when no one else used the room. The second room we used was the behavior specialist's office. He gave me permission to conduct interviews in his room and the participant told me she liked this location best.

We conducted three out of five interviews in the behavior specialist office. The other two interviews were conducted in the common room simply because the behavior specialist was using his office at those times. His office and the common room shared a wall and I knew if we needed him at any time I could get to him quickly and effortlessly. While we were in his office,



he walked the corridors of the extremely small center. He was always within audible range if the participant or I needed him for anything.

All interviews were audio taped with the participant's permission and transcribed within five to seven days. Each interview started with me reminding the participant that her working with me was completely voluntary and if she chose to stop doing so, there would be no negative consequence to her whatsoever. Once she recognized that verbally, I would review her stories from the previous interviews to be sure I understood them the way she meant them to be established as shown in figure 1 above.

Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. We were able to talk a bit longer at this center than in Center One due to this participant being ahead in her course work. While I would come around lunch time each meeting, she could speak with me into her affective lesson or into her coursework because of how far she had advanced since coming to the center.

**Interview Content.** The interview process was cyclical. There was a pattern to our meetings in an attempt to create familiarity with an unfamiliar process. This was intentionally developed for the sake of the participant but unintentionally helped me with the interviews as well.

In the first interview, I discussed my background and why I was interested in hearing their stories. It was integral to the study that I facilitated and fostered a relationship with each of my participants. My positioning as a researcher, and simply as an adult, could have been off putting to one or both of the girls.

The interviews took place in a location where adults typically mimic parole officers. I wanted to be sure that each girl understood my purpose of speaking with her was not punitive. It was critical to state explicitly my role as a person who was interested in their educational

journeys and life experiences. In an attempt to lessen the impact of the interview location, I conducted the first session as a “getting-to-know-you” session (i.e. interview).

During the first interview session, I gave each girl her own personal journal. The purpose of the journal was to encourage the girls to write anything inside that they felt was pertinent to their lives. It could have been something they would like to add that we may not have discussed in the interview. Or perhaps more detail about a topic or event we did discuss in an interview. They could have also written their feelings about the day, about our interview, or they could have created a visual representation of a situation if they were finding it difficult to discuss. I told them this journal could also be used to jot down ideas, thoughts, and representations of situations that had nothing to do with our interviews. It was their journal to use as they wished.

It was vital that the girls understood that these journals would be collected by me and used as data. If a girl objected to her journal being given to me, I would have made copies of the journal and left her with the original.

The second, third and fourth interviews were also semi-structured in the sense that broad questions were predetermined (See Appendix A). That was an attempt to allow the focus of the research to remain at the forefront of the conversation. These interviews delved into the girls’ school experiences, life experiences and prior contact with law enforcement.

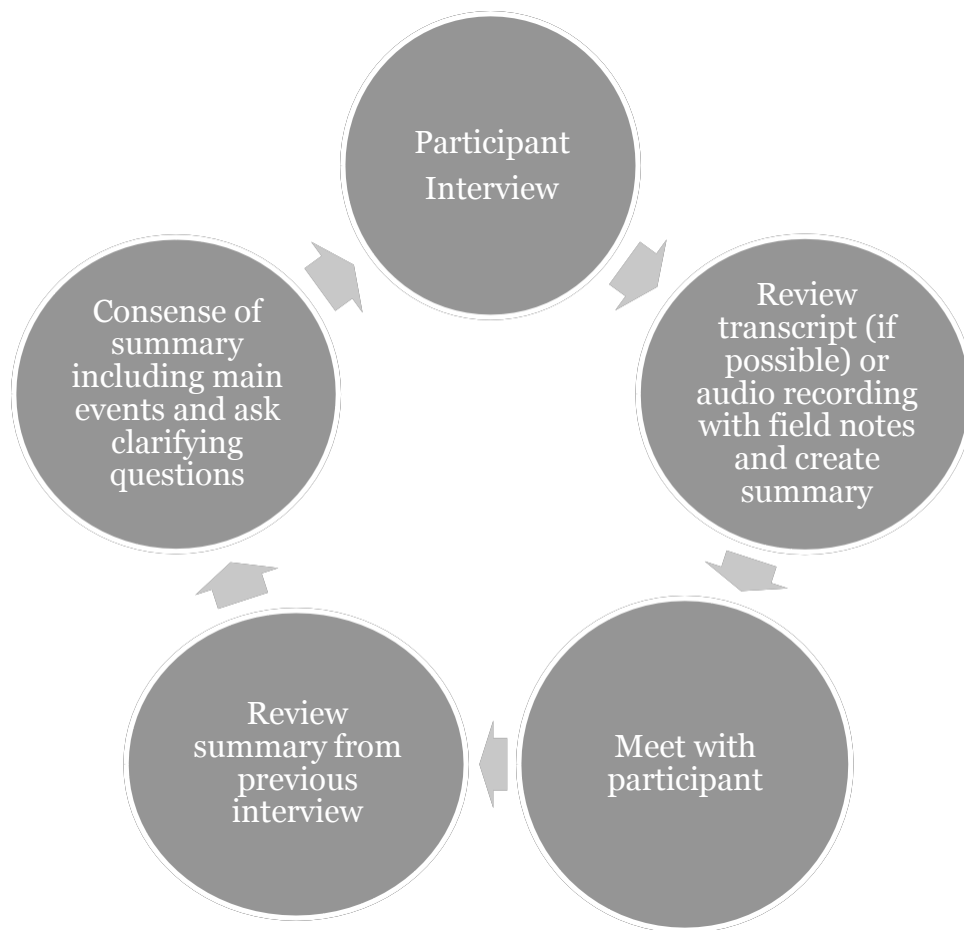
The fifth and final interview consisted of follow-up questions or clarifying questions (See Appendix B). I reviewed previous answers to the interview questions to ensure clarity within the story line and the meaning of the answers. Caine & Estefan (2011) remind narrative inquirers to never forget, that this sort of work relies on the generosity of those we inquire about. Therefore, it is critical to work with the interviewee through the co-construction of meaning of

the stories told. The final interview allowed for a wrap-up of thoughts, ideas and an opportunity to address any outstanding questions from either the participant or myself.

At times, the girls might have had questions they wanted me to ask that I had not considered or perhaps I belabored a point too long (Tierney, 1994). With that being said, I upheld the vision of my questions as springboards, but understood that these girls may have had more or less to say. I welcomed these types of interactions and encouraged the girls to speak to the points they felt were pertinent to their stories.

The fifth interview was different for both girls. Center one: I had not come to a concluding point of the interview process with my first participant by the fifth interview. I fully intended to interview her at least one more time if not two more times. She however, was arrested during the period of time the interviews were taking place. Consequently, she was never able to return to the center since it no longer serviced girls at that location.

Center two: I anticipated the fifth interview as being the last for my second participant. I was able to gain perspective on how she felt about telling her stories. I wanted to know if this was an intimidating experience or perhaps an empowering one. Gathering this data might have seemed menial, however; the catalytic validity of the project could be explored through answers about how she felt about the interview questions, process and any potential changes the girls were inclined to make as a result of our discussions.



**Figure 1. Data Collection Process**

**Student Journals.** Barone and Eisner (2006) discuss arts based research (ABR), specifically non-literary ABR as having an “illuminating effect” (p.102). They argue ABR can help the participant and researcher make meaning of the collected data. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also support the use of non-literary narratives (poems, pictures, songs etc.) in narrative inquiry as a source of data. Since many of these girls have historically been victims of trauma, eliciting their stories as well as drawings, poems, questions, songs or any other forms of visual art may help them discern their perceptions of school. These data were to be collected by giving each participant a composition book (journal) and a pencil. The girls were free to add whatever they chose to this journal with the understanding that the journal entries will serve as an adjunct to their stories.

The girls may have been hesitant to discuss the event(s) that led to their placement in the alternative school center. Having the ability to write or draw about their experiences could have encouraged them to discuss their stories in a way that is meaningful for them.

It was important for my participants to have an “out” in regards to answering my questions. I reminded these girls at each meeting that their participation was voluntary. If they chose to continue but feel like a spoken story is too difficult, I intended to redirect them to the journal. The journal could also be used after our meetings. The participants could use the journal to ask questions they thought of after our meeting ends, or perhaps they may have a story they want to add to one they have already told. The journal had the possibility of acting as a reflection journal, correspondence journal or a place to create images, poems or songs. The journals may have also provided the girls a safe distance between my guiding questions and their emotions.

**Researcher Reflexive Journal.** Of equal importance to actively listening, was observation of the interviewee during the interview process. Picking up non-verbal cues and a participant’s body language went in conjunction with the listening process. Non-verbal cues, body language and questions left unanswered were captured in my personal journal as a “blend of detailed field notes...interwoven with journal reflections” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 103). The added data source allowed me to review the interviews themselves as a whole and not in decontextualized segments (Clandinin & Huber, 2002). This reflexive journal illustrated important details of the design of the project, as well as, illuminating transformations that took place in regard to myself and my participants (Huber, Li, Murphy, Nelson, & Young, 2014; Mahoney, 2007).

## **Data Analysis**

**Interviews.** I have employed a holistic content analysis. Such an analysis is particularly interested in the “who, what, when, where and how” of the individual stories told by the participants (Beal, 2013). This type of analysis aligned with my epistemological perspective that narratives are layered and merged to create the story told (Spector-Mersel, 2010). This type of analysis also allowed for the story to be temporally positioned as the narrative spans the participant’s life time (Huber et al., 2014). The process I utilized was adapted from Polkinghorne (2007) and Beal’s (2013) work to analyze the interviews in a linear timeline to create a cohesive plot within the narrative. This was a six-step iterative process.

The first step in the analysis was a read through of all transcriptions in their totality. This gave a wide-lens view of the interviews as a whole. The second step entailed reading each girl’s story on their own twice more (Polkinghorne, 2007) for a total of three separate readings of the transcripts. Thirdly, change of events were identified and coded. A change of event was defined as “...a noteworthy happening...” (Beal, 2013). Throughout the interviews, no matter how focused my questions were, the participants jumped from story to story. Each jump in a story, major incident or new story was considered a change in event. It became evident that certain change of events were critical components of each girl’s story and themes began to emerge. Some themes were shared while others were independent to the participant.

The fourth step in the process was to support the change of events through the coding of data elements and narrative linkages. Data elements are the salient pieces of a story that “...illuminate context of which an action took place...” (Beal, 2013, p.696). I operationally defined data elements as all contextual conversation regarding educational experiences or the focus of this study (race, disability and gender). Narrative linkages refer to the meaning making

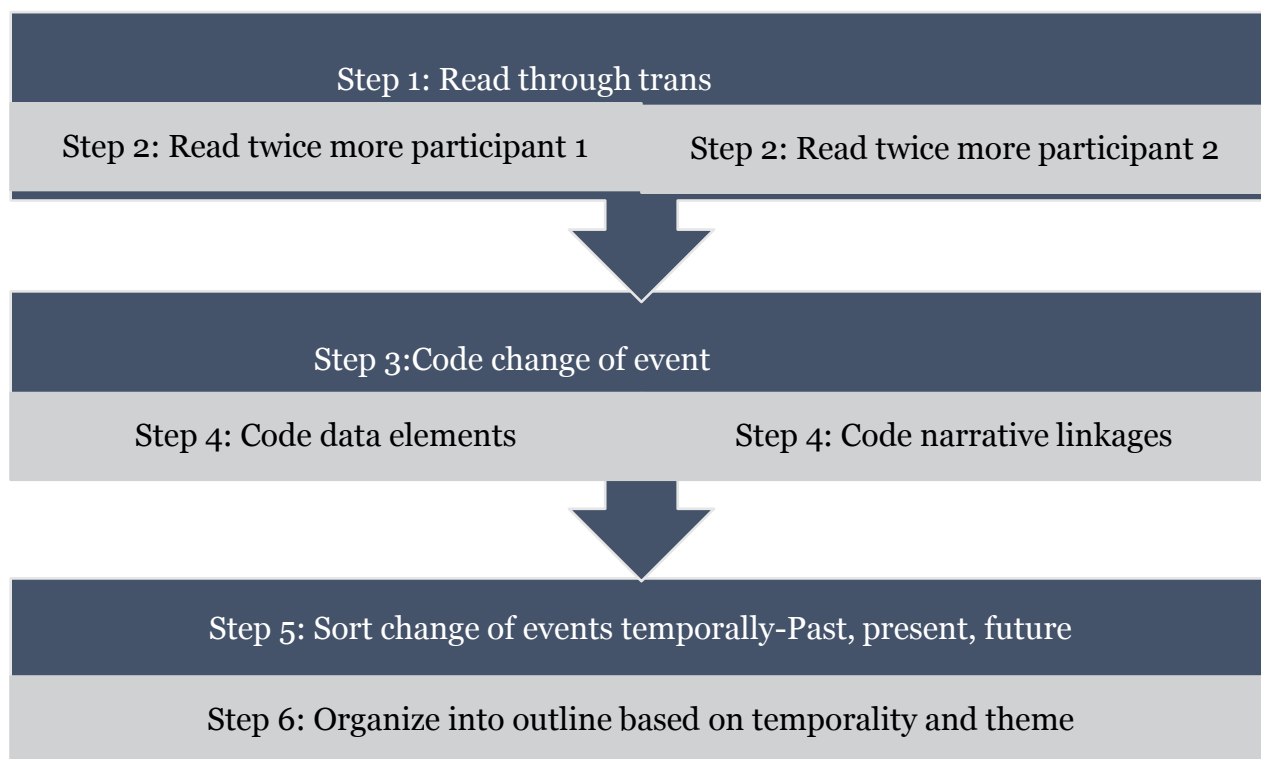
that occurs when retelling a life event. Therefore, when reflection occurred during storytelling, it was coded as a narrative linkage. This reflection was a critical component to the process as a way of supporting the plot development (Knight, 2009) and including the participant as a co-researcher.

Reflection is foundational tenet of what elevates narrative inquiry from storytelling. Discussion of why things happened the way they did or how an event impacted the storyteller's life, is a fundamental principle of narrative inquiry.

The fifth step was to situate the plots temporally. Temporality is a crucial to narrative research and ensures that analysis considers the past, present and the future (Ollrenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Categorizing each (i.e. past, present and future) helps to inform continuity of the plot. The change of events, narrative linkages and data elements were sorted into past, present or future.

The sixth step was to construct an outline using the coded and organized information. Establishing an outline of the narrative, supported my analysis by sorting the specific aspects of the stories. I then created a blue print for the narrative results.

Once the plot was situated I used the outline to create the narrative via a combination of my own narrative of the experience and direct quotes from the girls. The girls' voices are distinguished by italics within the chapter. I have separated the narratives to illustrate the complexity of each girl's story and to honor her individual experience; however, cross narrative comparisons were hard to ignore. Themes emerged from the storied lives of each girl. The themes were coded and helped to inform the structure of the stories told. This is not for the purpose of generalization, but to expose the similarities (and differences) of these two girls.



**Figure 2. Process of analysis**

**Student Journals.** Aesthetic representations are another level of narrative inquiry. Riessman (2008) suggests that visual representations of experience-in photographs, performance art, and other media-can enable others to see as a participant sees, and to feel (p. 142). Riessman (2008) also purports researchers must ask how or why images were created. It was important to the study to clarify the intended meaning of the images in the journal. In the case of literary text, I wanted to analyze that text as I would interview data. Using the participant's journals I would have been coding data elements, change of events and any reflective imagery or visual representations to help formulate the plot (Polkinghorne, 2007). Unfortunately, both participants failed to ever return their journals. I would remind them after each interview session and ask prior to the start of a new interview session but to no avail. Therefore no analysis was completed.



**Researcher Reflexive Journal.** An assurance to the ethics and rigor of qualitative research is public reflexivity (Bishop & Shepard, 2011). This reflexivity must be done not simply after the interview of a participant/co-researcher, but throughout the entire project. Not only must the researcher do so to document her own background and how her stories comingle with the stories of their participants, but also to denote how relationships unfold. This helps the reader to better visualize the relationships that have been created in order for the story to be told (Mahoney, 2007). This relationship affects the story.

I used a personal reflexivity journal as a way to address issues of interpreter stance (Rogan & de Kock, 2005). This personal journal collected critical data related to the process of the project to ensure that the integrity of the study remained intact. The personal journal was also kept for reflection through the analysis to aid with the decision making process (Beal, 2013).

Relevant data was collected in the form of field notes. This data allowed me to keep a record regarding context and questions which came to mind after the interview had concluded. I was able to review contextual information based on the notes in my reflexive journal for each interview. It proved to be most helpful while I constructed the narrative results as the emotions, questions and my overall thoughts were immediately accessible. The written details of the day's events and emotions brought the interview back to life while reviewing the journal in conjunction with the transcripts.

### **Trustworthiness**

Narrative researchers make claims about life events and the subsequent meaning people place on those events. There has long been an effort to synthesize criteria for validity within the field of qualitative research (Koelsch, 2013). The key issue of validity for me as a narrative researcher was making a claim (in this case a life event and the meaning it held to the

participant) justifiable to the reader of the research (Polkinghorne, 2007). Validity for narrative inquiry then comes not from claims which are substantiated.

The contribution of a narrative inquiry is more often intended to be the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic than it is to yield a set of knowledge claims that might incrementally add to the knowledge in the field.

(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.42)

Narrative inquiry, at times, situates itself among Deweyan thought that knowledge is gathered through experience (Caduri, 2013). While there are many researchers who adhere to the - hypothesis, claim, truth- rendition of whether or not a knowledge claim is indeed valid, I am not one of them.

Hendry (2009) suggests that perhaps the ancient Greeks had it right all along; there are multiple ways of knowing. Hendry (2009) also posits that perhaps those who wander and get lost during research push inquiry to the next level and outside of contented paradigms.

As a result of extensive dialogue throughout the past twenty years about the epistemology of narrative inquiry and analysis, an evolution of terminology has occurred (Baily, 1996). The word internal validity was replaced with terms such as credibility, transferability, and reliability to ensure goodness and trustworthiness within a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to ensure trustworthiness the following quality indicators were employed in this study: authenticity, credibility, verisimilitude and goodness.

**Authenticity.** Participants' stories are conveyed through rich, thick description which serves as the authenticity of the process (Baily, 1996). Keeping the age of the girls above thirteen

was a conscious decision to ensure each story could be told in depth. The girls' stories were elicited through open-ended questions that would promote thoughtful discussions of the issues brought forth in this study.

**Credibility.** Credibility of the analysis and subsequent narrative is evidenced and established through the transparency of the process. I was able to review the transcripts and/or the tape recordings prior to each interview. Before the next interview began, the participant and I would discuss the details of the interview from the previous meeting. We were acutely aware that we were co-constructing this narrative as co-researchers. This type of member checking ensured the credibility of the process. This also ensured that the story would be told as intended according to the participant.

My reflection journal, which housed my field notes, helped to inform my coding progression. Each supported my interpretations (Polkinghorne, 2007) and added to the credibility of the process and analysis. I used my personal reflection journal as a means to navigate any changing theories or insights while engrossed in the study and throughout the analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The journal offered me a place to make connections and discuss how I situated myself within the narratives of each girl's story (Huber et al., 2014).

**Verisimilitude.** Verisimilitude refers to whether or not the narrative results seem likely or true. While some might argue, fact can be stranger than fiction; this quality indicator might prove to be the most important.

If the narrative results do not resonate with the consumer of the research, then one cannot, or will not, move to the last quality indicator discussed here: goodness. Goodness indicates that narratives are not designed to exploit, but to move society to recognition and eventually social change. I did, however, review my plot outline with a qualitative expert. The

purpose of this expert was not to legitimize my plotline, but to determine the verisimilitude of the story (Baily, 1996). Ultimately, verisimilitude of any narrative is determined by the reader of the research.

**Goodness.** Lastly, the quality for criteria for goodness, as it relates to critical qualitative research, lies within the ability to expose unearned privilege in society and create a movement toward social justice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This study aimed to give girls who had a multiplicity of societal disadvantages (according to western cultural norms) a platform to tell their story. It was my honor and privilege to relay the stories to stakeholders who are interwoven in the girls' educational trajectories and move towards a paradigm of support and social change (Annamma et al., 2013).

### **Catalytic Validity**

Lather (1986) purports that conceptualizing credible data it is critical to when working with openly ideological research. Lather continues:

Once we recognize that just as there is no neutral education,  
there is no neutral research, we no longer need to apologize  
for unabashedly ideological research and its open commitment  
to using research to criticize and change the status quo (p.67).

Catalytic validity is the knowledge of one's reality as the catalyst to changing said reality (Lather, 1986). Determining whether a project has catalytic validity is based upon the degree to which a person or group is moved to create change for themselves or for the group as a whole.

This was apparent with one participant from center two. She began to make changes in her life in order to ensure positive life outcomes. She was able to be released from the program prior to its closing. She made up so many credits in the limited time she was at the center that she

was able to enroll in high school for the following fall. She also discussed helping other girls, possibly in terms of a career goal. She discussed helping girls who are in the position she once was in. While that was not the intention or the aim of this particular project, that revelation did arise and will be discussed further in the following chapter.

## **Conclusions**

Narrative inquiry is a powerful tool to engage people in the reflective process of telling their story (Knight, 2009). This study aimed to work with girls as co-researchers empowering them to speak their truths about what had occurred in their lives regarding their education. While focusing on race, disability, and gender unexpected themes emerged within the context of their stories (Rich, Wilson & Robertson, 2016).

It was critical to illuminate the experiences of these two girls who were straddling the line between student and inmate. The narratives of their experiences illustrate the difficulties they once faced and their challenges of today. My intention is to disseminate the information ascertained from the stories told by the girls. Their stories will add to the limited body of knowledge about at-risk girls *by* at-risk girls.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

*Fieldwork for the researcher-as-suppliant is predicated upon an unequivocal acceptance that knowledge of the person being researched (at least regarding the particular questions being asked) is greater than that of the researcher (England, 1994)*

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the individual perspectives of girls (i.e. key stakeholders) being educated within an alternative education center. While there is a growing body of literature examining the pathways and risk factors of incarcerated girls (DeHart & Moran, 2015) there is still a gap in the research where their voices have yet to be heard. This study illuminates the intersection of race, disability, and gender on the pathways to expulsion and placement into an alternative center (Shippen et al., 2012) according to girls currently navigating their way through the system.

Research shows that girls who have been incarcerated, or who are at risk for being incarcerated, are more often than not, victims of trauma (Sharpe, 2016). Physical, sexual or emotional abuse and/or witnessing extreme family dysfunction (ex. substance abuse, domestic violence, or parental incarceration etc.) are all contributing factors to girls' delinquency (Chesney-Lind, 2004; Diagle, Cullen & Wright, 2007; Gilfus, 2002). This informed the research questions guiding the present investigation.

### **Research Questions:**

1. What stories do girls being educated in alternative settings tell about their education?
2. To what extent is race featured in the girl's stories of their educational experiences?
3. To what extent is disability featured in the girl's stories of their educational experiences?
4. To what extent is gender featured in the girl's stories of their educational experiences?

The structure of the findings is a written narrative pertaining to each girl. The context of each girl's life and her pathway to the alternative center is described thematically. There were similarities among the girls' stories as well as divergence and those are reflected in the descriptions of the findings as well. Similarities are noted by utilizing the same section title in each narrative. Stylistically, the girls' stories are written in italics to easily navigate through the dialogue. Lastly, all identifiable information has been changed or disguised to ensure participant anonymity.

### **Jocelyn**

**Setting.** I have called the alternative center for weeks. I have tried to email and call with no avail. These people are very difficult to get in touch with. Oh and the participant I have secured is second to none in elusive maneuvers. Not with me though, with alternative center. I can only presume she hates it. She has done just about everything you could think of to get out of going. As I pulled up to the alternative center for the first time, I have a better understanding as to why.

When you get off the exit from the interstate, I am flanked by eighteen wheelers all while there is one approaching in my rearview mirror at a high rate of speed. This is an

industrial location to say the least. I scan the sides of the street for any signs of a school or signage that may show me the way. My GPS barks out orders to turn right at the light and I of course obey.

The only thing I see along the horizon is a barbed wire fence, several armed guards and countless big rigs. *Come on Garmin!* I'm certain that damn thing has led me to the wrong location, again. I drive up to the guard house, roll down my window and ask if he has ever heard of the school (alternative center) I am looking for. He points behind me. I am utterly confused.

I turn my car around and notice a small sign located on a spit of grass off the bustling highway. Sure enough: there it is. The building is set far off the road, which is probably a good thing considering it shares a driveway with trucks hauling freight containers filled with merchandise off the ships docked at the port. The only other street is a main thoroughfare. It is packed with cars and trucks fighting for space on a road that was constructed for a time which has long passed.

The center is brown with a black roof. It looks like a double-wide sales trailer you may have seen on construction sites. I'm struggling to imagine this as a school, but I do my best to push down my prejudice about the building and park my car.

When I walk in, there is no one at the desk. I see a call bell and the sign next to it says to ring the bell, but I don't want to seem pretentious. The first thing I think about when I ring a bell is a butler. The possibility that I might need to ring this call bell, has me questioning being here; as though I am the master of this house and I am ringing for someone to fetch something or worse, fetch someone, for me. It feels off. So I stand there. I



cough, clear my throat, do pretty much anything I can to make enough noise to get someone's attention.

The front door opens behind me and it is a police officer. School resource officers are a staple here. His presence is striking simply do to his size. He is a very large man. He ducks his head when entering the door. He swaggers in. He is clearly familiar with the place. He seems me standing in the office at the desk.

*Has anyone come up here? Have you been helped?*

Oh, not yet. But I just got here.

I lie. I'm a bit embarrassed that I am just standing here. He walks around the counter, through the counter- height door that separates those who work here and guests not permitted quite yet. He disappears into a back office.

It is less than ten seconds until a woman comes into the lobby to introduce herself. I recognize her name immediately. She smiles at me and I am instantly settled by her friendliness. She announces that she will go get Jocelyn for me and I wait a little more.

Newspaper articles are framed and hanging in the office. Certificates touting the positive impact the organization has had on the youth it serves and the community-at-large cover the dark brown paneled walls. Declarations of the good deeds done in this doublewide, double extended trailer that houses approximately 30 boys and girls are everywhere the eye can land.

The sound the floors make when you walk on them is hollow. It's as though the building stands on cement blocks and lacks a strong foundation. I find it ironic considering the work they do here. I smirk to myself and go back to anxiously hoping Jocelyn likes me.

## Introductions

She walks through the door with several adults hovering around her. She has a huge smile on her face. I am instantly excited that she seems to be in such a good mood and better yet, she is happy to see me. She is a tall, thinly built Black girl with doe-like large brown eyes. Her hair is short and sticking straight up all over. She immediately apologizes for this and I think *what a girl thing to do*. When she walks through the next door, she comes directly towards me. She gets very close. Almost like she wants to hug me, but I am uncomfortable with this and reach out my right hand and rub her shoulder with my left. I thank her for coming to see me. My reaction does not seem to faze her. She remains as bubbly and upbeat as she was seconds ago.

She twists her hair between her finger and thumb with her left hand and shakes my hand with her right. I introduce myself and she says she knows who I am and what I am doing. I review the necessary documents with her and ask for her permission to audio record our conversation. She agrees.

She makes it known immediately that she hasn't had lunch yet. I find this hard to believe since it is almost 1:00 PM. I can tell she is fishing, wondering if I brought her anything to eat. I didn't, but I should have. I tell her I will be certain to bring her a snack next time. She reassures me with, *I love you already*.

I ask when her birthday is and we realize our birthdays are four days apart: instant chemistry. We talk about how great our astrological sign is and we laugh about how much older I am. The rapport building session is going better than anticipated and I am thrilled to be here working with her.

I show her several spiral bound notebooks in a variety of colors. I tell her since she is the first person I am seeing today; she gets to choose the color she wants. She chooses purple. I hand

her the notebook, which I am calling a journal. I ask her to use it to jot down ideas, picture, poems, stories or anything she wants and we can discuss her entries in person. Or if she writes something she doesn't want to speak about directly we can correspond through post-it notes as long as she lets me know. She seems excited. It reminds me of how I used to be when I would go school shopping and pick out my own supplies. She is all smiles.

## **Background**

Jocelyn is fourteen. She is a young fourteen. While she is tall and looks every bit of sixteen, her voice is high pitched and childlike. She continues to nervously twirl her hair. I can tell she is anxious. I try to relax her a bit and I ask her about her family. It is quintessential small talk to help break the tension.

*Well, right now I am staying with my Aunt because of a court situation.* I immediately realize that my callow perception of small talk is naïve in the ways of families in distress (Forster, Gower, McMorris, & Borowsky, 2017). With this one question, we dive head first into her life. I ask her how many sisters she has.

She has two. *One is twenty-five and one is sixteen.* I ask her about any brothers she might have. She has three brothers who are, in her words, *way older. Like one's thirty-seven, one's twenty and one's eighteen.*

She is quick to leave the conversation of her siblings behind. Their relationship is brushed over and I can't help but assume they must not be close. She does, however; delve right into talking to me about her aunt. She tells me about a time in her life when she and her aunt struggled with their relationship. As she begins talking I pick up that the past she is referring to in this story is not so distant.

*We used to argue and stuff. I thought she didn't want me to be around my sister because we were adopted....by my real family though. She is quick to defend her adoption. Well, it don't feel like I am adopted. It's like I'm just a normal person, like, just around my real family now. I'm with my real family so I don't even feel adopted at all, but I know I am. I'm not mad at anybody. If she is trying to convince me she's not doing a very good job.*

The disjointed nature of her story is striking. Perhaps she is tired or maybe nervous. I sense she is confused by her own emotions about her family and feel this is probably not the best way to begin our time together. I want her to be comfortable. I want this experience to be something she looks forward to each time I arrive. So I change the subject to school in general. It seems like a less emotional restarting point.

From this point on, we never really go back and discuss her childhood without talking about school. I can't quite discern if it is because she doesn't want to, doesn't know how to or if it's a combination of the two.

### **Middle School**

*I used to be a class-clown. I used to be popular and stuff. I used to love being the class-clown. I used to disrupt the class and I got in my first fight there [middle school].*

Her first fight was in the sixth grade? This is not resonating with me, but I go with it. I ask her what the fight was about. *She didn't like me. She thought I jumped her cousin and I never did that. I don't jump people.* She takes a deep breath.

She is switching tenses now when she talks to me. Together we navigate both present day and the past. *I disrupt the class a lot. I get tardies and stuff. And I get suspended a lot. That's what made me come here. I got suspended a lot. But first they sent me to [a different alternative school]. It was bad. Girls there wanted to fight me too, and I did fight them.*

*So they said they felt like if they sent me here, there were less people here and I won't like, get into trouble. I'm not gonna get in trouble again, but I got in trouble here and fought a lot here. But I changed now. So I don't fight anymore.* The "they" she is referring to here is the court system. Jocelyn was removed from the other alternative center due to her constant fighting. I'm not sure if she is trying to convince herself or me with this proclamation. I don't think either of us is reassured by this storied version of her.

### **Elementary School**

*Kindergarten and first grade, oh my God, best years ever. It was easy but the sad thing is I got held back in Kindergarten.* I am curious what easy means to her. I am also saddened that her best years in school are Kindergarten and first grade. She has been in school now for nine years and the best ones include the year she was held back. I ask her point blank what made it easy. *All I did was go to sleep, do a little work. We would play games and then go outside and play.*

I wonder out loud if she remembers her teacher. I ask her what she remembers about him/her. She tells me she remembers that the teacher had a big heart. Jocelyn can't remember her name. *Back then I was sensitive.* In this moment, the word sensitive is a pejorative term. Jocelyn recognized, at a young age, that sensitivity could lead to victimization.

*Like, every time somebody like would yell at me, I'd start to cry and stuff. Every time she'd start to get mad at one of the kids, she'd start to yell and stuff.* I struggle with a follow up question here as the image of a big-hearted teacher just doesn't jell with one who yells at kids too.

She jumps from discussions of the teacher to the memory of girl in the second grade who yelled at her once. *This one girl I wanted to fight in second grade, she yelled at me.* I recall our

conversation earlier about the first fight she ever had. She said it was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I quickly realize trying to pin point when her first fight happened is proving to be a futile effort. I attempt to discuss what else she remembers about second grade. She can only remember the fight. I can tell she is distracted today. She is rocking in her chair and appears restless. Her body twitches and wiggles throughout our meeting today. She divulges that her medications have changed and that she is struggling with the adjustment and just like that I gain a bit more insight to her life.

*Only grade I remember is fifth grade, fourth grade definitely and sixth grade. I told you about Danielle, that's all I remember.* I sense she is irritated with this process today. Almost instantly her tone and attitude shifts and she begins to reminisce about her school work: predominately math. *When I was in third and fourth grade and stuff, I did not know math. I hate math so much because it was so hard for me.* Jocelyn has never really spoken to me about school work before now.

While she discusses her work at school with me I can see the disdain in her eyes and her words drip with disgust for school in general. Our conversation about classwork is short lived. She leaves behind the stories of school. School is something she believes has no control over (academics) and therefore sees herself as weak. She rather enjoys delving into stories of power instead. *Oh, the fourth grade, I remember I got in a fight with this girl. I tore her behind up.*

I ask her to tell me about the situation. She awkwardly chuckles to herself. There is a lack of remorse highlighted by the smirk on her face as she talks to me about the fight. Not only does she enjoy talking about the fights but these are the only stories that make her face light up. The details of fights are much clearer than any other part of her school memories so far. *She was talking about me. She said I looked like a rat. It was weird. I never said anything to her.* The

fight happened on the bus. *I wanted her to touch me first. She touched me and I punched her.*

Jocelyn says she was suspended but she can't remember if it was for two days or five.

Jocelyn describes her elementary school experiences as she has all other experiences so far, with confusion. While she seems conflicted with loving school and hating it all at the same time, hate definitely seems to trump the conversation. She has grown to hate the academics about as much as she despises most of the students. I'm still trying to determine her thoughts about being here in this center and I think she is too.

## **Fights**

*I got in so many fights my whole life.* I can tell we are getting to the crux of who she is. She is a fighter. I don't mean that in a depreciatory way. I mean she is trying to survive the best she can and fighting is something she has become very good at doing. She is fighting to let me in. She is fighting to let me get to know the real Jocelyn. She fights with herself right in front of my eyes. At times it is painful to watch. I can see the turmoil. I can see the wheels spinning, debating whether or not to reveal certain aspects of her life.

Today Jocelyn is fighting to be seen and heard, all while trying to blend into the chair she swivels side to side in. I want to tell her to put her fists down, but I'm afraid life will knock her out, so I just listen. *I got in a whole bunch of fights.* When I ask her to recall her first fight ever, an event I think would stand out in her mind, she simply can't. *I just don't remember.*

The theme of fighting is ever present and she laughs as she recalls the girls and boys she has unabashedly *tore up*. There is a sense that she knows it is wrong, she even states that explicitly. As I watch her fidget like a little girl, I try to imagine her fighting. She's tall and I guess that gives her a physical advantage over most students her age.

She is older than most seventh graders due to being held back twice. At fourteen-and-a-half year old, she is taller than I am. Yet her presence hasn't caused me any angst since the first time we met. I feel perfectly comfortable with her now. I know she feels comfortable with me too, as she has told me she loves it when I come to talk with her. I am struggling to see the fighter although I catch a glimpse of that side of her each time Jocelyn throws her head back with laughter remembering times she has brawled.

The fighter it is not the same person as the girl who is comforting herself by rocking in the swivel office chair. They are different people but the same being and I am perplexed. *I have real bad anger problems. I do crazy stuff. Now that I'm more grown, grown up, like getting older, my anger problems get so bad. They get worser and worser.* Her words sound a lot like a warning.

Jocelyn fights to prove she is worthy. She fights to prove she is powerful. She fights others frequently, but the true battle is happening within. *I'm not gonna talk [to the others] cause that means they controlling me if I keep going back and forth with them. I'm not gonna let them control me ever again.*

### **Jocelyn's Perception of the Alternative Center**

My hunch about her feelings about this alternative school placement is accurate. She hates it here. She tells me every time I see her. *I don't belong here. I'm like a smart girl. I could be in regular school doing real work.* She seems to be attempting to convince me since this contradicts our earlier conversations about school. She is also in real danger of failing the seventh grade yet she still doesn't want to go to class. *I missed so much work [because of being in the detention facility] and then I got suspended after that. I fought the boy next door.* She is referring to next door in another class. *They are all disrespectful here.*



*He kept calling me an eater (this is an offensive term referring to her as someone who performs oral sex on fellow classmates). I got so mad at him. Our lady (teacher) sent me outside. So I snuck back in the building. I went inside his classroom. I had stand up like this (she shows me how she stood tall in front of him). I was like trying to fight him. And I was looking at him like that (she shows me her nastiest face she can make). Instead he got up. And that's when we started fighting. I had a busted eye. This incident occurred just two days after coming back from the detention facility. She was suspended for another week for this specific fight.*

*And these hoes are so fake. I was friends with them when they first started going here. And then I was fixin' to fight both of them. Different days though. I was gonna do my work and then go on home. Keep doing me and then leave so I don't have to see those bitches again...at all. The kids here, they are so disrespectful, mean and rude. And I be like, I don't even care if I get suspended. I do something to get suspended.*

## **Boys**

*I started going out with boys when I was like eleven. I ask her what does going out mean. We agree at calling each other boyfriend and girlfriend and hugging and kissing a bit. So I really started [dating] ...it was like thirteen. I clarify again and ask her does dating mean sex. She says yes and reiterates that that was a long time ago. I say over a year ago and she snaps back with that was two years ago. I'm gonna be fifteen. She sounds like she is in disbelief of her own age. She feels grown, she tells me so.*

*I can't get this boy like out of my head. He has did a lot to me that I really didn't like. I've been taking my anger out on people for it. She has unexpectedly turned the story to a boy she is seeing, Dijon. He is sixteen years old and has a court date today. She is concerned about their relationship and how it has affected the relationships with her family.*

She tells me he hit her. *Now he's got to go to court because of me. Well he hit me, so I should say yeah, I'm glad he's going to court.* I barely know this girl but I can feel the momma bear coming out in me. I try to squash the feeling and remember I am here for her to tell me her experiences not to save her, but at this moment, it's all I want to do.

*We were all there [at the house]. We heard screaming and everything. We didn't know if anybody was hurt. I was like, what's going on? ...I looked out the peephole. You know that little peephole? And I was like that is my best friend, that's Daisha. What are you doing to her? So [the ex-boyfriend] told me to get a knife. We were by ourselves. There were no adults there with us. I went out there like, it's Daisha. What's going on? She was like, go in! I was like, why are you [Dijon] hitting her? Why are you hitting her? And then he hit me. Right after she got hit, he hit me. That's crazy. And maybe I think it's my fault because I took his phone and I wouldn't give it back.*

She warns me before she begins to cry. *I'm gonna get emotional right now. It's so sad, because I almost tried to hurt my best friend just because of this boy. Because I was too attracted to him.* I'm doing my best to follow but I have to ask for clarification. I ask her if her best friend was dating him as well. *No, no. I tried to hurt my best friend because [she] found out that he be hitting me and stuff. And she was like no, don't be touching my best friend.*

*He came over [another] day. And he just wanted to talk to Daisha. She found out about it. And he wanted to explain and... when he tried to explain... Daisha wouldn't let him talk. She made him go home. He just got over here and he had to go home already. And the one thing that made me made me so mad when he came over there [was] he had a hickey on his neck. It wasn't from me at all. I was really mad at him and I just got so mad I took it out on my best friend.*

I can't help but wonder what she did to Daisha. I know her history of fighting. I ask if she hit her. *I tried to stab her.* I am hoping that she is not able to see the shock on my face. I am not sure what I thought she was going to say, but I can assure you it wasn't that she had tried to stab her best friend.

The pieces are coming together for me now. I have been trying to see Jocelyn for weeks. I knew she was "not available" according to the staff at the center and now I know why. She was in the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) and then the detention center. Her fighting has moved from the school yard to her own front yard. *I never thought I would actually want to stab my best friend. I just got released from JAC (this week).*

She tears up and I do my best to move the conversation forward since this is weighing heavy in the air. I inquire how long she and this boy have been together. It doesn't have that much to do with a near stabbing, but it seems like an important detail in the moment. *Like a month. He's gone now. He don't talk to me anymore. I feel bad though because I be wanting to talk to him. We just better off just not talking to each other at all. I think he doesn't love me at all.*

*I never got hit by a boy before.* This isn't just a boy though. This is her boyfriend. My mind is reeling. Has anyone talked to her about how this is not ok? I know he was locked up for hitting her. I know people know. But has anyone really helped her work through this?

*But it was my fault. I took his phone and wouldn't give it back.* It is at this moment that I feel like I am in an afterschool special. Remember the ones where some major event happens and there is a lesson to be learned? Only, this isn't television and there is no one here to unveil the moral of the story and impart wisdom. It's just Jocelyn and me.

I step outside of my role as a researcher and I know there is a line but I can't see it anymore. Sitting here before me is a girl who has been hit by her boyfriend for not giving him his phone back. Jocelyn's reaction to him hitting her was to attempt to stab her best friend for standing up to him. I'm processing this story as best as I can, but I am human. I am grappling with how to proceed. Do I continue with my interview? I worry if I do; it will come across as though I am complacent with her story. The truth is, I'm deeply saddened by the events Jocelyn is telling me. I determine then and there that I cannot pretend to simply listen, nodding my head in what she may perceive as my understanding of the abuse. Instead, I preach. Yes, I did. I let the research focus go and let humanity take over.

I tell her no one has the right to hit her. Not for any reason. Ever. Yes, she was in wrong for taking his phone, but there is no excuse for anyone to put their hands on her. I am so grateful to hear that she has heard all this before; from her aunt and her therapist. I confirm with center and indeed she is receiving therapy for her mental health disorder as well as the trauma she has suffered from this episode of domestic violence and sexual assault. It won't hurt for her to hear it again, I tell myself. But as I leave the center that day I wonder if I did the right thing. I hope she wouldn't think I was judging her. I hope she took it as it was intended; a reminder of how she is a unique being capable of finding someone who will love her and never hurt her.

*It's like you love a person so much and it's like they treat you so different. They really don't love you. Make it seem like they really care about you and love you and really want to be there for you and stuff, when they really don't. They just want to get in your pants. And they done already got in your pants so there's nothing else you can do.*

## Sex and Babies

*Me and this boy Colin... he was the third boy I had sexual activity with. To be clear, this came up when we were not talking about sex. We were talking about her anger and how nowadays her anger is typically regarding some boy. He got a car-I like boys with cars. He is so cute. He was supposed to come over yesterday. He's nice and stuff but, I think he just wants sex and stuff. I'm not on that at all. Don't want to do that. I told him I don't want to do that.*

*Dijon, the boy who hit me...he used to force me to have sex with him. I hated that. And I'm stupid enough to do it too. He used to force me to do everything with him. I hated that. I hate when boys do that. When you tell them no and they get mad at you and won't talk to you ever again.*

I step outside of myself during this conversation. I remember how I felt when I interjected my rhetoric into the conversation about him hitting her. I can feel the same emotions rising up. I know she is receiving group counseling and intensive therapy for this particular issue, in this very room almost daily. That does not satisfy my desire to say at the top of my lungs that being forced to have sex is never okay. And no, she is not stupid. But I manage to ask follow-up questions instead and keep my research in mind this time.

She tells me she has only had two boyfriends but three sexual partners. Dijon is the only one of the sexual partners boys she names as a boyfriend, which I find interesting. I don't ask her about that, but it weighs on my mind later that maybe I should have.

Our discussion circles back around to Dijon: it always does. *I try not to think about him at all. It's like when I lay down in bed and I look at babies or couples and stuff like that I would think about Dijon. And I be like, damn. I miss him so much. So, when me and him was having sex, he was like, oh do you want to have my baby? And I was like, yeah, sure. Yeah, okay*

I ask her if he would be someone she would want to have a baby with and she says yes. She's fourteen. The last thing I wanted at fourteen was a baby. I have to know why the idea of having a baby is so appealing to her right now so I ask her. *Cause he asked me to.*

I restate my question and emphasize why would *she* want to have a baby. She gives me two answers. I believe the first one is the answer she thinks I want to hear. The second answer is hers. It is the real her. She even asks my permission to say "it." I explain to her she can say whatever she feels comfortable saying.

*Maybe I was stupid, like too much into it. Maybe I don't need one at all.* That was the first answer followed up by, *I don't even think I am meant to have one anyway.* When I ask her to clarify her answer of *yeah sure*, she informs me he wasn't wearing any protection.

I investigate deeper into why she thinks she isn't meant to have a baby anyway, as she stated. *I don't think I'm pregnant though. It's been too long. It's been twenty-one days since I've talked to him.* I ask her if she is happy or disappointed that she is not pregnant. *I'm kinda disappointed because I really do want to have kids in the future. I don't think I am meant to have any cause look (she points to her belly) ain't nothing popped up yet. Don't be disappointed in me.*

I have to ask her to repeat what she just said.

*Don't be disappointed in me and stuff.*

She looks at me with her longing eyes and I realize she is searching my facial expressions for approval. I reach my hand out to touch hers. I tilt my head to the side and smile as warm a smile as I possibly can.

I am not disappointed in you honey, I say swallowing the burgeoning lump in my throat.

In the car after our conversation that day, find myself reflecting on my words. The truth is I am disappointed. The disappointment does not lie with her though. My disappointment is with the idea that a fourteen-year-old girl feels her future is now and that bearing a child is a way to connect with a boy who forces her to have sex with him and then hits her. I'm disappointed and disheartened. According to her response to me today, I imagine my poker face needs some work.

### **Juvenile Detention Center**

*Oh, when I first went to the detention center I did not like it at all. I swear to God I did not like it. I hated it. I wanted to go home. I couldn't sleep at all.*

*It's a building just like this.* Jocelyn describes the juvenile detention facility she was sent to after she attempted to stab her best friend. *It's a lot of gates and stuff with wires on it like jail. It's just like jail. I always have a roommate when I go there.* The most recent stay was not her first time at the detention center. I ask her where she sleeps when she is there. *On these hard mats in these rooms where they lock us in. All the girls shower together and stuff. There's a bathroom in our room.*

How does that make you feel?

*I don't care. Cause I've been there for a long time. So it really don't matter. You gotta use the bathroom, you gotta use the bathroom. I ask her how long she was there for this time. For twenty-one. I didn't get the whole twenty-one. I stayed like sixteen days. I guess cause my aunt was telling them good things about me and stuff.*

Jocelyn describes the first time she was placed in the facility. *I was just thinking about stuff in there. I didn't want to go to bed at all. I stayed up until I had to go to court. When I went to court the next morning, man, they told me I could go home. I was so happy.*

But this time Jocelyn wasn't as lucky as the first time. This time she was charged with aggravated battery. The judge gave her twenty-one days. *I begged the officer to call my aunt. I did not ever want to go back there. They hand cuff us...in front. Then they put little shackles on. Them things hurt. Worst day ever.*

She leans in when talking about court. So I ask her what that is like for her. *It's like a free thing where you can just leave the detention center. You just...it's hard to explain about that. It's like going to court, it's like going to a place just to see what you done did. It's like school.* This statement surprises me. She equates court to school. I am not exactly sure if it is the power structures within the two placements that she is recognizing but her comparison is striking.

### **Cancer and Loss**

Jocelyn is at her most vulnerable when we discuss two topics: 1) Dijon and 2) her adoptive mother (who is also her aunt). In a casual conversation about learning how to drive Jocelyn informs me that her aunt/adoptive mother is sick.

Tell me more about your mom.

*My mom, she has cancer. And like she got the little tumor that's got the cancer inside of it. I think it's called drenal.*

Adrenal?

*Yeah. For real. And she is like strong. She's real strong. I love her so much.*

Did she get treatment?

*I think so. I don't know why they just won't take the cancer out? They told my aunt [adoptive mom] that she only had six months to live. That really broke my heart. But in my mind, not in my heart, I feel like she's not going anywhere. I think they are just saying that.*

When did they tell her that?



*Like three days ago. That's probably why I'm not really trying to come to school...all the time.*

How does that make you feel?

*Really bad because all these years she been there for me and everything and they are talking about six months of living? I hate when people do stuff like that. They always take away good people. Take away people that you love so much.*

Who is taking her? I ask.

*The Lord.*

There is so much on her plate. She is dealing with issues that I have not dealt with as a grown woman. I cannot begin to imagine how scared she is. She is brutally honest about literally fighting in class in order to be suspended, so she can go home and I can't blame her. She feels time slipping away. Once again, there is a loss of control and a sense of helplessness she exudes as we discuss her mother and the very real possibility of her mother's impending death. Talk about this subject is short lived. She is confused and in denial. I can see it in her body language and her inability to maintain eye contact with me. She diverts the conversation abruptly and we are once again talking about Dijon.

### **Just the Two of Us**

I walked into Jocelyn's life at an extremely tumultuous time. Her adoptive mom (her aunt) has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Jocelyn has also recently been arrested for attempting to stab her best friend because she was standing up to the boy who hit Jocelyn. The boy she was seeing was no longer talking to her due to the court date he received from his battery charge. She seemed hollow. She seemed beaten down and overwhelmed by what life had divvied out. I couldn't blame her. Just listening to her stories was exhausting.

I wanted to hug her. I wanted to console her. At times, she would let me. Other visits she was guarded. She struggled to keep her thoughts off of Dijon. All conversations somehow found their way back to him and how much she loved or missed him. This was frustrating at best. I worried about her going back to him. I still do. She seemed to need his love and approval above all others. I remain concerned that she will find her way back to him no matter how many times she tried convincing me she would not.

With Jocelyn, there were times that I had to contain my longing to mother her. I recognized that was not my place or my purpose in meeting with her. However, she talked about being physically and sexually abused and took responsibility for the abuse. That completely rattled me and pushed me out of the realm of researcher. I crossed a boundary that I imposed in order to conduct this research. I opened up and spoke to her as a friend and mentor regarding the abuse. I did not engage in that type of conversation again, but it definitely happened in that moment. I do not regret the conversation we had regarding the abuse but I have reflected time and time again. I have contemplated how unprepared I was for the story she told and how I can work on this for future interviews. When our meetings unexpectedly and abruptly concluded, Jocelyn was nevertheless trapped in cycle of attempting to find her power with her fists.

## **SHAY**

**Setting.** The massive emblazoned gold and cream country club is situated on a sprawling golf course next to a glistening lake. Here high-end cars are being hastily valeted by young men in button down shirts, red uniform pants and of course, bowties. Women in tailored slacks and jackets proudly walk through the crosswalk with their colossal leather designer bags tucked under their arms. Men in polos and tennis shorts dodge the traffic concerned with making their tee times. This place is bustling with tourists as it always is in April. Spring break has arrived.

I know this drive well. I also know the building that contains students who have been in trouble with the law resides on the right side of the street, amidst million-dollar lakeside mansions. I am well aware of the disdain neighbors have for the program that is housed here and how it devalues their property. What I did not realize, was that the students who walk the small corridors of the alternative center, know all of this as well.

Well, we got here at like fifteen or twenty minutes early. So [my aunt] dropped us off right there at the lake. And we went and walked by the lake a little bit and they called the cops on us. They came and they put us in handcuffs and stuff like that. They were like asking us what we were doing and we were just like, so in shock. We didn't do anything. We were just walking by the lake.

*And they were like, well, you're supposed to be on school campus. Why weren't you there? Um, it's not time. They just brought us here and let us go. And then Mr. Smith had a long talk with us about it. He was like telling us why we couldn't do that and stuff like that. 'Cause I guess this is a half-a-million dollar community.* I attempt to clarify what that means to her.

*The people around don't want us here. So, they're trying to do everything they can to get us kicked out and to move somewhere else.*

I park in a precarious spot on the property, where the sidewalk meets the mud. I'm sure there used to be grass growing here but years of staff, therapist, parole officers and visitors alike attempting to park in the tiny space has left the landscape as worn down as the building appears.

When I walk up, the students are finishing lunch outside on the dock by the lake. *Who the fuck is that?* I am the 'who' and it is clear that they know I am here. *Knock it off...Hi, Ma'am, the elevator's right there...you want the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.* I let the man know I am grateful for his help and I stand close to the elevator so as not to be seen by all of the students eating lunch. I

practically leap into the elevator when the door opens. I'm hoping the reception from my participant will be a bit more pleasant.

The elevator opens this time into a corridor. I step off and see an office to the right through the floor to ceiling glass doors which are open anyway. The office is empty. Not a soul is there. I stand there motionless, not quite knowing where to go. It is a sterile place with cheap picture frames lining the walls of accolades from the past. I can't help but think the linoleum floor is as cold as the reception I am receiving. Finally, a man steps into the office and says "*are you here for Shay?*" YES!! I am immediately all smiles and probably a bit over zealous with my response. He moves to the side and points with his hands in a Vanna White motion to a girl who must have been standing just outside the office. *This is Shay*, he says.

Nice to meet you, I say. She doesn't make eye contact with me but she does dutifully reach her hand out to shake mine. Much better than the greeting I received outside just moments earlier. She is a petite framed White girl, with long blond hair. Her walk is one of confidence but her facial expressions are indicating bit of hesitation, which I think is stemming from my presence. The man, who has still not identified himself, escorts us to a small office with dark paneled walls that emits the odor of fried fish.

*Sorry, I just got my lunch delivered.*

No worries, I say trying not to gag.

*This is my office. I am the behavior specialist here, the one you have been talking to on the phone and through email.*

Nice to put a face to a name. Pleasure to meet you.

*This is the only place I have for you to talk today. Is this going to work?*

Absolutely, thank you again for allowing me to come in.

*No problem...I'll let you two talk.*

## **Introductions**

Is this going to work for you?

*Sure, this is fine.*

Let me go ahead and close the door and how about you take Mr. Smith's seat.

This is my meager attempt at leveling a painfully obvious unleveled playing field (i.e. interview space). I review the assent with her. Discuss briefly that her father has given permission for her to speak to me, but of course she doesn't have to if she doesn't want to. She wants to. She is holding both arms of the chair. I deduce her posture as a sign she is ready to talk with a mix of anxiousness. When I tell her I want to know about her, her life before she ended up at the alternative center, she leans forward in her chair like a horse at a starting gate. She is ready and eager.

## **Background**

*Um, I was like five. Yeah, five and my parents were like drug dealers at the time. It was like five of us in one small hotel. My parents had went to jail for like three days including my uncle and at the time all of us kids were living together. And my dad, my mom and my uncle were drug dealers. And we would have these people come in and out of our room and hotel and I used to ask my dad all the time, like who are they. And my dad would just tell me like, that they were friends of the family.*

*They had just came to visit for a little while. And then my cousin... he is like two years older than me, two years and nine months actually. He knew a little more than I did. And he would tell me like they're doing bad things. He'd say we shouldn't be here. And that's when I*

*kind of like, caught on to what they were doing. Because every time we would want to use the bathroom, they would grab us by the hand and cover our eyes so that we didn't see what they were doing. But I would smell like the stuff, the weed and all of that. I didn't really know what it was at the time.*

Shay's parents and uncle went to jail. She was placed in the care of her grandparents. She recalls that when her parents were released they picked her up and once again she was living in a hotel. The police warned her parents that if they were caught selling again, Shay would be removed from their care. *So yeah, we went to a different hotel and they were doing a really big drug deal.* At this time, there were multiple people and children living in the hotel. *And like, I think it was four or five in the morning, um, the door got busted in. And it was the police.*

*They were like, it was SWAT, so they went and handcuffed all our parents and told us that we needed to get up and get out of bed and go outside. And he (Shay's father) was handcuffed with his hands behind his head and I asked him what was going on. He said they were doing bad things and you all are going to have to suffer because of it. And he started crying. So I started crying.*

Shay is moving the story along in a methodical way. I can't help but wonder if she has been thinking about talking to me. Even her story is in chronological order. I sense she is building up to something.

*I was with the same foster parents for like nine months. During that nine months, um, something really bad happened to me. I had to sleep with their biological daughter which was fifteen, around there at the time and she would rape me, basically. She is so matter of fact. No emotion. Just looks at me and shrugs her shoulders. My grandparents got me...and they asked if anything happened in foster care and I told them no because I didn't want to tell no body. I felt*

*like it was my fault and I was sticking with it. I wasn't telling nobody. I never told nobody until six months ago. I finally told my dad and I am in counselling.*

I'm shocked. I try my best to hide it, but I am shocked. Not so much by the rape of this girl, but by the fact that we are barely into our first rapport building session and she is willing to go so deep into her story with me. I am honored to have her trust.

She continues her story describing how afraid she was that she was going to have to go back into foster care. She tells me a heartbreaking story about finding her parents smoking weed after being placed with them again. She recalls how devastated she felt since that's why she was taken away in the first place.

*When he would drink, he went to bed with a beer in his hand and he woke up with a beer in his hand. Everything revolved around beer. His last twenty dollars went for beer. When our lights and cable got cut off, he wanted beer. He didn't care about anything but beer and weed.* I'm not sure if she arrived at this conclusion recently, but the pain in her voice is fresh.

Every detail is crystal clear. Her young memory is vehemently hanging on to the past traumas all while she attempts to connect with me in the present. I can't help but be amazed that she can recall the dates and years so easily, like a rolodex of events categorized by time. She launches in to a discussion on her move from the south, where she has known no real happiness, to the northern part of the country where her life changes, if only for a little while.

*Yeah, we just packed up and moved. We went and lived with my great grandfather which was really sick and that's the whole reason we went. They told us he only had a year to live and my grandpa owned a bicycle shop. And my dad was like, okay, well, grandpa wants me to run his shop. He wants us to live with him, take care of him and so that's what we did. And I got to meet family that I never met before. I got to meet, my dad had a sister whose name was Mandy. She*

*killed herself. She had two kids before she passed away with Uncle Mike, who is still in our lives 'til this day. I got to meet my great-grandfather for the first time. We connected like two peas in a pod.*

He dies that year, days before her birthday. This is a deep wound. One I will not touch. Her pain is visceral. I didn't see a hint of emotion until now, but it is clear this loss is something with which she has not yet come to terms. With the loss of her great-grandfather came the loss of a dream for a different life.

*After that my family decided they were just going to run the bike shop and we were going to live [there] for the rest of our lives. And me, like, [that place] is like my home then, because that's where I was basically raised and had the best life. Then two years go by and um, the shop started going in debt. The next thing you know, our lights are off, our cable is off, our water is off and we're living basically in a poor household.*

*Then my mom called my uncle and asked for help. My uncle called her back two days later and said I can't take you guys all in, but I can take the girls in. So we got on a plane October 11th and came down here.*

I can see defeat in her eyes. Coming back here is not what she wanted. Life in Florida has not been kind to her. Up north is where family resides and where happiness lives. *I get a call two days after that and my mom's incarcerated for fraud and she's looking at three years in prison.* There is it. The bad news sets in almost as soon as they step off the plane. This move has proven to be the letdown she anticipated. Her father and mother are consumed with their own demons unable to assume responsibility for Shay or her sister.

*My dad comes down here August 14th and he, we, get a house and stuff and my mom calls me from jail and tells me that she doesn't want us to live with my dad because her and my*



*dad had split up. She's feels like my dad's going to take us and run with us.... But my dad told my uncle, that the only way he could come down here was if he was in AA and he stopped drinking and smoking and that's why my dad did. He has two years sober. I have the father I never had before. Now it's just like his whole attitude is changed. He puts his all into the relationship, to have a relationship with me and my sister. That is amazing because I thought my mom would always be the one around and it totally changed.*

Her pride shines through her dark eyeliner. She reminds me of a parent ogling over their child, yet the roles here are reversed. However, when she decides to discuss her mother, her shoulders slouch. There is an explicit juxtaposition in her demeanor when the conversation shifts from speaking about her newly sober father and her mother.

*My mom just moved here, she got out early. They let her out on early release and put her on ten years of probation. Yeah, she got here on September 17th, the day before my sister's birthday of last year. She was working with my uncle and she met this guy named John. They, I guess you could say they fell in love instantly. So my mom's planning a wedding with him and she moved in with him. She barely calls us. She don't text us. If I call her, she hardly ever picks up and she won't call back. She never really sees us. Um, it's like our mom abandoned us....so.*

I want so desperately to hug her. It's not what she wants or needs from me though. I am doing my very best to remember my role as researcher in this fish fragrant office. We chat a minute about why she thinks her mother doesn't call. She's sure her mother harbors anger towards her father. I'm not convinced that is why a mother would leave her daughters, but I do my best to simply listen.

*I got a call one night later, cause my mom's an alcoholic. She called me and she was drunk on like a Saturday around 12 and I'm a teenager, so like, I was up. She called me and she*

*was crying and I was asking her what was wrong. I was trying to be there for her and she told me she was going to kill herself. I had to hang up. I could not deal with it. I told my dad the next day and he called my mom and told her that she didn't need to call us and tell us stuff like that.*

*My mom straight up denied it because she did not remember it. And so, I got a few phone calls like that. My grandma finally kicked her out. After like three months of living with her friends she got kicked out of there for drinking too. Her friend was a like a really big alcoholic too, but he was like, I couldn't keep up with your mom. So my uncle, the one that's like really big AA, he owns a sober living home. He was like I have this room open for you if you want it. My mom at first was like, at first, no I have to be sober....I don't want that. My uncle was like, okay then I guess you're going to be out on the streets. My mom was like, no, never mind, I'll take it. My mom has been sober for sixty days, I think.*

This is a source of pride for Shay. Anyone can see she is hopeful for her mother's future. But reality is a bitter pill. *She's still not really in our lives because she is more in tune with her boyfriend and his kids...yeah.*

As she is giving me every part of who she is, time is running away from us in this interview; I don't want her feel rushed, so I ask her if she would want to talk with me tomorrow. I can tell by her smirk she is okay with that. Right now, I want to be certain she arrives wherever she is supposed to be so she and I walk awkwardly together, to her classroom, like we would if we were friends.

We have begun an interesting relationship. She is telling me her deepest, darkest secrets and I am not only listening but recording them to analyze at a later date. We both realize the bizarre nature of the relationship I think, but she is indisputably happy. So am I.

## High School

I call the next day to confirm my meeting time with Shay. She is not at school today. She is out sick. I am bummed and hope that the flow of the first conversation wasn't a fluke. I am concerned she will get cold feet and not want to speak with me any longer. My fears are unsubstantiated. I meet with her the following week. Again, we gel. You know there are just those people you connect with instantly. She is one of those for me.

Mr. Smith, the behavior specialist strides into the office. He nods his head up and says *Shay right?* Right, I say back. He tells me she really enjoyed speaking to me last week. I say *the feeling was mutual*. As he leaves to get Shay he points me in the direction of his office. This is to be the interview room again. I go one way, he goes the other.

Since the last time I was here, I feel more comfortable in this space. I am hopeful she does too. There are about six rooms upstairs where they work with students on what they call credit recovery. This is the process of having a student who has failed a for-credit course in high school, come in and retake those credits via an online course. It is self-paced and self-guided. Therefore, the rooms are quiet with everyone using a computer that faces the outer walls of the building. As a teacher, this is a strange sight for me. There is no discussion happening, just module after module completed and the end result is a cumulative test to determine if the course objectives have been accomplished.

The walls are painted with bright colors, which normally I think I would love, but for some reason this looks and feels loud and overdone. Maybe the noise of the paint balances out the silence of the students. The hallways are small corridors which connect in the shape of a square. So you can easily get to one side or the other very quickly. This is a great feature when you have students who are violent and may act out aggressively towards other students or staff.

All hallways connect for easy access to assist in a crisis. The office still feels cold to me and I have never seen anyone working in it. If anyone is there, they are behind closed doors.

I can hear Mr. Smith and Shay coming down the short hallway. He is teasing her and she is trying not to laugh. I have left his office chair open for her to sit in again while I sit on the “student” side. I can see she’s got a tissue in one hand and she looks stuffy. We catch up on the weekend events. She causally drops that she has a boyfriend and they went to the movies and dinner this weekend. I get the feeling she doesn’t have a lot of friends to just talk to. She is filled with conversation and I have to constantly remind myself that I am here for a reason. When the subject of her returning to her old high school comes up, I push the dialogue towards school.

She can tell where my questions are going. She is quick to clear her friends from any responsibility of her not being in school. *My dad thought it was like I was hanging with the wrong crowd, but it wasn’t. I just didn’t want to go to school. So, I didn’t go.*

Okay...I get it. She just didn’t want to go. I can’t help but wonder why? As we continue to talk the most obvious answer to my question comes to light. *And then my ninth grade year, was, I have to say like, the best but the worst year of my school years. I liked school, but I did none of my work. None of it. I got straight F’s and D’s. And the only reason I got D’s was because I passed my EOC’s. Um, I was more - I had a boyfriend at the time that I was dating since eighth grade. And I was more focused on him and his grades so that he could play basketball than my grades. And rather than doing homework, I would go to football games, basketballs games and all of that. And hang out with people. I lied to my dad about my grades.*

A boy. Of course. It’s so painfully obvious.

*Um, then, I fought, ninth grade year.*

Who’d you fight?

*This girl name LaToya. She's like six foot three. Yeah and she weighs like two twenty five. My best friend at the time, she um, was fighting her over a boy. Which was so dumb. And they had fought two times. So they fought two times and then she wanted to fight again, but my best friend didn't want to. So, I fought her and I dislocated my shoulder. I had to be rushed to the hospital and my shoulder popped back into place.*

I am continuing to see this particular story seep into the narrative that Shay has some physical issues with her back. She has scoliosis. She states that she has had temporary paralysis more than once in her short life-time. She is still going to doctor appointments hoping to figure out the cause. *They try to say it was like, I don't know what it's called, psychiatric, something like that.*

I am struck by this last sentence. She later says doctors ruled out any psychiatric episodes. However, she does inform me of her bipolar diagnosis. Her mental stability is questioned several times in our conversations by not only her doctor but by Shay as well.

I think to myself that she is a deep thinker. I also think how proud I am of the father she has now. She is wounded. He recognizes her pain and takes her to and from her many doctors' appointments. Counseling is proving to be potentially life changing for Shay. I can't help but feel hopeful for Shay. Someone is taking care of her and that someone is her father, which is an advantage many at-risk girls simply do not have.

## **Middle School**

I feel pretty confident at this point that I can ask Shay specific questions related to the research. After a conversation about her kindergarten teacher and what a powerful impact she had on Shay's life, I wonder if she has a contrasting teacher. One who has made her life hell? She did.

*It was like the start of my eighth grade year in [up north] and it was like a week into school and I wouldn't like - Sometimes I didn't have rides to school and where I lived, I didn't have like, a choice of a bus. They wouldn't come to where I stayed. So, if my parents didn't get up and take me, I wasn't going.*

*So, I missed like three days out of the first week. The first day I go back to school, my teacher, she asked me what was going on. And I was like, I just didn't have a ride. And she was like, um, well, maybe you should have got a taxi and I was like, um, my parents like, my parents aren't going to make me get a taxi to go to school. You know like, my parents don't have the money for that. And she was like, um, well then maybe your parents should be better parents and get up and actually take you. And I was like, well my parents work all night and all day. And she was like, well then you're going to be nothing in life. And I like, walked out of the classroom...*

Much of Shay's middle school experience reads like bad teenage soap opera. Her perceptions of her teachers are that they don't care. Her parents are busy involved with their failing family business and still in the throes of drug/alcohol addiction. Shay's schooling is really the last thing on anyone's mind.

There is a hint that perhaps her school is attempting to correct her behavior with daily progress sheets sent home. However, when you bring home notes to parents who are preoccupied with their own lives, the effectiveness of these types of behavior management tools are diminished.

*I went to school every day, but I barely paid attention. I was more focused on like, making friends. Um, I got in trouble a lot. I fought.*

I lean in.

*Um, there was this teacher, her name was Miss Jackson. I threw gum at her. I got into trouble for that. She graded my paper wrong. I knew she graded my paper wrong because I cheated off this girl and she got a straight A.*

And you didn't?

*I didn't. I got a C, which made no sense to me because usually if like, she knows you're cheating off somebody, she'd just ask you about it. So, I threw gum at her. It wasn't like chewed up gum or anything. It was just like, a pack of gum and I just threw it.*

And did you get a referral?

*Yeah, I got a referral for that. And then, I was in gym one day and we weren't supposed to have our phones out. But I had my phone out and the teacher asked for my phone and I was talking to my dad at the time. And I told her no because I was talking to my dad and she was like well, you can talk to your dad later. And I was like, I don't want to talk to him later, I'm talking to him now. And she was like, well then, she was like, if you don't give me your phone I'm going to have to have somebody come escort you. And so I threw my phone at her. Yeah. It hit her in the back of her head when she was walking away. So... I got arrested for that, but it wasn't really like arrested for it. I just got put in handcuffs. Yeah, they took me to JDC. But I got out in like an hour or two.*

They put you in front handcuffs or back handcuffs?

*Back. They actually like, put me on the ground and all that. They tackled me like I was a real bad criminal or something. But then, I wrote her an apology letter and gave it to her.*

This is a defining moment for me. I have a shift in my consciousness about this girl. Up until now there was pity, sorrow and sadness for all she had been through. This is a pivotal

moment. I see her morph right before my eyes from victim to perpetrator. She is unabashedly open with me. Shay is telling it like it is.

I sense no remorse or embarrassment. It is just a matter of fact and that destabilizes me. There is a palpable tension that signifies there are more stories of brutality to come. Perhaps chucking a phone at teacher is her way of introducing me to a different side of who she was. Or maybe who she still is.

### **Elementary School**

Shay is quick to note that her elementary years were difficult. She moved a lot and compares herself to an army brat. By her count, she has been to eight or nine elementary schools. This is no doubt of that due to her parents evading law enforcement and jumping from hotel to hotel in different parts of the school district. She seems indifferent to her elementary school experience, with the exception of a teacher says *had a really big impact on (her) life*. When I push her to go a bit deeper about the relationship and why Shay finds it so impactful, she describes a woman who cared for her students and one who recognized that Shay was struggling. I find myself wishing she had more of these types of teachers along her educational path.

*I've had a lot of those teachers like this - that would just sit at their desk and like, if you ask for help they would like, tell you to ask a friend or like, ask your partner or something. But like, when I asked her for help like, she would actually, like help me. She recently passed away. It was very depressing.*

### **Fights**

The more I meet with Shay the deeper she delves into her past, specifically, her history of violence. She is very concise when discussing her involvement in fights. No excitement in her voice and no sorrow either. Shay is both a victim and perpetrator of aggression and violence.



*There's this girl...she's not new, not that new. We had problems. She was talking about me but was like trying to be slick about it. Like, she wasn't trying to let me know she was talking about me. I'm the type of person like my mouth has no filter. I say what's on my mind at all times. So I said something to her and she got slick and so I got slick and then we just started going at it.*

I asked her to clarify the phrase going at it and in this instance she and the other student were yelling at each other. This part of the story is important. Shay was this girl's mentor. That means her role was to show the girl the ropes of the alternative center. I find it interesting that the first thing Shay says to justify her behavior is that the *girl is not that new*. As though, that makes the incident easier to accept. I also am listening thinking Shay has been at this center for approximately four months. This was the one "nonviolent" incident at the center. But there is another incident that harkens back to Shay's earlier schooling and darker times.

*Um, the other girl...she was here before I was and I've known her since sixth grade. Yeah, but we like butted heads a little bit because she was talking about my cousin. I'm real, like, defensive when it comes to family. So, I said something to her and she said something back. I punched her in her face.*

In this moment I acquire a better understanding of Shay, where she is and where she has come from. These stories are in stark contrast to the warm greetings I receive and the heartfelt goodbyes I encounter with each visit. I vacillate between empathy and astonishment. Who is this girl?

Shay is at an indelible crossroad in her life. She has been bloodied and caused others to be bloodied with her anger, yet she sits across from me respectfully addressing any and all questions I ask. She begins to speak as though she is remorseful. She is empathetic towards those

she has hurt, physically and mentally. She is working so hard on becoming something other than which she has been. Her freckled face is filled with pain and hope. I wonder if the stories she tells release her of her past even just a tiny bit. I hope they do.

*That was the first altercation I ever had here. And, um, I actually cried.*

She is growing. The stories of fights from long ago had no hint of regret. But in the here and now, I can tell she is softer then she once was.

*My first fight was in elementary school, in the bathroom my fifth grade year. This girl called my mom a crack head at lunch. And I wasn't having that. So, well, she was in the bathroom and was peeing. I kicked in the stall and I just started fighting her.*

While she was peeing?

*Yeah. I don't know what was going through my mind. I actually felt kind of psycho afterwards, because – I was smiling and like walking away. But I got suspended for ten days.*

I sit back in my chair and grapple with the vivid images swirling in my head.

*I'm always the one to hit first and I don't know why. 'Cause my anger just takes over and I see black....and I can't control anything.* Her ability to express to me her inability to stop herself when she “sees black” is remarkable. She is currently not on a medical regimen for her Bipolar disorder and she recognizes that might be a problem. She is on a roll and wants to tell me more. Is this cathartic? I can't tell.

*Um the second biggest fight I had was with this boy. I think it was like seventh grade year. Yeah, seventh grade year. It was like almost the ending. I had like three more months of school left. He stole my cookie. And I don't know, I love food so.*

We laugh together at the ridiculousness of her fighting a boy for taking her cookie.

*I wasn't having that either. I chased him down the hallway. I slung him into a locker. I bashed his head into the locker. They said I hit him over one hundred and five times in less than five minutes. Ambulance had to come get him, 'cause he had a head concussion. He couldn't get up. He couldn't see. He was bleeding out his nose. I had to go to secondary school. I had to go to court. All of that. Um, every day we went to school... we had to be shackled and handcuffed.*

*This was the same timeframe that the family business was plummeting up north. This was the same timeframe that her great-grandfather was dying. There, in that place, that spawned the beginning of the end for Shay and her family up north. I didn't care about nothing then. Um, then, it was like my last day of [secondary school] this girl tried to fight me. And I wasn't gonna fight her on my last day, I could have got sixty more days.*

*So, um, like a week later, it was summer. I seen her at the apartments, that my cousin lived at. And my mom and them they were doing drug deals. I seen her with my friend... when she came back I told her that I wanted to fight her. Um, so I did. And she went to the hospital. I got another charge for that. Then, um - then they charged me with assault with a deadly weapon 'cause I picked up a rock. And, that's how I got my reputation. I started fighting.*

*I started associating with gangs. I started drug dealing and um... I got into a gang. I was jumped in. I was beat, really bad. Like I had two black eyes, a bloody nose. It was really bad. The girl that I fought, she wasn't from the gang that I really hung out with, which is Bloods. She was from their biggest rival which is Crips. Um, so this girl from Bloods, she approached me one day. And she said, hey, I seen you fight that girl and I think you should join. And I was just like, okay, because I thought it was cool at the time.*

*So, they decided I would run with them every day. I recognize her pronoun choices in this statement. She has given up her power to the gang as she states *they* decided what she would*

*do. I started skipping school to be with them. I sold drugs. I shot at people. Oh my God, I was so bad. And that's who I really associated with. We sold drugs. We shot at people. We stole. We stole cars and, um, yeah. I was really bad.*

And so at this time you're not going to school? School is a nonissue?

*Yeah.*

And mom and dad are doing their thing?

*Strung out on drugs.*

So, they don't pay any bit of attention?

*Yeah. There was nights I wouldn't come home at all and my parents would like have a conversation with me the next morning and they wouldn't even know - that I was gone. And then um, I got shot at. Um, there was like a drive-by shooting and my best friend got shot. He died instantly. He was only thirteen. Um, then that's when I knew I needed to stop what I was doing and like get out of this. This was not the place for me. This is not what I should be doing at this age. I'm too young to die.*

*And I was talking to my dad and he was like, there's nowhere else we can go. This is our home and you can't go back to Florida. And so, I stayed with the gang and stuff. I was talking to them about how I got shot at. They were telling me you're going to be okay. I went to the fair one day and there were these girls, the girl that I fought and her friends, well her ex-best friends they still like hated me because I was from the Bloods and they were from Crips.*

*I was walking by myself. They came up behind me and cut my throat with a razorblade. I go to the hospital from the fair and all that. I had stitches. Actually it was glued or something. Um, I got out, it was around Easter and I decided I was going to steal my parents' car. They*

*woke up Easter morning, I was gone. They called the cops. They found me in two days. I got arrested for grand theft auto. It was me and three boys and two other girls.*

Her voice does not waver through the entire monologue. In this narrative, there is no sense of drama. She remains calm and collected. I do not break her stride with questions. I listen. Once she takes a breath, I gauge her demeanor. She is composed and I use this moment as a vehicle to steer the conversation to reflection. I ask how she feels about her past. Does she view it as *good times*?

*When I reminisce on like what happened and what I've been through and what I've done to other people and like put other people in danger and stuff, I'm like, why would I ever do that? That's not really who I am. Today, that's not who I ever really was? I think I was just trying to fit in. I was trying to be one of them. It worked. By doing what I did. They respected me for what I did. And, I just, now that I look back, I'm like, wow. I was really nothing for trying to associate with people like them. But...I made a dramatic change..... Some still talk to me to this day but most of them have babies now. The girls that I really hung out with, they have babies.*

I go into the center for the last time fairly close to the end of the school year. Shay is excited and nervous to be “graduating” the program with enough credits to re-enter high school and take her rightful place in her grade level. She will be a junior in high school in the fall. I know she is excited and nervous. I know she is confident in her ability to be successful, maybe even overly confident. However, when we talk about her weekend Shay, the fighter, rears her head.

*She came to my cousin's house, Sunday at like eleven. She's really close with this girl named Beth's mom. And me and Beth were really close. Beth's gay and so she dated that girl Christina. And then, um, Christina thought me and Beth had something going on, but I don't like*

*girls so. I tried to tell her like, I don't like her...And so, yeah, I guess she found out where we lived and popped up at the house and we were fighting and um, I kind of knocked her bottom tooth out.*

I can't help but notice the bruise and scratch around her eye. I feel a bit naïve. She has been progressing so well, I figure the marks are unrelated to fighting. But there is a something to the adage, old habits die hard. *Yeah she just like scratched me. But like her girlfriend, when I was on top of her, her girlfriend pushed me off of her and I hit my head on the ground. Really hard. My cousin broke it up.*

*This girl, she is sixteen. She has a daughter that is two, which means she was pregnant at fourteen. She does drugs, like not marijuana or anything. Heavy drugs. She just like, dropped out of school and she has like nothing going on with her life. I was trying to help her, you know, when her and Beth were breaking up. And she just starting hating me. I was trying to help her. I don't care. I know she does. I can tell by how irritated she seems with the whole situation.*

She transitions from the video recorded fight to how amazing the chips are that brought for her and I go with it, but the shift seems abrupt and a bit bizarre. I take advantage of the change of topic and ask her about her experience talking to me. *I look forward to it. I don't really like open up and express like my life story and like to tell my story to people. But I don't know. I feel like I've been so much smoother during the day knowing that, like, you're coming.*

### **Shay's Perception of the Alternative Center**

*Um, me and my dad talk about this all the time. I think it was the best decision I could ever make for myself. 'Cause my GPA was low, I had like 0.9. I had four credits when you're supposed to have like six, for one year. Um, my grades were horrible and it's like nice being in like a small environment and having like, actually your teachers work with you. Not only do they*

*teach you. They work with you for credits and stuff, they teach you how to have respect and stuff like that. She loves it here. I jokingly tell her she is like a poster child for this place. This is such a stark contrast to Jocelyn's experience.*

*Life-long lessons, like it's nice. I communicate with all the staff. I know all the staff and the staff loves me. Like the teachers actually interact with you and they help you. People actually get to know you and stuff. They put a number on your and call it a day. If you let them, they put you on the right track.*

She has nothing but positive words for the center. She has the typical teenage complaints, but in general she is grateful to the school and especially the staff for their support. She has made amazing strides both socially and academically. The center has been able to accurately create a learning map to enhance Shay's experience

### **Just the Two of Us**

Shay and I connected pretty instantaneously. She jumped at the opportunity to tell me her story with very little probing from me. She poured her heart out and bared her soul each visit. We both genuinely looked forward to our time together. When it was time to conclude our interviews, she assured me she would be working hard in school so she could fulfill her dream of helping other girls deal with the harsh realities of life. I liked Shay. I think we would probably have been friends in high school. We hugged on our last visit and I told her how much I appreciated her willingness to talk to me and divulge stories that were painful to remember and impossible to forget.

School has started now and I can't help but wonder how she is doing. Did she register for her junior year? Is she as committed to completing high school today as she was then?

It's a strange line I am straddling; researcher and confidant. I question should I go to the high school and check on her. It's not my place. That was not my role. But yet here I sit, concerned. I'm human, a woman who used to be a girl and a junior in high school. I am now a mother and have a daughter of my own. I am worried that Shay could read the next odd look from a fellow student as a diss triggering a fight. I cannot help but wonder if she will wear those skirts she's been told she shouldn't. Will they dress code her again sending her home? Will she have the determination to go back to school?

My researcher hat so easily slips off and I shift to a place deep inside of me. A place I did not learn about in a classroom or through journal articles. It is a part of me that is not up for negotiation or analysis. This is a part of me who isn't interested in data collection or academics. This instinctive part of me burrows to the core of who I am and the affect my participant has had on me. Simply put, I am a worried mother of a girl who I barely know.

## **Mental Health**

**Jocelyn and Shay.** While not the focus of this research, the issue of mental health came up within both girls' stories. In congruence with research of at-risk girls from the last 30 years, the mental health status of these 2 participants was a reoccurring theme during the interviews (Cuellar & Dave, 2016; Mallett, 2014; Schleider & Weisz, 2016). It would be remiss to not mention the stories these girls told about their own mental health and the challenges that they have faced throughout their lifetime. Jocelyn spoke to me candidly about her medication. *I'm supposed to do work. Pills make me so sleepy. I be so exhausted I can't even do work. It's been like that for a couple days. Not days, but months now.* I asked her if she took her meds in the morning or afternoon. *I take Abilify in the afternoon. Yeah in the afternoon and I take Clonidine*



*in um- [the morning]*. She was on a new regimen to help combat the aggression and mood swings.

Shay was also forthcoming with her struggles in being diagnosed with depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. She recalled a time where she had lower limb paralysis and the doctors thought it was *psychiatric or something. They're testing on me right now because they think I have ADHD*. I asked her if she was currently taking any medication. *No. My dad, since he's in AA, he doesn't want me on any medication or anything. And he told the lady that, but she told him that if I was diagnosed with ADHD that I would have to be put on medication. To be honest, whatever she thinks will cure me. I don't think you can cure ADHD but, hey. And I'm bi-polar*. She is hopeful medication will stop her from acting out before she can have time to think about the consequences of taking the medication (Walker, Munro, Sullivan-Colgazier, 2015).

Both girls have been diagnosed, according to the directors at the centers, with Bi-polar disorder and depression (Marsh, 2016). One of the girls was on a medication regime while the other was not on any medications at all.

## **Conclusions**

Each participant's story showcases the trials and tribulations met by these two girls who are at-risk. They have hopes and dreams like any other girls. They have fought, both literally and figuratively, their way through this life and have ended up at alternative education centers. They are in very different emotional places and yet still need substantial amounts of support from both their loved ones and service providers (Sharpe, 2016). Without these supports their developmental trajectories are at risk and their risk for recidivism increases (Fontaine et al., 2009; Tile & Rose, 2007).

## A Total Shutdown

I called the center looking for Shay. I wanted to stop in prior to the end of the school year. I also had already made arrangements to speak with another girl who was interested in being a part of the research.

Hi there. May I please speak with Mr. Smith?

*Hello Mrs. Curtis. I'm sorry to inform you that he no longer works here.*

What do you mean he doesn't work there anymore? I was just there yesterday!

*This was a very abrupt change.*

Okay. Well I have scheduled to meet with Anaia today and I wanted to confirm that appointment and be sure she was in class today.

*Anaia is also not here. Our center will no longer be providing services to girls.*

I'm sorry, what? You are no longer providing services to girls?

*Yes, that is right.*

Oh...Okay, thank you.

I am in utter shock and frantically call the other center location, the one off the busy industrial highway.

Hi there, it's Jessica. I just got off the phone with the other center and they said that they are no longer providing services to girls. How can this be?

*We have had a shift in our mission. This center location will also no longer be servicing girls.*

Wait, this center isn't either? So what has happened to the all the girls?

*They have been displaced.*

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The principal purpose of this study was to explore the educational journeys of girls prior to their placement in an alternative education center. Although the fields of education and criminal justice recognize the importance of examining firsthand experiences, girls' voices are still largely missing from the research (Sharpe, 2016; Knight, 2009). The study offered the participants a platform to share their journeys and examined the intersectionality of race, disability and gender.

#### **Review of the Findings**

There are a multitude of tensions that exist in narrative research for many and the impetus of the tension lies with their own conceptualizations of research. From children we are taught the scientific method. We are directed to state just the facts as they present themselves throughout the cyclical process of experimentation. We are trained to stay out of the research and that our opinions are hurdles to avoid. narrative; however, suggest that identity, opinion and the researched are potentially one in the same (Smith & Sparkes, 2006). The researcher may indeed negotiate his/her own identity while constructing the narrative.

This study employed both the narrative as the analysis and an analysis of the narrative to ensure the answers to the research questions were explicably answered. The research questions posed were designed to explore the interconnected relationship between each participant's school

experiences, as they related to race, disability and gender. The questions are explicitly stated and answered below.

**Question 1:** What stories do girls being educated in alternative settings tell about their education?

The stories told by the girls illuminated the issues brought forth in their schooling as a factor in their educational derailment. Similar to the work of Shippen et al. (2012), Jocelyn and Shay experienced suspensions as well as a lack of connection with teachers and administrators throughout their educational journeys. Their succeeding detachment from school therefore created a window of opportunity for delinquency.

### **Jocelyn**

Jocelyn spoke briefly about her kindergarten teacher. While she could not remember her name, she said she was kind and had a big heart. Jocelyn described kindergarten as the “best years ever.” I asked her what made that year so amazing. She stated, “All I did was go to sleep, do a little work...it was so fun. We would go outside and play games.” She remembered that her kindergarten teacher also yelled. “And every time she’d [the teacher] get mad at one of the kids, she’d start to yell and stuff.”

Jocelyn informed me that she was held back in kindergarten. She said, “I didn’t know I was [held back]. My momma told me in like the fifth grade.” She did not remember being held back or how it made her feel at the time. She was simply matter of fact about the situation.

Jocelyn described herself as being sensitive when she was younger. Her tone was decidedly negative when conversing about this characteristic. “Well back then I was sensitive. Like every time somebody like would yell at me, I’d start to cry and stuff. I hate when people yell at me.” She informed me that this particular teacher was an old White lady.

As we explore further into the history of her schooling, she states, “Second grade was harder.” She follows that comment directly with a story about a girl she wanted to fight, in second grade. “I remember I wanted to fight this girl in second grade. She yelled at me too. That’s all I remember.” There were brief conversations about academics however, I found most of our discussions veered back to fighting. She became anxious to talk about other grades.

“Oh, fourth grade I remember I got into a fight with this girl. It was on the bus. I tore that girl behind up.” She was particularly animated when telling this story. She bounced in her chair and smashed her hand into her fist. “I always win my fights and I never lose them.” I asked her what winning a fight means. “She’s [the other girl] bleeding.” I clarified and asked so whoever draws blood first is the winner? Jocelyn giggled and stated “that’s right.”

She continued on regarding the academics in fourth grade.

Fourth grade was easy, a little bit. We’d go outside  
and play but sometimes the work was hard. When I  
was in third and fourth grade and stuff, I did not  
know math. I hate math so much because it was do  
hard for me to know. And then when I get something  
right, you know, I love math.

I could honestly relate. When I asked her how she felt about math today she stated, “I hate it still.”

I ask her if she remembered the situation with the girl who’s behind she tore up. “She was talking about me. She said I looked like a rat. It was weird. I never said anything about her.” I asked her what happened. She said, “I wanted her to touch me first. She touched me and I

punched her.” I asked her if she remembers what happened after that. She was suspended for five days. “I think it was like five days. In elementary it wasn’t that long.”

When we delved deeper into her schooling, she was even more candid about her middle school experience.

I used to be the class clown. I used to disrupt the class. I do crazy stuff.

Now that I’m more grown up, like getting older, my anger problems get so bad. They [family, administration, and teachers] said they felt like if they sent me here [the alternative center] there were less people here and

I won’t like get into trouble. But I got in trouble here and fought a lot here.

Jocelyn has been to several schools over the past three years. She attended a public middle school and then was sent to an alternative school. She was removed and placed at her current, more restrictive, alternative school.

While in her current placement she had been arrested twice and suspended twice for five days. With the first arrest she was placed in a residential center. “It’s got a lot of gates and stuff with wires on it like jail. It’s just like jail.” I asked her where she slept at night and she stated, “On these hard mats in these rooms where they lock us in.” I asked her if she was alone in this room. “I always have a roommate.” We discussed the first time and night she ever was in a detention center. Jocelyn remembers her first time was filled with worry.

Oh, when I can first went to the detention center I did not like it at all. I swear to God, I did not like it. I hated it. I wanted to go home. I couldn’t sleep at all. I was just thinking about stuff in there. I didn’t want to go to bed at all. I stayed up until I had to go to court. When I went to court the next morning, man, they told me I could go home and I was so happy.”

The next times Jocelyn would stay longer and longer. This last stay was just under 21 days. “They were supposed to let me do twenty-one, the whole twenty-one, but they let me go home early and I was so happy.”

I waited for over a week to see Jocelyn at one point. Each time I would call to make an appointment to see her, she was out. I later found out she had been suspended for an entire school week. When I asked her what happened she stated, “I fought the boy next door.” I simply asked her why. “Sorry dude but this boy was so disrespectful. They all disrespectful here.”

### **Shay**

Much like Jocelyn, many of Shay’s school memories are of altercations and brutal fights rather than academics. There is a drastic difference in Shay’s stories. In addition to her fights with other students, Shay also attacked teachers. Below are two different instances with two different teachers.

**Incident 1.** Shay describes a time that she cheated in class. She received a C and the girl she cheated off of received an A. She became irate and stated that the teacher graded her paper wrong. The teacher asked her to tell her if she cheated. Shay stated that the teacher would typically just change the grade to the one you should have received.

But um, she graded my paper a C and  
I wanted the A. So, I threw gum at her.  
It wasn’t like chewed up gum or anything.  
It was just like, a pack of gum and I just  
threw it.

She received a referral for this particular episode.

**Incident 2.** Shay was in gym class. She had her phone out when she acknowledged she should not have. She stated she was speaking with her dad and the teacher asked for her phone. Shay told the teacher no. The teacher told Shay to talk to her dad later. The situation escalated. Shay told the teacher she didn't need to talk to him later since she was speaking to him now. The teacher told her she would get someone to escort her out of the gym if she didn't give her the phone.

She was like, well then, if you don't give me your phone I'm going to have to have somebody come escort you. And so, I threw my phone at her. Yeah. It hit her in the back of her head when she was walking away. So, I got arrested for that.

Shay was matter of fact in all of the details she purported. Her academics floundered due to her social activities.

And then my ninth grade year, was- I have to say like, the best but the worst year of my school years. I liked school, but I did none of my work. None of it. I got straight F's and D's. And the only reason I got D's was because I passed my EOC's [end of course assessment].

Shay's elementary school years were trying. According to Shay, most of her issues started with her home situation and spilled into school.

I actually went to eight or nine elementary schools. It was really like hard. I'd make friends and then get really



close to them and then I would up and move without  
like no goodbyes, nothing.

She remembered one teacher in her life that she felt made an impact. It was her kindergarten teacher. “We would talk, you know, on a day-to-day basis.” Shay went on to say, “But I was only with her for three or four months.”

We continued the conversation about her schooling focusing on middle and high school. Similarly to Jocelyn, Shay focused in on her fighting rather than her school work. Her perceptions of her teachers were that they did not care. “It’s like they can treat you anyway and not [give] the same respect they [got].” Shay stated “I’ve had a lot of those teachers like this, that would just sit at their desk and like, if you ask for help they would like, tell you to ask a friend or like, ask your partner or something.”

**Question 2:** To what extent is race featured in the girl’s stories of their educational experiences?

### **Jocelyn**

The first time Jocelyn had the police called on her it was by her mom.

I used to cuss at her a lot. We were arguing  
that day. I tried to get past her. I was right here  
and she was like this blocking the door so I won’t  
go by. I was like mom, move. Move! So I went under  
her. I tried to go under her and I accidentally pushed  
her against it [the doorway].

Her mother called the police. The police came out to the house. They questioned her, took a statement from her mother and proceeded to handcuff her behind her back as they

escorted her to the patrol car. She was thirteen at the time. She was placed in the back of the car and taken to the juvenile assessment center (JAC). I asked her how she was with the police. Her statement spoke volumes about her experience as an African-American in the United States. “I was nice. Every time the police get around me, I be nice. I don’t want them to kill me.”

Jocelyn was being educated in a warehouse district that was not far from her home. While she took the bus, it was a short ride for her. Other kids in her school could walk from the nearby neighborhoods. “Yeah, some kids walk home.” There were students in her class from her neighborhood that she knew “I knew her from a long time ago. She not my best friend, but she’s like my friend that I talk to and stuff.” The stories of her neighborhood included nightly gun shots and even a dead body found at her apartment complex.

I heard a gunshot, so I looked out my  
window and the man was running. A man  
shot at him. He fell by my window. Everybody  
had called the police and the police came. Me  
and my cousin looked at his face and this what  
he was like, dead. His eyes were like open and  
his mouth was like open too. They were trying  
to pump his heart so he could come back.

Poverty and stressors are not superficially related to race but indeed contribute to educational disparities among marginalized students and students of color.

I asked Jocelyn about her favorite subject in school. “I don’t have a favorite subject. I just like Black history month.” Black history month is celebrated one month per school year. It is also the shortest month in the calendar year. When I inquired about whom her favorite person

was that she had learned about during Black history month she stated, “Martin Luther King cause he said the right thing. His speeches are real good.” This conversation between Jocelyn and I was the personification of the purpose of culturally responsive pedagogy.

## **Shay**

Shay was being educated in close proximity to a country club that boasted a beautifully maintained golf-course and expansive lake. The center itself was decrepit, yet it was nestled among multi-million dollar homes. All of the students were bused there. Some came from over an hour away according to the behavior specialist. The students at this center were racially diverse. Shay stated “it’s like homey here.”

The students at Shay’s center had a dock where they ate their lunch daily. The multipurpose room overlooked the water and when it rained that space became their cafeteria. According to Shay’s behavior specialist, the teachers were able to launch boats into the lake and explore the water with the students whenever they staff saw fit.

Shay’s home environment had vastly improved from the stories of her childhood. “Our parents were going from trailer park to trailer park and hotel to hotel.” The Department of Child and Family services caught up with the family during a drug deal in the early morning hours. At that time her father and mother are arrested and she is sent to foster care.

DCF split us all up and sent us all to  
different homes. My sister and I lived with  
these Black people that owned a day care.  
I lived with the Black people that had one blood  
daughter and um, two other foster kids.

It is in this placement that Shay is victimized by the daughter of her foster parents. “I had to sleep with their biological daughter, which was seventeen, around there at the time and she would rape me basically.” According to Shay this went on for around three months until her grandparents took her in. Shay entered counseling where she divulged her story to her counselor and eventually to her father.

“Friday I went to a football game and then went home. And then my best friend stayed the night. And Saturday at the movies.” Shay presently lived with her sister and recently sober father in a home in a middle class neighborhood within walking distance to her zoned school. She told stories about her weekend plans and outings with her family and how her life was so different than it once was.

**Question 3:** To what extent is disability featured in the girl’s stories of their educational experiences?

Each girl gave her best understanding of services provided to her at the previous schools they attended. Jocelyn divulged that she indeed received speech services. “I went to speech a lot. Speech was fun. They came to the place where I was arrested at. We did speech there.”

Each girl candidly shared her struggle with bipolar disorder. While it was unclear if they received special education services related to their bipolar diagnosis, what was clear was that each girl understood the gravity of the disorder and how it influenced her daily life.

### **Jocelyn**

Jocelyn discussed her new medication regimen. She was on two different drugs for her bipolar diagnosis and complained that they made her tired. She suggested that her medication was the reason she always wanted to sleep in class “I’m supposed to work. Pills make me so

sleepy. I be so exhausted I can't even do work." She also said she felt that her anger was getting worse as she was getting older.

I disrupt the class a lot. I get tardies and stuff.  
And I get suspended a lot. That's what made me  
come here. I got suspended a lot. But first they  
sent me to [a different alternative school]. It  
was bad. Girls there wanted to fight me too,  
and I did fight them.

The last visit I had with Jocelyn she was bright eyed. I spoke to her directly about how perky she seemed. "I didn't take my pills. I feel good. I did my work finally." She continued,

Well, this morning I didn't feel good because  
I guess these girls, I used to be cool with, they  
done turned on me and they ain't fucking with  
me like that. [It was] something that Dijon said  
and stuff. Just cause he commented a heart on  
her picture. She showed me and I was like, okay,  
I don't go with him anymore so I don't care.

It was obvious she did care and she was clearly hurt by the conversation on the bus on her way to school.

## **Shay**

Shay offered insight to her mental health diagnosis of Bipolar however, she rejected the notion that she was ever in special education classes.

No. Never. No, but um, in middle school,  
I got in trouble so often that um, every morning  
I had to go get this piece of paper. It was just like,  
every teacher had to sign and say how my day  
was and stuff like that. Then I would have  
to take it to the principal.

She also described a time she was in a fight and received a ten-day suspension.

My fifth grade year, this girl called my mom a  
crack head at lunch. And I wasn't having that.  
So while she was in the bathroom and peeing,  
I kicked in the stall and I just started fighting  
her... Yeah. I don't know what was going through  
my mind. I actually felt kind of psycho afterwards,  
because – I was smiling and like walk[ed] away.  
But I got suspended for ten days.

Her comment regarding her exactly ten day suspension could be an indication that she does receive special education services. I never received a clear answer due to the center not having her cumulative folder or updated documents from her zoned school.

Shay divulged that she had been diagnosed with Bipolar disorder and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. She was not currently on any medication for either diagnosis. Her father was in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and was concerned that she would become addicted to any medication provided to her; he was staunchly against her using any prescriptions.

Shay described times where she would *see black* and she would become enraged. She qualified her statement suggesting at those times she felt “psycho.” She disclosed that the therapist was in conversations with her father regarding medication for her Bipolar diagnosis but nothing had been decided. “My dad, since he’s in A.A., he doesn’t want me on any medication or anything and he told the lady [the therapist] that.” I asked her what her feelings were about being put on medication. “To be honest, whatever she thinks is going to cure me.”

**Question 4:** To what extent is gender featured in the girl’s stories of their educational experiences?

It has been widely purported that girls encounter harsh punishment for status offenses or mild delinquent behavior as compared to their boy counterparts (Liddell & Martinovic, 2013). The clash of gender societal norms and the girls’ schooling was evident throughout each interview. There were stories told regarding relationships and dress coding that negatively impacted the educational trajectory of each girl.

**Relationships.** Being a romantically or sexually involved at-risk, adolescent girl can be a toxic combination (Morris, 2016; Sherman, 2005; Steketee, Junger & Junger-Tas, 2013). These caustic relationships often contribute to the delinquent behavior of girls, but have very little effect on boys. Failed adolescent relationships can severely negatively impact girl’s self-esteem and increase the likelihood of depression. Depression can help to set the scene for sexually risky-behavior in girls at risk and can cause the girls to be susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases, as well as, increase the probability that they will encounter abuse (Chesney-Lind, et al., 2008).

### **Jocelyn**

Jocelyn had repeatedly been arrested for battery since she was thirteen. She spent almost 21 days in a juvenile detention facility during the time this study took place. Even so, she rarely steered the conversation away from the boyfriend who had just broken up with her (Dijon). Her

fixation with him and their relationship was all consuming. No matter what topic we were discussing the topic of Dijon always ended up front and center. She told me about an issue she was now having with her friends due to a social media post that Dijon had commented on.

This girl, Sierra, she like, do Dijon got a  
right hand [girlfriend]? I was like, I don't know.  
She showed me something on her phone. It said,  
he wrote on her Facebook That's real cutie,  
you should be my little baby. I was like that is so creep.  
You're[Dijon] like messin' with the girl that  
I was friends with. And these hoes is so fake.  
And then I was fixin' to fight them.

### **Shay**

When Shay and I spoke about boys, she was quick to inform me that she did not have a boyfriend at this time. She was talking with a boy but they were not considered boyfriend and girlfriend. She had boyfriends in the past and they caused her to lose focus on what was important her: family.

I had a boyfriend at the time that I was dating since  
eighth grade. And I was more focused on him and his grades  
so that he could play basketball than my grades. And rather  
than doing homework. I lied to my dad about my grades.

**Dress Coding.** Dress coding denotes to when a student is out of compliance with the school's dress code. The student may be referred to the office for a plethora of reasons. For instance: offensive language on a shirt, low hanging pants, tight/short skirts etc. are just some possible dress code violations. In response to these infractions, the student may have to wear a



shirt provided by the office or turn his/her shirt inside out so the offensive language is illegible.

If a student's pants are hanging down too low, exposing his/her underwear, the student may have to use zip ties to tighten their pants around the waist. Each of these issues resulted in the student headed back to class.

What I was surprised to learn, was when Shay was “dress coded” in her school, the procedure was to contact her guardian. If a guardian was unreachable at that time, there were two possible consequences for the infraction. She was either sent to in school suspension (ISS) or sent home. When I asked Shay to clarify what dress code violation served as a catalyst for her being sent home, she stated that she wore leggings to school.

I um, wore leggings like the second  
week I was there because everyone  
else wore leggings. And as soon as I wore  
leggings, I got dress coded and sent home.  
They [school administration] told me not to  
return [that day].

## **Conclusions**

The interconnected nature of race, disability and gender all play an important role in the educational pathway of marginalized girls. Parameters are often set around how we support students based on financial limitations and time constraints that can make our jobs less laborious. The truth is it takes time to understand each child and their circumstances.

Girls like Jocelyn and Shay have asked for a community of listeners including their peers and adults who can advocate on their behalf. Engaged listening can also create a sense of liberation and self-advocacy for the girls involved. Shay suggests that sharing her life experience

with other girls may “help others you know, those have been through similar situations and [tell them] I promise you things are gonna get better. Keep your head up.” With support from the educational community (peers included) girls would be guided towards successful completion of their schooling. Lastly, they may also come to a deeper understanding of who they are thus igniting within them a sense of empowerment.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will discuss the theoretical lens and review the findings of this study in relation to the guiding research questions. In addition, I present a discussion of the challenges of the study, positionality, and recommendations for future research.

This research study aimed to contribute to the literature by gaining the insight and perspectives of girls who were being educated in an alternative center. The present study sought to better understand how previous experiences had impacted the girls' educational trajectory. The fields of both education and juvenile justice have long called for further research where girl's voices would be heard (Stein et al., 2015). Much of the literature is focused on pathways to the juvenile system or the school to prison pipeline (STPP), but there is little research constructed with the student's voice at the forefront.

The methodology of narrative inquiry allowed the nuances of the participants' lives to be explored. The context of each story was kept intact to examine the lived experience of each girl in a holistic manner. Through the theoretical frameworks of radical feminism and critical race theory (CRT), the experiences leading these two girls to an alternative education have been scrutinized.

#### **Theoretical Lens**

This study was guided through the theoretical lenses of critical race theory (CRT) and critical feminism.

**Critical Race Theory.** Critical race theory is considered a “structural discrimination that permeates all aspects of society” (Chadderton, 2013, p.40). Critical race theory (CRT) suggests that perhaps there is a normalcy to racism (Daniels, 2011). It is part of the woven tapestry of white hegemonic history and therefore infused within the American culture. This hegemonic structure is personified in school settings across the country. The group of marginalized students being most severely impacted by this power structure is students of color, and even more specifically Black students.

Nationwide, [B]lack boys are at the highest risk,  
three times as likely to be arrested at school as their  
white male peers. And African-American girls fare  
little better: They are more than 1.5 times as likely  
as white boys to be arrested. (EdWeekly, Jan. 24, 2017)

This statistic was evident as the research for this study was conducted. The majority of students being educated in the alternative center placement were black. These students were either one step closer to being placed in a juvenile detention center or had just been released.

This current study showcased the difference in experiences and one could say the dissimilarities are race based. But the girls did not articulate race as a factor in their experiences at all. Race never came up. Not one time. This peculiarity led me to believe that indeed racism is deeply nestled in the culture of schools and society. Even when directly confronted with race issues, neither girl could identify race as a factor that may have impacted her success or failure (i.e. location of the center and terrified of the police etc.).

As stated in the previous chapter, seemingly meaningless placements of certain students at certain centers were undoubtedly race related. Center one was disproportionately Black while

center two was diverse. Center one serviced students from the adjacent neighborhood located in a low-income, warehouse district. Center two bused students from more than an hour away into an upper-class golf course community. It's not to say that the center was deliberately continuing a racist agenda, however; the issue is so deeply rooted that without critical examination of the status quo these inequities go unhindered. CRT central tenet demands the critique of the "educational enterprise" (Leonard, 2012, p. 428).

Those who are in power wittingly, or unwittingly, deny students access to a multiplicity of opportunities keeping the power structure firmly in place. CRT is not only a critical study of race in education, it is also a call to action. It demands that the educational researcher look at central issues of race before seeking to discuss other challenges such as sexism or socio-economic status (Leonard, 2012).

The girls in this study were so deeply involved in systematically raced structures (education and justice systems) that their identity as a White girl and Black girl were nearly impossible to detect. They have learned, or more accurately, they have been trained over the years- that they are the root cause of their problems: it is not the system but their choices which have caused them so many traumas. This incarceration discourse (Wing, 2010) ignores the context of the offenses perpetrated by the girls and lays blame squarely in the lap of a child or adolescent. CRT turns incarceration discourse on its heels and demands the systems engage in critical examinations related to its role in the offenses and continued strains of these girls and race is clearly a factor.

**Critical Feminism.** Critical feminism and CRT share similar goals and aims in the constant examination of power structures at play. The main difference is critical feminism is concerned with the lived experiences of girls and women no matter her racial/ethnic background.

Critical feminism specifically engages in challenging the status quo related to the patriarchal society, which strategically and systematically creates a male dominated culture. It's radical feminism that also calls for a reordering of this power structure.

Critiques of critical feminism suggest there is little attention paid to the intersectionality of race and class. Some have even suggested that critical feminism is nothing more than an attempt to "speak hyperbolically about a universal sisterhood" (Echols, 1989 p. 10). Critical feminist have consistently addressed these concerns by stating analysis and critique of racism and other forms of oppression have always been at the forefront of the radical feminist agenda (Whisnant, 2016).

Each of the girls' narratives was constructed through both a CRT and critical feminist lens. It is difficult to ignore the masculine over and undertones of the alternative center and how it affects the girls being serviced there. From being sexually harassed by the other students at the center, to the issues regarding dress coding prior to entering the centers, these girls' experiences in school has been strikingly gendered.

Shay in particular, told a story about her skirt being too tight on her bottom according to her school. She was sent to in-school suspension for the rest of the day because of the interpretation of the dress code by administrators. She was quick to clarify that her skirt was a maxi-skirt (meaning it was almost to the length of the floor). I couldn't help but think to myself how does a teacher or administrator determine the tightness of a girl's skirt? Aren't most clothing items (ex. Jeans, shorts, skirts) tight on your bottom? Isn't that how they stay on your body? Then I snapped out of asking myself those types of questions and became enraged. Here is a girl struggling to connect with school. On the day she actually decides to go to school, the first

thing someone in an authority position told her was that her clothes were inappropriate (sexual undertones). She is then sent to in-school suspension.

Meanwhile Jocelyn was suspended for attacking a boy at school who called her a sexually explicit name. It was how she thought to defend herself. I am not by any means suggesting hitting the boy was a good idea, but it was her method of self-defense. He attacked her character by shouting across the classroom filled with her peers, that she was engaged in a sexually explicit act. She reacted and was suspended, again.

These gendered issues are well documented in literature (Chesney-Lind, et al., 2008; Gage, Joseph & Lunde, 2012; Smith-Adcock, Lee, Kerpleman, Majuta, & Young 2011) and continue to be common place in the education system. Radical feminism demands the organizations that service women and girls combat exploitation and sexual violence against women. This study contextualized the sexualized nature of issues that plague at-risk girls in educational settings. It has also highlighted the sexualized and gendered nature of attacks on girls who statistically have been victimized in the past (Liddell & Martinovic, 2013).

### **Summary of Findings**

This study engaged two girls in semi-structured interviews navigating their educational journeys. The interviews occurred over the course of five sessions. Within those conversations issues of race, disability and gender were explored. Each was examined to determine to what extent any or all three of those issues may have had an impact on the educational lives of the participants. Employing the methodology of narrative inquiry allowed for the girls' stories to be told while adhering to the themes that emerged. Those themes helped to inform the structure of the final narrative; this included similarities across themes, as well as, divergences.

A major contribution of this work is the girls determining what they consider important factors in the ups and downs of their lives. Their voices and the impact of their life experiences on their journeys (educational and otherwise) allow unique insight to the significant issues they battle daily. Each question will be addressed with discussion in conjunction with literature regarding girls at-risk.

**Question 1. What stories do girls being educated in alternative settings tell about their education?**

Students who exhibit or have been identified as having behavioral disorders need intensive emotional, behavioral and educational support to improve their life trajectories (Flower et al., 2011). For Shay and Jocelyn each day at school was riddled with failing grades and fighting classmates. There was no connection to adults and friends were hard to come by for these two girls. In one interview, Jocelyn even related court to school. They were synonymous to her. At the end of the day, there is an adult (teacher or judge) telling you what you can and cannot do and you are to listen or suffer the consequences. The girls' conversations about their education focused around disengagement and struggle. Both girls struggled academically throughout school. Both girls' home lives bled into their school lives at a very young age. Neither of them could remember an encounter with a teacher that was positive after kindergarten.

They felt ignored, unimportant and powerless. Fighting and violence changed that for them. It is important to note that most stories in or outside of school centered around fighting for both girls. The sense of power these girls felt overshadowed any remorse for improprieties against their classmates. The violence snowballed from punishment at school into a criminal act. These girls have been to juvenile detention facilities multiple times for battery. With convictions they gained credibility amongst their peers. With credibility they gained power over others. I



assert that had a teacher reached out in the first, second, third or any grade and made a positive impact on these girls, perhaps they would not be in an alternative center. Teachers have that kind of power. But it is critical in teacher preparation that we prepare candidates to attend to all students; to notice all students. While academics are the cornerstone of schooling it is also crucial to look at the whole child. To see the whole child entails acknowledging all the history and struggles they bring along with them to school.

Tille and Rose (2007) described the phenomenon of sensitivity perceived as a weakness. Once the perceived weakness is self-identified, the unwanted characteristic is substituted with violent outbursts. In a similar manner, Jocelyn appeared to mask her sensitivity with aggression. Being sensitive left Jocelyn vulnerable, therefore she created a new more violent persona to conceal her perceived weakness, which would ultimately prove detrimental to her success in school.

According to Van Dorn and Williams (2003) a sense of power (i.e. violence) creates the sense of safety. Jocelyn recognized, at a young age, that sensitivity could lead to victimization.

Goodson and Morash (2016) discussed the importance of a girl's desired ideal of her possible self and how that desire ultimately affects behavior. The ability or inability for a girl to see herself in a positive light was influenced by childhood experiences.

According to Goodson and Morash's (2016) research, if a girl thought she could be successful and held that belief throughout her schooling, she was indeed successful. Likewise, if a girl's perception of her future self was not positive, she was also accurate. Those girls with little to no positive attainment perceptions often dropped out of school and/or broke the law. Jocelyn had clearly identified herself as a class clown who disrupts and one who has become very angry.

Students with behavioral challenges often reported feeling disconnected from school. Jocelyn's stories were consistent with the literature. For example, girls who exhibit violence also tend to feel isolated (Osher et al., 2012) and lonely.

Jocelyn stated, more than once that she believed most people were either talking about her or they simply did not like her. These feelings made making friends in school nearly impossible. Jocelyn's diagnosis of Bipolar seemed to hinder her ability to foster interpersonal relationships and left her secluded at her current school. Research shows co-occurring mental health issues cause girls to become isolated and engage in risk taking behaviors (unprotected sexual relations, drug use, violence etc.) (Leve & Chamberlain & Kim, 2015; Schleider & Weisz, 2016).

Extensive research has been conducted on the importance of teacher relationships with their students to "... understand and address student's emotional and social skills" (Osher et al., 2012, p.286). Empathic teachers are an integral part of the academic achievement of students who are at risk of incarceration (Chesney-Lind et al., 2008). "And she was like, well then you're going to be nothing in life. And I like, walked out of the classroom" (Shay). According to Sharpe (2016) there is an association between helping professionals (such as teachers and well-fare agencies) failing to recognize and accurately respond to girls who have been victimized and their delinquent activity. Understanding why a girl acts out has to coincide with treatment for possible past/present maltreatment or trauma.

For Shay and Jocelyn, they felt they had no control of their lives inside or outside of school. So they took their power back the only way they knew how. They fought other students. They became powerful when inflicting violence. They expended their rage in a concentrated

manner and made someone else subservient to them. They were the powerful one handing out consequences.

The student teacher relationship can serve as a protective factor for at-risk girls. Sanger et al. (2010) conducted a study with 16 adolescents (12 males and 4 females) who were at-risk for incarceration; some were on probation, some several misdemeanor adjudications. The study was a qualitative study that asked semi-structured interview questions regarding home life, school, peer relationships and any major life events. Three themes emerged, a) the importance of adult relationships, specifically teachers and mothers b) the decline of father support c) and school failure as a disappointment to the adolescents. While this study did not disaggregate boys from girls, the data suggests relationships with teachers have an impact. Also, that school failure or limited success can have a negative impact on all students. Both of these are significant findings for teachers and are substantiated in this study as well.

**Question 2. To what extent does race feature in the stories of these girls' educational experiences?**

As indicated in previous chapters, neither girl spoke of race other than to indicate an adversary they fought (ex. *there was this White girl, or I came at this Black girl*). Both girls indicated race of others, but not of themselves. According to the girls' narratives there was no explicit story regarding race. Yet if you delve into each story and critically analyze their situations, the stories were indeed differentiated by race.

Jocelyn is a Black girl who was being educated in a warehouse district alternative center. Her placement there was mandated by a judge after she had been removed from another alternative center. In contrast, Shay was a White girl who was being educated in an alternative center located in a golf course, country club community on an expansive lake. She determined

that her schooling was not going well and decided, with the support of her father, to register herself for the alternative center.

These scenarios showcase stark differences between two girls. One could look at them and say they have had different experiences and they happen to be different races. But research tells us this is not a coincidence.

Racial and ethnic disparities are rampant.

Children of color ages 10-17 represent only

16% of the overall child population ages

10-17, but make up 34% Of children arrested,

38% of children adjudicated, and 68%

of children in residential placement.

(Child Defense Fund, 2014 p. 38)

The question remains, how to rectify this disparity? For more than twenty years the conversation of culturally responsive teaching has been at the forefront of this conversation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). However, teacher preparation programs and in-service professional development continues to be lacking in this area. While many teacher preparation programs address multicultural issues, rarely are programs preparing teacher candidates to adjust their teaching in the field.

Cultural immersion experiences for both in-service and preservice teachers have been proven effective (Waddell, 2011). Teachers gain valuable insight related to the culture of the school and ultimately the community-at-large. Through reflection, these teachers garner insight into their own biases and come to better understand the different perspectives each community represents, which supports the CRT lens employed in this study. These practitioners are better

prepared to engage all students in meaningful learning activities and culturally relevant content (Schlein & Garii, 2011) and in turn, meet the needs of all students.

Culture in this instance can, and is intended, to refer to students with disabilities as well. All over the country there are organizations that work with people with disabilities. Engaging with students with disabilities from each category of IDEIA (2004) would ensure that the teacher (pre-service or otherwise) had experience with a plethora of students. This type of cultural immersion experience exemplifies the need for differentiation for all students, no matter their disability status.

Current research has just begun to examine race and ethnicity as it relates to delinquency in girls. Stein et al. (20015) suggests this is an important gap within the literature to address as ethnicity, gender and race could be critical factors in creating responsive models of rehabilitation for girls specifically. A recent study by Stein et al. (2015) reviewed archived documents of approximately 657 boys and girls of racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds (30% Hispanic, 48% White, 24% African American and 11% self-identified as other) who were either in a residential juvenile facility sentenced to live or who were preadjudication, meaning a limited stay (4-21 days).

The study was conducted to determine the Risk-Needs-Responsivity model and the recidivism rates of those serviced. What was determined by the study was that White girls show more pathology leading to adjudication then other races studied. They had what the researchers called “problematic profiles” (p. 72). Examples of these characteristics were abuse, hard drug use at early ages and parental difficulty. Stein et al. (2015) posit that their non-White peers may have “been placed in a controlled environment when they are perhaps not as severe” (p. 72). The findings of this current study would support those findings of Stein et al. (2015).

Jocelyn's story is reminiscent of Evan-Winters (2017) work with Black girls as co-researchers regarding on their school experiences. These girls were navigating hostile school environments and literally fighting oppression with their fists, much like Jocelyn did almost daily. In Jocelyn's case, her alternative school center was a direct reflection of her neighborhood environment. The stories of her neighborhood included nightly gun shots and even a dead body found at her apartment complex. "I heard a gunshot, so I looked out my window and the man was running. A man shot at him. He fell by my window. Everybody had called the police and the police came. Me and my cousin looked at his face and this what he was like, dead. His eyes were like open and his mouth was like open too. They were trying to pump his heart so he could come back." Evan-Winters (2017) suggested that there is inadequate support within the school system to help girls cope with the hostility they face in school and in their neighborhoods in a non-violent manner.

The center Jocelyn was at did not provide concrete visual representation that allowed the imagination of the participants to explore possibilities beyond their circumstance. "Youth in communities with concentrated disadvantages engage in delinquent behavior and substance abuse in part because breaking the law cannot make things worse" (Steven, 2011 p.1437).

There was very little blatant discussion regarding race within the girls' narratives. While they did not overtly address the subject of race, I believe that race has had an impact on their educational experiences. Something as seemingly innocuous as the setting of an alternative center can reflect racial discrepancy and promote radically different outcomes.

**Question 3. To what extent does disability feature in the stories of these girls' educational experiences?**

Each girl originally stated that they did not receive special education services in their schools prior to entering the alternative center. However, Jocelyn then indicated that she does speech “a lot.” Shay reported behavior monitoring systems she used throughout her middle school experiences. Both girls discussed the obstacles that being labeled Bipolar presented. Each girl talked about times in life when she feels “psycho” with rage. Shay stated she sees “black” and at times grins after violent outbursts. She recognized this as a troubling and was currently in therapy to modify her behavior, as well as, potentially using medication to help manage her symptoms.

These feelings of being “psycho” support research conducted by Vaughn, Newhill, DeLisi, Beaver and Howard (2008) utilized psychopathy subscale scores and the relationship to drug use, theft and violence. The subscale scores are comprised of self-reported data collected through multiple questionnaires answered by girls who were in a residential facility (n=94). The researchers concluded that “psychopathic traits do possess validity in predicting violence, theft but not drug abuse” (p.250). A call for further exploration with careful consideration of the convergence of psychopathic traits as they relate to mood disorders was suggested.

Youth with disabilities, learning difficulties, and challenging behaviors are overrepresented in the juvenile justice community. Studies have shown that girls who are, or have once been incarcerated, show signs of serious mental health symptoms (Schleider & Wesiz, 2016; Veysey & Hamilton, 2007). Both girls were acutely aware of their mental health status (Philippe, Gloppen, Sieving, Borowsky, & Pettingell, 2016).

Jocelyn portrayed herself as both victim and perpetrator and she continued to do so throughout the interviews. Jocelyn's scenario was similar to a study conducted by Tasca et al. (2012) regarding girls who were perpetrators of violence. Typically the girls who victimized others were immersed in violence throughout their lives. The same can be said for Shay. While she was not victimized physically by her family, her surroundings were violent and consistently unstable.

Students with emotional/behavioral disorders (EB) are typically suspended at least once in their school careers. An alternative education center is the last chance placement afforded to students with severe and challenging behaviors (Flower et al., 2011). Jocelyn was no different. And while she did not self-identify as having school services regarding an EB disorder, her reported history would lead one to believe she may have received services under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) in her zoned school prior to being placed at her first alternative center.

#### **Question 4. To what extent does gender feature in the stories of these girls' educational experiences?**

The girls in the present study told stories of their schooling that were decidedly gendered. Dress coding was a term I was not familiar with at all. I had not seen it in the research or heard about it in the schools I work in, however; dress coding is a very real offense. Girls' clothes that are deemed too provocative (i.e. tight, low, high, short etc.) can ultimately send a girl to ISS or she may even be sent home. The practice of dress code suspensions in schools has become a point of contention nationally. From social media post where girls upload pictures of their infamous outfits to outrage from parents over missed school events due to dress code violation, the issue of appropriate dress seems to be disproportionately female



Boys tend to be dress coded for offensive language represented on their shirts or for pants hanging too low. The shirt offense is easily rectified by having the student turn his shirt inside out while low hanging pants can be addressed by either zip tie or safety pin, both of which are readily available at most schools. Therefore, the boys tend to offend and remain at the school for the day, interacting with their friends, continuing their education as they would on any other non-offending day. In contrast, girls who do not have a change of clothes are sent to a room separated from their peers. Instruction for the day is interrupted. When a girl violates the dress code, that violation in the eyes of the school district, is apparently worth one day of school.

Shay talked about being sent home from school due to her family not being able to bring her clothes to change into. Dress codes and the subsequent enforcement disproportionately impact girls. There is a sense among society that we are sexualizing fashion or simply the attire of these girls and could potentially cause them harm in the long run. According to Harbach (2016) sexualization of girls may increase their incidences of sexism, limit their educational abilities and encourage harassment and violence. Nationwide, girls who have been considered violators of dress codes report a sense of injustice (Bates, 2015).

## **Challenges**

The first challenge I encountered when beginning this study was finding girls. While numbers of girls being educated in alternative centers (either mandated or volunteer) have increased over the past two decades, their numbers are still relatively small in comparison to boys (Zahn, 2009). Once I found the girls, many of them wanted to talk, but few of them could remember to bring their consent forms back. Several lost the forms. So I presented them with new forms, yet still two and three times the girls would lose them.

These girls also tend to be transient (Vaughn et al., 2008). Even those girls who have been mandated to the center tend to not come regularly. When they break their probation period, they are arrested and sent to the juvenile detention center for a stay of anywhere from one to twenty-one days. This made it very hard to keep in contact with these girls.

The two girls within the research offered a variety of experiences and I am forever grateful for their participation. The stories are their own and while there are similarities across narratives, generalization is not possible nor was it the aim of the study.

As these programs become more and more difficult to fund, it is imperative educational institutions determine how to address these issues in a manner that is both cost effective and meaningful to their most valuable stakeholders, the students. Too many times re-traumatization is caused by the justice system in the name of “saving” these marginalized girls. Incarceration which leads to isolation in alternative education centers has proven to be an ineffective means of rehabilitation. Research shows that an adolescent who has contact with the justice system early, has a higher probability of a lifelong struggle with the justice system (Forster et al., 2017).

I was committed to working with these girls for the purpose of this dissertation, but it was also my desire to foster the relationship that we had clearly developed through this process. However, one day the program shut down abruptly. I contacted the director of the program and he informed me that the funding for boy-centered services was what was provided at that time and therefore services to the girls had been ceased. I inquired about the whereabouts of the girls (including one girl I had not yet started interviewing) and was told they had been displaced. When I pressed what that meant, the words were simply repeated and no explanation was given.

He was as devastated as I was. I do not want to give the impression that this organization cast these girls out through greed or malice. They were dedicated to the success of the girls and were destroyed when funding was cut.

### **Positionality**

In conducting this research, I could conceptually situate myself among the researched, however; times had drastically changed. I am no longer part of this group of girls. I have had some similar experiences and there were connections I could make to my past. But there were stark contrasts between them and me. I sat next to Jocelyn and Shay as a doctoral candidate, teacher and more obviously a woman, no longer a girl. My connection to them had expired. I am not even sure they ever saw a connection. I am no longer lower socioeconomic status. I am privileged. I drove to the center in my car. I left when I wanted. I answered to no one. I was effectively the “other”.

While I could so easily remember when my life mimicked theirs, it certainly didn’t now. My age and status positioned me in a place of privilege that honestly made me uncomfortable and had me searching for the old me. I could not stand being poor and living in a lower class neighborhood. But this time, those characteristics would have been unifying. I could only speak about them in the past tense with each girl, but wasn’t living that life every day and that is a very different perspective.

During the study, there were numerous times where I would have to refocus my questions to the research at hand, due to the extraordinary circumstances shared in the interviews. I frequently felt I was the only ear these girls had to speak casually to. I would not make a judgment of them; I would not give them something I thought they needed to work on. I was

simply listening to their story. When you stop and think about it, how many times has someone asked you to tell your story and then simply listened? It is not something we are accustomed to.

I had no problem getting the girls to talk. There was not a single moment of discomfort for them as evidenced by the stories they told and the details they provided. But for me, it was different. At one point, in one of the interviews, I over stepped my bounds. I stepped clear over the line of researcher and laid down judgement. Let me be clear, this was not a judgement of the participant, but of her situation. I wanted so badly for her to understand that I was not complicit in her story of abuse. I felt it my duty to say something, rather than nod quietly and smile. I am still not sure if it was out of line but I do know I can sleep at night. Had I stayed quiet I am not sure I would be able to say the same.

From the first interview I knew I had developed a bond with each girl. Both shared with me how happy they were to see me and to get to talk with me at each visit. I was sure to tell them the pleasure was mine. It wasn't until our second-to-last visit when I started to worry about the end of this process and how it might affect each girl. It turned out that I would have no control of how our relationship would end. When the center closed to the girls and moved them to wherever, they were simply gone. I was one more person who had vanished from their lives.

### **Implications for Practice**

The extent to which these girls poured their hearts, souls and experiences out to me so early in our meetings came as a bit of a shock. As I started to speak to them in our first interview, I fully intended to only discuss surface level issues and answer any burning questions they had for me. That was my intension; their intensions were different.

They were ready to burst with conversation. They discussed deep issues with me from day one. I would like to think that I have a face that launched a thousand stories but truth be told,

the only thing I did for these girls was give them power. Their voices were heard. Their stories were important. Their lives were important. They were allowed to talk without interruption, without judgement, without questions and probes as to why they would do what they did. I just listened (well, most of the time). I was a person, an adult even, that had come to hear all about them. At times they told me about when they were little. Other times the girls disclosed their dreams and concerns for their futures. These girls wanted nothing more from me than what everyone else wants in life; they wanted to be heard.

So many programs have learning objectives that are linked to a mission or purpose that stretch beyond the scope of what girls have stated they need or want. After conducting this study, it is clear to me that there must be a call to create a community of listeners. The objective of this community would be to connect students with adults and other students who are interested in listening to the storied lives of each other.

There should be time in the day to discuss issues the students are having. This doesn't take long, a minute per student who wants to share (some may choose to pass). This exchange keeps the teacher abreast of possible issues happening within the student's life and opens the door of communication between classmates. At-risk students typically lack interpersonal skills, but girls especially crave emotional connections with others (Holsinger, 2008). Interpersonal skills are lifelong abilities that deserve as much attention as reading or writing.

School systems could implement an after-school group of teachers who are designated listeners. The school could incorporate other peers into the group as well. In organizations or alternative centers this could be integrated into affective or social skills lessons weekly, if not daily. There would have to be an understanding from the girls involved that teachers and staff are

mandated reporters. Any reports regarding abuse, neglect, or self-harm would have to be reported.

Listening is an art form. It is something to practice and can prove invaluable to girls who are in crisis. I recognize that this seems simple. I recognize that this is not the first call to action for girls who already have a support system built of people who listen to them, but I challenge you to ask yourself, if this is such a simple practice, why is it not being done more frequently? This is cost effective and demands minimal time commitment from adults, but there could be overwhelming rewards. We know girls who are connected to the schools have higher success rates. We also know that girls are begging to be heard.

As I began this research, a few years ago, it struck me as odd to note such a divide between the juvenile justice system and the educational system. When I enrolled in criminology classes, my professors were shocked to see an education major. It was as though the two institutions had no connection to one another. The thought was as if the students who ended up in juvenile centers were seemingly no longer a part of the educational system. The mindset seemed to be that the two should never meet.

Pathways to the pipeline for students at-risk became foci of educational research in the not so distant past. That research allowed an aerial view of the issues. This was a critical survey of the landscape from above. The two systems were visible through this lens, but the underground context at times became lost due to the magnitude of challenges in each system.

Prevention and protective factor research has come within the purview and this is a bit muddy. Attention to prevention and protective factors offers an assumption that there is something those in charge can change. It suggests something might be missing from the status quo (i.e. the two systems). We must ask those students who unknowingly followed the pathway

into the STPP through the darkness. They are the key stakeholders that have suggestions to questions we continue to ask the field. We can change the educational trajectory for students by creating a supportive community of school officials and staff to be a protective factor for our most vulnerable and most marginalized students (Yang & Anyon, 2016). We can listen. Historically research has stated how building strong relationships with students can be significantly impactful on student success (Leve, Chamberlain & Kim, 2015; Sanger et al., 2010). Creating a support network at school for girls to connect with other girls and talk about their lives (Shaffer, 2006; Walker et al., 2015). This is what girls (and boys as well) explicitly state that they want.

Lastly, fashioning a community liaison or guidance counselor to connect students (and their families or guardians) in crisis with organizations developed to support those students and their caretakers would also help these girls in need. Wrap-around services are critical to ensure entrée into the justice system is avoided or reentry from the justice system is successful.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research situated itself within two alternative education centers for the purpose of the examination of girls experience in education prior to entering an alternative education center. The literature addressed the assertions made regarding pathways of girls to the justice system while through conversations in the form of semi-structured interviews, issues related to race, disability and gender were examined. The dissertation explored these issues but had to rely on inference and background knowledge to make certain connections. Specifically, issues of race and disability appeared vague at first glance, from the surface level of the narratives, however; the total collection of stories drew lines and connected theory, literature and story-making assertions possible.

Further examination into the girls' perceived identities and not simply their experiences would be warranted in order to better understand how at-risk girls view themselves. This type of research would connect well with current resilience and protective factors research (Lipowski, Lipowska, Magdalena, & Krokosz, 2016). While it is critical to understand the pathways to the STPP, protective factor research is a proactive way to interrupt the flow of students to the pipeline. The more we can hear directly from the girls, the better informed the field of education will become in interfering with the STPP trajectory of at-risk girls (Wun, 2016).

Further exploration of girls within the STPP working within alternative centers or juvenile detention facilities who are learning how to mediate the challenges of school, justice system and home life is warranted. A longitudinal study following the trajectory of these girls would allow for program efficacy to be examined (Wun, 2016).

### **Catalytic Validity**

Lather (1986) describes catalytic validity as, As Shaferner (2006) concluded through discussions with girls who were incarcerated in multiple states, girls are looking for someone to talk to them. They wanted a person with whom to communicate regularly, rather than only being spoken to and with when they have committed an infraction of the rules. Girls listed that as their number one request. That sentiment was echoed each time I visited my participants as well. Jocelyn would ask me every time "when are you coming back" or she would say "I love talking to you." I asked Shay how the experience of talking to me was. She stated "I look forward to it....I don't really like open up and express like my life story and tell my story to people....I feel like I've been so much smoother during the day know that you are coming."

While I would like to think that this study was responsible for moving Shay towards her goals the reality is there were other variables working in her favor. The center, her father and



newly found stability were all forces working towards allowing Shay to dream about her future and plan for how to make those dreams come true. What we were able to do discuss and identify life goals. Shay went from talking about her past and struggling to look forward to talking about her college career and becoming a psychologist. There was most definitely positive movement in her thinking about her future but I cannot state that it was this study alone that positioned Shay in this place at this time. However, there was a reorientation (Robson & Sumara, 2016) to her life goals from the first interview to the last and therefore self-awareness and an understanding.

A study by Philippe et al. (2016) concluded that curriculum that taught and enhanced social and emotional skills was a deterrent for girls to participate in at-risk behavior. They were able to better manage the stressors they faced and address interpersonal issues that arose. We know that these types of programs and curricula have a positive impact on students. Creating policies and subsequently curriculum that supports the mental and emotional growth of students is vital in the fight to save children from entering into the justice system.

Once individual situations are evaluated a continuum of services should be established. This process would ensure that each girl received the wrap-around care she needs to redirect her trajectory away from the pathway to the justice system.

## **Conclusions**

The participants in this study were critically detached from school at a very young age. Family disruptions (as identified as drugs/alcohol, family fighting, or separations) play a crucial role in the development of female adolescents according to Steketee et al. (2013). While the dysfunction in their home lives spiraled out of control, Jocelyn and Shay found no refuge in school. They acted out. They fought and they were suspended, repeatedly.

Research suggests that suspensions are not only ineffective ways of managing behavior, but they also contribute to delinquency due to probable unsupervised time spent at home (Daigle et al., 2007). Instead we must build relationships (Walker et al., 2015). Positive student-teacher relationships can prove to act as protective factors for at-risk girls (Petersen & Howell, 2013) and should be a focal point of teacher preparation.

Ultimately, the purpose of this research was to examine the perceptions of girls' educational journeys prior to entering an alternative center with a focus on the intersectionality of race, disability and gender. The discussion centered on the findings in relation to theoretical framework used to construct the research, addressing the big ideas from the research and suggestions for future research. This study contributes to the understanding of how at-risk girls perceive their educational journeys. Critical feminism and critical race theory provided a lens to focus in on issues related to gender, disability and race so to give girls who are at-risk a platform to tell their stories.

## **Epilogue**

I walked out from the dilapidated building thinking I'd be back the following week. I was pumped and ready to work with the new girl I had just met. I called to find out a good time to meet with Ania and they told me, girls are no longer serviced at the center. I asked where the girls were. Where did they go? I was told the girls had been displaced. My mouth fell open. I was stunned.

There was awkward silence and then me sounding ridiculous and desperately trying to wrap my head around what I had just been told. Displaced? This was the word used by both center locations. I figured it was something higher ups had determined appropriate verbiage when informing the public. I couldn't help feel that these girls' lives were summed up in one

word. They have been displaced from their homes, displaced from their schools and now displaced from the alternative center. Suddenly, I was no longer part of the social justice movement, but a purveyor of displacement.

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**Appendix A:**  
**Sample Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your family.
3. Walk me through a typical day in your life as a little girl?
4. What is different about your daily life today?
5. How would you describe your past experience at school?
6. How did you get along with the teachers at your school?
7. How would you describe yourself as a student?
8. Tell me about your friends?
9. Where did you meet your friends?
10. What would you do after school?
11. Are there experiences you would never change even if you could? Do you mind sharing them with me?
12. Are there experiences that you would change if you could? Do you mind sharing them with me?
13. Is there anything you feel you would like to add that we have not covered?
14. Were you ever taught in a small class or pulled out of your class for special classes?

**Appendix B:**  
**Sample Final Interview Questions**

1. What has the experience of being interviewed been like for you?
2. What do you hope comes from our time spent together?
3. Do you have anything that you would like to add that we have not talked about?

## Appendix C:

### Jocelyn's Plot Line Table

#### Jocelyn Plot Outline:

- Temporally organized and supported through Jocelyn's story.
- Coded within the transcript as Pa(past), Pr (present), and Fut(future) using the previously identified narrative linkages, change of events and data elements to focus in on relevant details of the story.
- The numbers are interview number and page of transcript within the interview.

| Past  | Present  | Future  |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationship with Aunt was strained- <i>I thought she didn't want me around my Best Friend, be we were adopted"</i></li> <li>Self-identified class clown- <i>When I was at (her middle school), I used to be the class clown.</i></li> <li>Identified herself as popular- <i>"I used to be popular, then I got into my first fight there.</i></li> <li>Many suspensions in 6<sup>th</sup> grade- <i>I disrupt the class a lot. I get tardies and stuff. I got suspended a lot.(1/7)</i></li> <li>Sent to an alternative education center where she continued to fight-...<i>Girls there wanted to fight me too and I did fight them(1/7)</i></li> <li>That center sent her to this more restrictive center- <i>if they sent me here there were less people here and I won't like, get into trouble....but I got into trouble here and fought a lot here.(1/7)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationship with Aunt is good- <i>It's like I'm just a normal person like just around my real family now....so I don't even feel adopted at all, but I know that I am. I'm not mad at anybody"</i></li> <li>In first interview states that she has been suspended a lot for fighting but now will not fight anymore since she has changed- <i>But I changed now. SO , I don't fight anymore</i></li> <li>Reassures me she is friends with everyone at this center now- <i>I get along now with the people they people that I fought with, I get along with them real good.</i></li> <li>Discussion of her fighting- <i>I always win my fights and I never lose them</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>States she will not be in trouble again- <i>I'm not gonna get in trouble again</i></li> <li><i>No. I'm kind of disappointed because I really do want to have kids in the future.(2/23)</i></li> <li><i>Cause if you're not there for them, they know that when they grow up. They ain't gonna want to talk to you. 'Cause I feel like that about my real dad and my real mom.(2/24)</i></li> <li><i>The right dad. Like you gotta be there. I want him to be the right dad. He can't be childish at all. He's gotta have money. He's gotta take care of the kid. He gotta take care of the baby right. You gotta be there to teach the kid right, like from wrong. (2/25)</i></li> </ul> |



Appendix C (continued)

| Past   | Present   | Future   |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She recalls elementary as a wonderful time- <i>It was so fun... You don't have to fight nobody</i> (1/8)</li> <li>• A shift in her feelings about elementary school comes about in 5<sup>th</sup> grade- <i>it started getting different when I was like in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.</i>(1/8)</li> <li>• She recalls her first fight-...<i>I was trying to pull the girl off my friend...I was on both their sides. Next I was walking with my friend. She was like you jumped (her). I was like no...She was talking a mess. And I was like what? She just took all her earrings off and we fought like that.</i>(1/9)</li> <li>• She recalls feeling remorse about the fight- <i>I shouldn't have done that. We got suspended for two days</i>(1/11)</li> <li>• Getting held back- <i>I got held back in Kindergarten</i> (1/12)</li> <li>• We discussed her first fight and she states the fight she described wasn't her first. There are too many to recall and she doesn't remember the first one-<i>I got in so many fights my whole life. I have real bad anger problems. I do crazy stuff.</i>(1/13,14)</li> <li>• We go back to the discussion of elementary school- <i>Kindergarten and first grade, Oh my God, best years ever. All I did was go to sleep, do a little work.</i>(2/4)</li> <li>• She describes who she was in early elementary-<i>Well back then, I was sensitive</i>(2/4)</li> <li>• Recalling her elementary schools experiences she remembers a possible fight-<i>I remember I wanted to fight this girl in second grade. She yelled at me too...this one girl I wanted to fight in second grade.</i>(2/5)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The possibility of summer school...<i>They want me to go to school during the summer here, cause I've been missing days and stuff</i></li> <li>• She tells me about her recent stay at the Detention center-<i>I was ready to go home. I hated it there. And I got jumped there too.</i></li> <li>• The relationship with those who jumped her, changes while she is at the detention center- <i>I don't know, they as cool with me. They act like the jump never happened.</i>(1/14)</li> <li>• She recalls feeling remorse about the fight- <i>I shouldn't have done that. We got suspended for two days</i>(1/11)</li> <li>• Getting held back- <i>I got held back in Kindergarten</i> (1/12)</li> <li>• We discussed her first fight and she states the fight she described wasn't her first. There are too many to recall and she doesn't remember the first one-<i>I got in so many fights my whole life. I have real bad anger problems. I do crazy stuff.</i>(1/13,14)</li> <li>• When we talk about how she feels when she gets angry, a boy is introduced into the story- <i>I still can't get this boy like out of my head. He had did a lot to me that I really didn't like.</i>(1/15)</li> <li>• She tells me more about this boy and the challenges they've had recently- <i>Now he's got to go to court because of me</i> (1/15)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I'd let him beat me up before he beats the kids up.</i> (2/26)</li> <li>• <i>A singer. And a basketball player, a professional basketball player.</i> (3/16)</li> <li>• <i>I'm not gonna let them control me ever again.</i> (4/12)</li> <li>• <i>The second time I went, I said would never do that again.</i>(4/16)</li> <li>• <i>I will not hang around the people I hanged around with. 'Cause when I was going to, I was like so popular and I was like so cool with everybody. And I like, guess I used to get in trouble a lot because of people I used to hand around with.</i> ( 4/22)</li> <li>• <i>I could be in a regular school doing real work.</i> (4/23)</li> <li>• <i>Keep doing my work and then leave so I don't have to see hose bitches again (pause) at all.</i>(4/25)</li> <li>• <i>I'm not trying to be in seventh grade. I'm ready for eighth grade, 'cause I'm ready to go to high school.</i> (4/26)</li> </ul> |

Appendix C (continued)

| Past   | Present   | Future |
|--|---|--------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She goes on to tell me about the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. <i>The detail she recalls, is another fight-I got into a fight with this girl-it was on the bus. I tore that girl behind up.(2/6)</i></li> <li>• She touches on the remorse she felt- <i>I never wanted to fight though(2/6)</i></li> <li>• She immediately discusses how much fun 4<sup>th</sup> grade was-<i>it was so fun though cause we used to have activities and stuff(2/6)</i></li> <li>• She discusses the subjects she was taking at that time-<i>I hate math so much because it was so hard for me to know. And then I something right, you know, I love math and stuff....I still hate it. (2/6)</i></li> <li>• She states she was never in special class, but did have speech.- <i>I went to speech a lot....Speech was fun, They came to the place I was arrested (2/8)</i></li> <li>• Conversation changes to her time in the detention center- <i>It's a lot of gates and stuff with wires on it like jail. It's just like jail(2/9).</i></li> <li>• Discussion of the first time in the JDC-<i>I didn't want to go to bed. I stayed up until I had to go to court.(2/11)</i></li> <li>• How old she was when she started going out with boys and having sex- <i>I started going out with boys when I was like eleven...Twelve(2/16)</i></li> <li>• <i>I started going out with boys when I was like, eleven.(2/16)</i></li> <li>• <i>Sex first time at 13-and-a-half.(2/16)</i></li> <li>• <i>I heard a gunshot, so I looked out my window and the man was running. A man shot at him. (2/27)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She describes what led up to him hitting her and why it's her fault- <i>And then he hit me. Right after she got hit, he hit me....maybe it's my fault because I took his phone.(1/16)</i></li> <li>• She reflects on attempting to harm her Best Friend-...<i>It's so sad cause I almost tried to hurt my Best Friend because of this boy (1/16)</i></li> <li>• She describes the conflict she has – <i>We are better off not talkin' to each other at all....I just really love that boy...I think he doesn't like, love me at all (1/18)</i></li> <li>• Discussion of the juvenile detention facility-<i>I always have a roommate when I go there (2/9)</i></li> <li>• Her days are worse now since the issues with her boyfriend- <i>I have worse days now(2/12)</i></li> <li>• After the confrontation with her Best Friend, she returned to her mother's house and broke the tension with her Best Friend- <i>We were ignoring each other. We didn't speak to each other like nobody was there. I asked her could I borrow her lip gloss...and then I started crying (2/13)</i></li> <li>• Best Friend was afraid of her- <i>Do you think she was really fearful of you?- Laughter...Yeah she was</i></li> <li>• A boy that was supposed to come over the night before- <i>Well, this was the third boy I had ...sexual activity with....Like he got a car. I like boys with cars. Like 17. He is so cute. He was supposed to come over yesterday (2/14)</i></li> </ul> |        |

Appendix C (continued)

| Past   | Present   | Future |
|--|---|--------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>So I messed around and went to go tell my momma. I go, Momma, Momma, somebody's shooting outside! And then what else happened? My momma called the police and she see him on the ground laying down. We went outside to go see. We didn't want to eek all the way, cause then what if we got shot. (2/27)</i></li> <li>• <i>I tell my real mom. Why I say my real mom, that's so stupid. I tell my mom, when I was staying with my mom, she let me go outside anytime I want. (2 "Cause he was strict. He was nice. He was good. He used to preach a lot. (2/35)</i></li> <li>• <i>He used to tell the right things. He used to say the right things. (2/35)</i></li> <li>• <i>/33)</i></li> <li>• <i>You should get an education it's good for you. (2/36)</i></li> <li>• <i>There's a lot of them. ( 2/36)</i></li> <li>• <i>Like you get suspended for like – this teacher, what's her name was? Miss Jordan, she was a Spanish teacher. She suspended me "cause I called her crazy. That was stupid. I don't know why she did that. That's why I don't like, I don't like, why I hate teachers at that school (2/36)</i></li> <li>• <i>"Cause when you gonna suspend me 'cause I called you crazy, you is crazy. Saying stuff that people don't understand, like you say stupid stuff. And you don't hear yourself when you stay stupid stuff, at all.(2/36)</i></li> <li>• <i>That's why I got kicked out of school. Because all the referrals, but they weren't all from her though. (2/38)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Boy she waited for last night- He's nice and stuff. But since, I think he just wants sex and stuff and I'm not on that. I told him I don't want to do that...HE understands though. He's out of school (2/15).</i></li> <li>• <i>Discussion goes back to Dijon-Some boys like Dijon, the boy who hit me...he used to force me to have sex with him. I hated that. (2/15)</i></li> <li>• <i>Thoughts about herself- And I am stupid enough to do it too.(2/15)</i></li> <li>• <i>Back to exBF and sex- He forced me to do everything with him. I hated that. I hate when boys do that. When you tell them no, they get mad at you and won't talk to you ever again (2/15)</i></li> <li>• <i>I feel older now.(2/17)</i></li> <li>• <i>For real. And she like. Strong. She's real strong. I love her so much. ( 2/18)</i></li> <li>• <i>I think so. I don't know why they just won't take the cancer out. They told my grandma that she only had six months to live. That really broke my heart, for real. But in my mind, not in my heart, I feel like she's not going anywhere. I think they're just saying that. Then in my head, I think, yeah, she might do leave.</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah, that's probably why I'm not really trying to come to school like that, all the time.(2/18)</i></li> <li>• <i>She's been next to me since I've been two days old, not months, not weeks. Two days old. (2/19)</i></li> </ul> |        |

Appendix C (continued)

| Past   | Present  | Future |
|--|--|--------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Late for his class, all the time. I never went. I never like him. Then all of sudden I started liking him a lot. (2/38) Me and my Best Friend, had went outside to talk and stuff. We just sat outside and was talkin'. (3/2)</i></li> <li>• <i>I used to smoke weed. (3/4)</i></li> <li>• <i>Before class. (3/4)</i></li> <li>• <i>I never did drugs. (3/5)</i></li> <li>• <i>I was doin' so much work at. (3/10)</i></li> <li>• <i>I'd rather be in eighth grade right now 'cause like, work is so easy. I done the work before. (3/11)</i></li> <li>• <i>We spent money and stuff. She spent money on me and stuff. It was so fun. (3/14)</i></li> <li>• <i>But I can think about the good times. It was so fun with him. It was just so fun. We did everything. (3/15)</i></li> <li>• <i>He had a big jump house. A big jump house. Jump yeah trampoline. We'd be jumpin' on that and had so much fun then. So much fun. (3/16)</i></li> <li>• <i>That's it. That's the only school I played at. I din't get to play the whole thing with them 'cause I always got suspended. (3/17)</i></li> <li>• <i>Did you ever wear an ankle bracelet? (3/24)</i><br/><i>Mm nn (3/24)</i></li> <li>• <i>I had sex with (pause) The first one I ever had sex with was this boy named Jay and he took my virginity. (3/25)</i></li> <li>• <i>-And then when it hitted a month that's when we started having sex and stuff. I was scared. (3/26)</i></li> <li>• <i>We chilled and stuff. We had so much fun. And then when it hitted like a month, we just, we like started going out and when it hitted weeks – (3/26)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Really bad because all these years she's been there for me and everything and they're talking about six months of living. Uh, uh. I hate it when people do stuff like that. They always take away good people. Take away the people that you love so much. I hate that. (2/19)</i></li> <li>• <i>I don't know. It's just weird. I just be thinking stuff happens for a reason and I'll be just glad to see the results sometime. Like, seeing how I'll be without seeing the people that I love. (2/19)</i></li> <li>• <i>I don't really think about it all. I just be having fun. (2/20)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah. Like Dijon. I would never think about him. I would try not to think about him at all. (2/20)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah, it's like when I lay down in bed and I look at babies or couples and stuff like that I would think about Dijon. And I'd be like, damn! Can I cuss in here? (2/20)</i></li> <li>• <i>Cause he asked me. (2/21)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah. Maybe I was stupid like too much into it. Maybe I don't need one at all. I don't even think I'm meant to have one anyways. (2/21)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah. So, when me and him was having sex, he was like, oh do you want to have my baby? And I was like, yeah, sure. Yeah, okay. (2/21)</i></li> <li>• <i>No, I don't think I am pregnant though. It's been too long. It's been twenty one days since I've talked to him. (2/23)</i></li> </ul> |        |

Appendix C (continued)

| Past  | Present   | Future |
|---|---|--------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>And when we started getting to know each other more and more, started going out with each other being closer, he just started getting meaner. And all we used to do was argue a lot and I hated that. (3/26)</i></li> <li>• <i>Oh yeah, when I was thirteen. ( 1<sup>st</sup> arrest) (4/15)</i></li> <li>• <i>Um, my mom lied and said that I pushed her. But she lied because she wanted me to get suspended. (4/15)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yes, she wanted me to experience what it feels like to be locked up.(4/15)</i></li> <li>• <i>'Cause I always used to cuss her out a lot. I regret that too. (pause) We were arguing that day. I tried to get past her.I was right here and she was like this blocking the door so I won't go by. I was like, mom move. (4/16)</i></li> <li>• <i>So I went under her, tried to go under her and I accidentally pushed her against it. (4/16)</i></li> <li>• <i>I was like, really mom. So you just lied on me just so I can spend some- The second time I went, I said would never do that again.(4/16)</i></li> <li>• <i>I spent 21 days for the first time. (4/16)</i></li> <li>• <i>They were like, did you push your mom? But they didn't really ask me questions. They wrote a statement from my momma and stuff. And, they just arrested me. They said, alright, you're coming with me. That's what they said. (4/17)</i></li> <li>• <i>I was thinking a lot. I was like, what did I do? Saying what did do?(4/17)</i></li> <li>• <i>'Cause I got in too much fights at the other school. (4/22)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>No. I'm kind of disappointed because I really do want to have kids in the future.(2/23)</i></li> <li>• <i>I don't think I'm meant to have any 'cause look ain't nothing popped up yet. At all.(2/23)</i></li> <li>• <i>So you are prepared, in your mind, to have a baby really at any time. (2/24) (Laughter) Yeah.(2/24)</i></li> <li>• <i>You said whenever it pops up, is what you said.</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah, don't feel disappointed in me and stuff.(2/24)</i></li> <li>• <i>I can't barely go outside. (2/33)</i></li> <li>• <i>Other than that, I don't even know. I know how to keep myself safe. (2/34)</i></li> <li>• <i>A little bit. But I didn't take it out on nobody. (3/1)</i></li> <li>• <i>My Best Friend she, I guess my Best Friend will be Gay and my grandma, she's a little frustrated about it. (3/2)</i></li> <li>• <i>And asked her why you wanna be Gay? She's like, she don't know. She was like, you don't need to be Gay then if you don't know why you want to be Gay. (3/3)</i></li> <li>• <i>I think she's confused. (3/3)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah, but she understands. She was never born to be a boy. She needs to just be her. I'm not judging her at all. (3/3)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah, but I don't want to be like that. (3/3)</i></li> <li>• <i>They're nothing. They're just a bad influence. (3/4)</i></li> <li>• <i>I don't drink. I just smokeweed. (3/4)</i></li> </ul> |        |

Appendix C (continued)

| Past   | Present  | Future |
|--|--|--------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>I used to turn up too much. I got referrals and referrals. Disruptin' the class and stuff. I got so much referral then I got suspended at that a lot. So I got like twenty-seven referral and suspensions and stuff. So, they sent me to Alternative and I kept getting in fights at , so sent me here. But these people, they really want me to get out this school. ( 4/23)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>He just got out. He just got out yesterday, I seen him. My dad just got out. (3/6)</i></li> <li><i>I can always get a boyfriend. I'm not ugly. I men for real. (3/8)</i></li> <li><i>I'm supposed to do work. Pills make me so sleepy. I be so exhausted I can't even do work. It's been like that for a couple of days. Not days, but months now. (3/8)</i></li> <li><i>We don't really do science. (3/10)</i></li> <li><i>Yeah, just math and reading. (3/10)</i></li> <li><i>I'd rather be in eighth grade right now 'cause like, work is so easy. I done the work before. (3/11)</i></li> <li><i>All them other days I've been with him.(3/15)</i></li> <li><i>That's so annoying to me. He does not think about me, so why should I be thinking about him? (pause) Definitely not thinking about me. (pause) Maybe one of these years or in the future, he'll text me one day. I don't know. I don't know about now, but, right now, it's crazy. (3/15)</i></li> <li><i>But I can think about the good times. (3/15)</i></li> <li><i>He had a big jump house. A big jump house. Jump yeah trampoline. We'd be jumpin' on that and had so much fun then. So much fun.(3/16)</i></li> <li><i>I just like history. Black History Month. (3/22)</i></li> <li><i>I did my work, finally (4/1)</i></li> </ul> |        |

Appendix C (continued)

| Past | Present  | Future |
|------|--|--------|
|      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Well this morning I didn't feel good because I guess the girls, these girls I used to be cool with, they done turned and they ain't fucking with me like that. (4/1)</i></li> <li>• <i>Something that Dijon said and stuff. Just 'cause he commented a heart on her picture. She showed me and I was like, okay, I don't go with him anymore, so I don't care. (4/1)</i></li> <li>• <i>Alright, so Dijon is going to court today?</i></li> <li>• <i>Because of me. (4/4)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah. She, I was supposed to see him yesterday, but he wasn't over there at the Best Friend's house and stuff. (4/4)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah, no, not like that now. No, I don't want to see him ever again. He made me so mad. (4/5)</i></li> <li>• <i>He like, keep making me mad. And it's like, the post that I seen, it was so true. It was like, he like, if God feels like this person is not for you and you keep running back to that person, he's gonna, God's gonna even find like ways to hurt you. (4/5)</i></li> <li>• <i>I just love him so much and I don't know why. Maybe it's the lust or maybe the sex or something. (4/5)</i></li> <li>• <i>Everything else, like the Dijon situation and stuff that's definitely gonna make me cry, 'cause like, it's so messed up. (4/6)</i></li> </ul> |        |

Appendix C (continued)

| Past | Present  | Future |
|------|--|--------|
|      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>It's like you love a person so much and they treat you so different. They really don't love you like they put things in your head and make it seem like (pause) Make is seem like they really care about you and love you and really want to be there for you and stuff, when they really don't. They just want to get in your pants. And they done already got in your pants so there's nothing else you can do. (4/7)</i></li> <li>• <i>Or when they want more, they say some stupid stuff to you. They say some lovey-dovey stuff to you so that you come back to them and stuff. And that's like, I'm an easy person. I wish I wasn't easy at all. I just fall in love too fast and I need to slow up with that. (4/7)</i></li> <li>• <i>I love him so much. (4/8)</i></li> <li>• <i>Well, I mean the detention was for 21 days, I missed so much work and stuff. (4/8)</i></li> <li>• <i>And then, and then I got suspended for that. (4/8)</i></li> <li>• <i>I fought the boy next door. (4/8)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah, they're all disrespectful here. (4/9)</i></li> <li>• <i>Beth came today, came that day. I missed her so much 'cause I'm cool eith her too. It's like the other girl I'm cool with. And then, he like, no don't hug her, don't hug her. I was like, what the fuck.(4/9)</i></li> <li>• <i>Okay. So what else? What else? He kept calling me, eater. Like I suck D and stud, like the eater. I'm like, I hate when people do that. I', like, okay, what the fuck. I don't care. I really don't care. And so, when you love somebody so bad, you don't do stuff like that with them. But, he calling me an eater and I'm like what? I ' m wh a t? (4 /9 )</i></li> </ul> |        |



Appendix C (continued)

| Past | Present  | Future |
|------|--|--------|
|      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>And I was looking at him like that. I was like trying to fight him. Instead he got up. I had my head up like that. He had his up and that's when we just starting fighting. I had a busted eye. (4/10)</i></li> <li>• <i>What did you do? What were you doing while you were suspended? (4/11)</i></li> </ul>  |        |
|      | <i>Fighting. (4/11)</i>  |        |
|      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Oh, I didn't do anything but sit at home. (4/11)</i></li> <li>• <i>She was gonna buy me a phone that day and I messed up fightin'. I ain't had a phone in like a month now. (4/11)</i></li> <li>• <i>He ain't in that class again. I'm in that one 'cause they kept calling me an eater. (4/12)</i></li> <li>• <i>I'm not gonna talk 'cause that means they're controlling me if I keep going back and forth with them. I'm not gonna let them control me ever again. (4/12)</i></li> <li>• <i>I was nice. Every time the police get around me, I be nice. I don't want them to kill me. (4/17)</i></li> <li>• <i>Mm hm. It was better than last time I went. ( 2<sup>nd</sup> time arrested) (4/18)</i></li> <li>• <i>I got some sleep. Food was good. Got a little peace. (4/18)</i></li> <li>• <i>Okay, so you had company and that made you feel better?</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah. ( 4/19)</i></li> <li>• <i>The third time. No I said the second time. And the second time I was arguing with my Best Friend and I pushed her. So you know, you can't touch nobody like that. And that's battery. Ah dang, like battery. (4/20)</i></li> <li>• <i>Is there anything you would change about that school? (4/20)</i></li> </ul> |        |

Appendix C (continued)

| Past | Present  | Future |
|------|--|--------|
|      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I wouldn't change anything. I want to go back there. (4/20)</i></li> <li>• <i>Nah, I really don't want to be here. I hate this school so much. This school really makes me want to drop out. (4/21)</i></li> <li>• <i>Like, because it's just so hard and people here. The kids, they're so disrespectful, mean and rude. And just always talk about people and I just hate it here and I can barely get my work done. There's always something. And I be like, I don't care if I get suspended. I do something to get suspended. I didn't even care. (4/21)</i></li> <li>• <i>No! I didn't. It's not that. Alternative sent me here 'cause they feel like this would be a better place for me to work, but it's not no better place at all. (4/22)</i></li> <li>• <i>'Cause there's too much drama at school. I don't belong here. I'm like a smart girl. I could be in a regular school doing real work. (4/23)</i></li> <li>• <i>Well, today I stayed away, away from girls real good. I didn't say nothing to them at all on the bus. (4/23)</i></li> <li>• <i>Even though that junk made me so mad. Low key. I was low key. (4/23)</i></li> <li>• <i>I was low key mad. Like why would you show me that? I don't care. I don't go with him.(4/23)</i></li> <li>• <i>We was on the bus.(4/23)</i></li> <li>• <i>I was on the bus. I was like, oh, I gotta go to court today. They was like, why? Because of Dijon when he hit me. And they was looking at me like- I was like what the fuck? Sorry, I didn't mean to cuss. (4/24)</i></li> </ul> |        |

Appendix C (continued)

| Past | Present  | Future |
|------|--|--------|
|      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Yeah, so I was sitting in the seat. Sitting in the set like, like this. Like with my back like that. She was showing me. She showed me. The girl Tyesha, she asked me something. She like do Dijon got a right hand? Something like that. I was like, I don't know. I don't talk to him. And she showed me something and I was like – She showed me something on her phone. I said, I can't see it so I got it. I made her come closer. It said, he wrote on her picture on Instagram.(4/24)</i></li> <li>• <i>It was like, he was like, let's real cutie, something like that, and you should be my little baby. And I was like, that's so creep like cause you're my ex-boyfriend. You're like messing' with the girl that I was friends with. Like that's so creep. And those hoes is so fake. They were actin' so fake. I was like, I don't care 'cause, this is what I said.(4/24)</i></li> <li>• <i>I was gonna do my work and then go home. Keep doing my work and then leave so I don't have to see those bitches again. At all. ( 4/25)</i></li> <li>• <i>I was friends with them when I first got- Well, I was here before them. I was friends with them when they first started going here. And then I was fixin' to fight both of them. Different days though.(4/25)</i></li> <li>• <i>don't, I don't do that. I don't get mad over stuff like that. I just know who my real friends are. Who aren't. (4/25)</i></li> <li>• <i>I would get suspended. That's all. (4/25)</i></li> <li>• <i>I just don't want to go to class. I hate this school. (4/26)</i></li> </ul> |        |

Appendix C (continued)

| Past | Present  | Future |
|------|--|--------|
|      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I know but the work's hard. And I be getting sleepy sometimes doing it. (4/26)</i></li> <li>• <i>And they was fixin' to fight each other too one time. So, I don't know. And then the sad part about it is this girl be talking a mess about the other girl. And they just be talkin' a mess about each other. And they close. Me and lexi, me and her were was real close, but she wanted to be friends with Mia. I was like okay, you can be friends with Mia. I</i></li> <li>• <i>I need- they say I might repeat seventh grade then. I'm not trying to be in seventh grade. I'm ready for eighth grade, 'cause I'm ready to go to high school. (4/26)</i></li> </ul> |        |

**Appendix D.**  
**Shay's Plot Outline Table**

| <i>Past</i>  | <i>Present</i>  | <i>Future</i>  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Um, I was like five. Yeah, five and my parents were like drug dealers at the time. (1/8) PA</i></li> <li>• <i>Um, and my parents had went to jail for like three days including my aunt and at the time all of us kids were living together. ( 1/8) PA</i></li> <li>• <i>It was like five of us in one small hotel. And my dad, my mom and my aunt were drug dealers. And we would have these people come in and out or our room and hotel and I used to ask my dad all the time, like who are they. And my dad would just tell me like, that they were friends of the family. They had just came to visit for a little while. And then my cousin, the one who goes here. He is like a year older than me, eight months actually. He knew a little more than I did. And he would tell me like they're doing bad things. ( 1/8)</i></li> <li>• <i>He'd say we shouldn't be here. And that's when I kind of like, caught on to what they were doing. Because every time we would want to use the bathroom, they would grab us by the hand and cover our eyes so that we didn't see what they were doing. (1/9)</i></li> <li>• <i>And I would smell like the stuff, the week and all of that. I didn't really know what it was at the time.(1/9)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I was thinking like I'm going to have to deal with this girl for the rest of my life and this will be the death of me. And so I tried telling the foster parents, like the day before I knew I was leaving with my grandparents. And they told me that I was lying and that their daughter would never do anything like that. I was like, okay. Well, and then, so I never told anybody until six month ago.(1/13)</i></li> <li>• <i>And I just like started balling my eyes out when I told my dad. But my counselor told me I needed to start opening up and telling my dad. Telling people, the more I tell people the less harder it would be on me to deal with it.(1/14) Just me and my sister wit</i></li> <li>• <i>hout my mom and dad. And I get a call two days after that and my mom's incarcerated for fraud and she's looking at three years in prison. ( pause) My dad comes down here February<sup>h</sup> of 2014 and he, we, get a house and stuff and my mom calls me from jail and tell me that she doesn't want us to live with my dad because her and my dad had split up. And she's feels like mv dad's goine to take us and run with us and dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. But my dad told my aunt, that the only way he could come down here was if he was in AA and he stopped drinking and smoking, And that's why my dad did.</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Free dress. Free dress. (Laughter) Because this uniform is not cutting it.(2/23)</i></li> <li>• <i>No. I'd just laugh. Ya'll are stupid. Like I did today. (2/26)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah. And being able to match. Yeah. 'Cause I have like four pairs of shoes that actually match this blue and the orange we wear. (2/27)</i></li> <li>• <i>Because once I start college, if I start college early, I'm not gonna know what's going on in my classes because everything I've done is online. I can just Google it. But like, you know, I'll have to write essays and stuff like that. And I wouldn't know the proper way.(2/32)</i></li> <li>• <i>I just – I feel like if I do stuff like that I'm going to end up being like my parents. And I don't want to be like my parents. I want to be way better than my parents. So, I just don't associate myself with people that do stuff like that or think about doing stuff like that. (3/7).</i></li> <li>• <i>So I can get a trade for cosmetology.(3/16)</i></li> <li>• <i>Um, I told my dad that next year all I'm wearing is sweat pants and jeans. And he was like why? So I don't get dress coded. (4/9)</i></li> <li>• <i>And he gets so mad. When he asks, like when we talk about like what college I want to go to and where I want to go. I tell him XXXX.(5/22)</i></li> </ul> |

## Appendix D. (continued)

| <i>Past</i>  | <i>Present</i>   | <i>Future</i> |
|--|--|---------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Yeah, we went to a different hotel and they were doing a really big drug deal. And like, I think it was four or five in the morning, um, the door got busted in. And it was the police. They were like, it was SWAT, so they went and handcuffed all our parents and told us that we needed to get up and get out of bed and go outside.(1/11)</i></li> <li>• <i>And he was handcuffed with his hands behind his head and I asked him what was going on. He said they were doing bad things and you all are going to have to suffer because of it. And he started crying. So I started crying.(1/11)</i></li> <li>• <i>DCF came at the same time and took all of us away. Split us all up and sent us all to different homes, My sister lived with these black people...and I lived with black people who had one blood daughter and um, two other foster kids (1/11)</i></li> <li>• <i>I was with the same foster parents for like six months. During that six months, um, something really bad happened to me. I had to sleep with their biological daughter which was seventeen, around there at the time and she would rape me, basically.</i></li> <li>• <i>I didn't know any better, I thought it was my fault(1/12).</i></li> <li>• <i>It went on until I went out of foster care (1/12)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>He has two years sober.</i></li> <li>• <i>Amazing! I have the father I've never had before. (1/17)</i></li> <li>• <i>My mom just, when she moved here, she got out early. They let her out on early release and put her on ten years of probation.(1/17)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah, she got here on , the day before my sister's birthday of last year, and um, ( long pause) My sister was like so excited because my mom was like her role model. She wanted to be everything like her and when my mom got here, she started working and stuff and finally they told my sister that they weren't together anymore and that my mom wasn't going to live with us and so she was living with my grandma. And she was working with my aunt and she met this guy named. They, I guess you could say they fell in love instantly, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. So my mom's planning a wedding with him and she moved in with him. She barely calls us. She don't text us. If I call her, she hardly ever picks up and she won't call back. She never really sees us. When we need money or something, if my dad can't give it to us, she's not the one to call. Um, ( pause) it's like our mom abandoned us. (Voice breaks) So, but-</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah. And it just came out of nowhere. I was at my friend's house. And Sunday, my eyes were like really, really watery. And then, um, I started getting a really bad headache and my nose started to bleed. And he was on a date with his girlfriend. (2/1)</i></li> <li>• <i>So you're kind of seeing a boy?</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah (2/9)</i></li> <li>• <i>Even though I only have twelve days left. (2/15)</i></li> </ul> |               |

## Appendix D. (continued)

| Past  | Present  | Future  |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>My grandparents got me...and they asked if anything happened in foster care and I told them no because I didn't want to tell no body. I felt like it was my faulty and I was sticking with it. I wasn't telling nobody. (1/12)</i></li> <li>• <i>I never told nobody until 6 months ago. I finally told my dad and I am in counselling (1/13)</i></li> <li>• <i>And like so six months go by and we finally get to go live with my parents and I'm scared for my life because, I did not want to go back to foster care. And, when I was living with my foster parents, they were telling me my parents weren't trying to get me back and they would end up adopting me. (1/13)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah. Then we left my grandparents and we went back home in February, the next February. And, (pause) no it was like March. Yeah, it was March. And we were living in like a trailer home; it was a nice one. (1/14)</i></li> <li>• <i>Um, when he would drink, um, he went to bed with a beer in his hand and he woke up with a beer in his hand. Everything revolved around beer. Everything revolved around beer. His last twenty dollars went the beer. When our lights and cable got cut off he wanted beer. He didn't care about anything but beer and weed. And, um, (pause) so, now it's just like his whole attitude is changed. He puts his all into the relationship, to have a relationship with me and my sister. And that is</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>It's just like, it's home like. It's like homey here. I have friends. Like I look at the staff as family. I look at the kids as family. And it's just like so little we have so much like, space and at XXXX like, you just like have to watch where you walk. And like, if you stop then somebody will run into you. Sad. But I'm ready to go back with my best friends and like, eat regular school food and be able to buy food when I want to and have my phone. (2/23).</i></li> <li>• <i>It is not. I wore my T-shirt today. The orange. I did you not. Me and my cousin got off the bus one day. This lady at the stop sign, she was like waiting for her turn to go. She rolled down her window and said, shouldn't you guys be in handcuffs? Aren't you guys prison kids? Yeah! it was bad !And she was like, you're wearing prison orange and khaki.(2/23)</i></li> <li>• <i>It was horrible. I just could not help but laugh. And my cousin was like, see this is what I'm talking about. And one day my cousin that got kicked off the bus, so his mom was bringing him in and she was like, you might as well ride with us and get breakfast. So I was like, okay.(2/24)</i></li> <li>• <i>The people around don't want us here. So, they're trying to do everything they can to get us kicked out and moved somewhere else. (2/24)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah. That's the kind of kids we have here. (2/25)</i></li> <li>• <i>I'm just glad we're allowed to wear our own shoes. Like whatever shoes we want. Except for we can't wear sandals.(2/27)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>'Cause um, when we lived in</i></li> <li>• <i>I used to tell him I was coming her for college. He so he's like, that's crazy how I wanted you to go to XXXX when we lived in XXXX and now that we don't live in, you want to go to. I'm like, yeah. Anything to get away from ya'll. ( laughter) He's like you know what, your Grammy's still up there and so is your aunts and uncles. Okay. They're not my parents.(5/23)</i></li> <li>• <i>To like, put my life into like, take my life experiences and help others with it. Like You know I've been through similar situations and I promise you thing are gonna get better. You've just got to keep you head up. Stuff like that.(5/33)</i></li> <li>• <i>Asked if she'd consider ever working in a place like.</i></li> <li>• <i>I actually did, um, but then I thought about it and you know. I could just donate to places like this because, I can't deal with what they deal with. I just don't have the patience.(5/34)</i></li> <li>• <i>But I mean, I told Mr. and Mr. and Miss that when I got my diploma. That I was gonna be the first one – That they were gonna be the first ones to see me.(5/34)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah. And I honestly like, want to invite them to my graduation. (5/34)</i></li> </ul> |

## Appendix D. (continued)

| Past  | Present  | Future |
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| <p>amazing because I thought my mom would always be the one around and it totally changed.(1/17)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• And I had to hang up. I could not deal with it. I told my dad the next day and he called my mom and told her that she didn't need to call us and tell us stuff like that. And my mom straight up denied it because she did not remember it. (1/19)</li> <li>• Yeah. She went to stay with friends. And after like three months of living with her friends she got kicked out of there for drinking. And her friend was a like a really big alcoholic too, but she was like, I couldn't keep up with your mom. She is too much. So my aunt, the only that's like really big AA, she owns a sober living home. She was like I have this room open for you if you want it. It's like \$150 a week and you can stay there. My mom at first was like, at first, no I have to be sober. Like, I don't want that. And so, my aunt was like, okay then I guess you're going to be out on the streets. And my mom was like, no, never mind, I'll take it. And my mom has been sober for sixty days, I think.(1/19)</li> <li>• No, not really. It was more like I didn't want to go to school.(2/17)</li> <li>• My dad thought I was hanging with the wrong crowd, but it wasn't. I just didn't want to go to school. So, I didn't go. ( 2/17)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• And it's not even like you read one section and then you answer like two or three questions, no. You read this like, frickin' novel and then answer ten questions. And then you do it again, ten questions. Do it again, ten questions And then like, finally you get to your post-test. Then you don't read anything, you just have like twenty or thirty questions. And you can't go on from your post-test unless you get a seventy. (2/33)</li> <li>• You know when I'm in front of my computer for so long. I get so tired and I start nodding off. And like, if we sleep here, we get in trouble.(2/37)</li> <li>• Yeah. I had counseling last night. (3/1)</li> <li>• I will never do it again. I just – I feel like if I do stuff like that I'm going to end up being like my parents. And I don't want to be like my parents. I want to be way better than my parents. So, I just don't associate myself with people that do stuff like that or think about doing stuff like that. (3/7).</li> <li>• And I have a crack in my lower vertebra, but I was born with it so that wasn't anything. And then I'm still going to the doctor, 'til this day and they still can't tell me what it is. They try to say it's was like, I don't know what it's called, psychiatric, something like that. (3/12)</li> </ul> |        |



## Appendix D. (continued)

| Past   | • Present  | • Future  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I would bring my backpack, and um, just put my backpack on my desk and sneak my phone. But that was ninth grade year. I did half of tenth grade there and um, we got anew ISS, ABS man and he was like really cool. He would like let us sleep and stuff.(2/20)</i></li> <li>• <i>It was like that in middle school too. Like, um, I wore leggings one day 'cause like nobody told me dress code. I started um, eighth grade here, half the year already gone. So I um, wore leggings like the second week I was there because everyone else wore leggings. And as soon as I wore leggings, I got dress coded and sent home. They told me not to return. Yeah, so. (2/22)</i></li> <li>• <i>And one day my cousin that got kicked off the bus, so his mom was bringing him in and she was like, you might as well ride with us and get breakfast. So I was like, okay.(2/24)</i></li> <li>• <i>Well, we got here at like fifteen or twenty minutes early. So she dropped us off right there at the lake. And we went and walked th lake a little bit and they called the cops on us. They came and they put us in handcuffs and stuff like that. They were like asking us what we were doing and we were just like, so in shock. We didn't do anything. We were just walking the lake. And they were like, well, you're supposed to be on school campus. Why weren't you there? Um, it's not time. Our bus doesn't usually pull up until like 8:26.(2/24)It was pouring down rain, like</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I went for like three or four, five months my tenth grade year. And, um, then I told my dad, like when I was in the hospital, I told my dad, dad I want to go to this school called . And he's like, what's that. And I was like it's a school on the water they're like a Call to Recovery, JDC program-type school. And he was like iffy about it. He didn't want me to come here. He thought it was just straight delinquents. And I was telling him, like, that's what I want to do I need to get my credits up. I need to get my grades up and he was, he wasn't really for it. (3/13)</i></li> <li>• <i>And not only do they teach you. Do they work with you for credits and stuff, they teach you how to have respect and stuff like that. Life-long lessons, like it's nice. I communicate with all the staff. I know all the staff and the staff loves me. So.(3/14)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah, it's like, here they actually know you by name. And not by like, you're not just a number there, here. At or any regular high school you're just a number. Like at I know some of the staff, but they don't really talk to you. They don't relay with you. They don't actually sit there and try to have a conversation with you. They just check you on what you're messing up on and walk away. (3/17)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul> |

## Appendix D. (continued)

| • Past   | • Present  | • Future  |
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| <p><i>storming. We were about to have like tornado warnings and everything. And her took his shirt off and ran outside. And her told us his mom was right down the road (laughter) and all of this, and he did it because the computer stopped working. Yeah. (2/25) Um, Miss. I had her, well, I didn't have her in my ninth grade year. But she was like a softball coach and my best friend played softball. I went to like all their practices and stuff and she would like always communicate with me. You know, like, say hi, how are you doing? In the hallways, if she seen me like doing the wrong thing, she'd check me, like you need to go to class. Dah, dah, dah, dah dah. If I had problems, I knew I could go to her. (2/34)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>When I had her in my tenth grade year. She played like a mom. She made sure I went to every class. Like she would look every day on my portal to see if I got to class on time, to see how my grades were, how I did in class and she'd give me an update on what I had to do. She'd tell me this is what you need to do, this is the day you need to go to tutoring and stuff like that.(2/34)</i></li> <li>• <i>Mm hm. I actually went to like, eight, nine elementary schools. (3/3)</i></li> <li>• <i>It was really like hard. I'd make friends and then get really like close to them and then I would up and move without like no goodbyes, nothing.(3/3)</i></li> <li>• <i>And she had like a really big impact on my life. (3/3)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>And um, here it's really different. Because like, me and Mr. , like, we can joke around. I mean like, he pulls my hair sometimes and like I bump into him on purpose. And like, we can just goof around and nobody really gets insulted or anything. And, it's like at it's different, like I'll have more friends. I'll have more people to communicate with, um, I'll have more things to do outside of school. I get out of school so much more earlier. I go to school more earlier and that was like one of my biggest problems. I never wanted to wake up and go to first period. I always just wanted to sleep in and go to like third or fourth. (3/17-18)</i></li> <li>• <i>I can't do that here. Like if I'm not at the bus stop I'm not coming to school and I'm dedicated to coming to school now. So I get up every morning and I come, unless I have like a doctor's appointment or something. (3/18)</i></li> <li>• <i>But, um, when I came here I decided like to open up to my dad and like tell him. I left school so many times, that you never knew about. He was just like, thank you for being honest with me. (3/18)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul> |

# Appendix D. (continued)

| Past  | Present  | Future  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• And she wasn't like one of them teachers like – 'Cause I've had a lot of those teachers like this, that would just sit at the desk and like, if you ask for help they would like, tell you to ask a friend or like, ask your partner or something. But like, when I asked her for help like, she would actually, like help me like. And I was like one of the only kids that really like, listened to her and like, took what she said into, like –And all the other kids, they just like, since she was like older they took advantage of her and stuff.(3/4)But, she like connected with like me and like, it was nice. 'Cause at the time, we lived her and my grandma lived inxxx. So my grandma was – My grandma, she was a meth addict.(3/5)</li> <li>• And I was like, well my parents work all night and all day. And she waslike, well then you're going to be nothing in l ife. And I like, walked out of the classroom and went and told and got a new teacher.(3/7)Um, sigh. When I moved here, I, my eighth grade year, I had half of my eighth grade year done. When I moved with my aunt it was like second semester of eighth grade. I went to school every day, but I barely paid attention. I was more focused on like, making friends. Um, I got in trouble a lot. I fought. (3/8)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Um, I think it's when I came here they like, they talked to you about honesty and like respect and loyalty and stuff like that. Like, that's our like thirteen values and we used to talk about them on like a day-to-day basis. And, um, When we went to your challenge in, I actually had to write a paper about it, like all thirteen values. And honesty was really like the one that stuck to me. And respect. I have so much respect for like my elders and stuff like that. Like, I don't cuss in front of adults. I say yes ma'am, no sir, yes sir. And that wasn't like really – that's something I picked up on because my dad, he doesn't really like me saying sir or ma'am to anybody in our family because he thinks it make people feel old. So, it's just something I picked up on. And the staff don't really get that here, so it's like – But I picked up on honesty a lot. (3/19)</li> <li>• Yeah. But I picked up on honesty because the staff's been nothing but honest with me. So, I felt like I needed to be nothing but honest with them and the people that I live with and the people that I surround myself with.(3/19)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul> |

## Appendix D. (continued)

| Past   | Present  | Future  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>In Gym and a teacher asked for her phone as she talked to her dad. And I told her no because I was talking to my dad and she was like, well, you can talk to your dad later. And I was like, I don't to talk to him later, I'm talking to him now. And she was like, well then, she was like, if you don't give me your phone I'm going to have to have somebody escort you. And so I threw my phone at her. (3/9)</i></li> <li>• <i>And I got only D's because I passed those. Um, I was more (pause) I had a boyfriend at the time that I was dating since eighth grade. And I was more focused on him and his grades so that he could play basketball than my grades. And rather than doing homework, I would go to football games, basketball games and all of that. And hang out with people. I lied to my dad about my grades, which eventually I got my cell phone taken away for. Um, then, I fought, ninth grade year. (3/10)</i></li> <li>• <i>So they fought two times and then she wanted to fight again, but my best friend didn't want to. So, I fought her and I dislocated my shoulder. I had to be rushed to the hospital and my shoulder popped back into place. I had to be put to sleep. (3/11)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Um, X she's one of the new ones. We've talked a few times. I wouldn't say she's my friend, but she's like an associate. If she needs help, she'll come to me. (3/21)</i></li> <li>• <i>Here, if you fight or something, they won't let you out of this room. Unless you apologize and shake hands and stuff. And so that's what we did and um, she messaged me one day. She was like I'm really sorry for what happened between us I was having a really bad day. She has mom problems like I have mom problems. So, she wanted to talk about it and I was there for her. That's how we became friends again. And there's X. She was here before I was. Um, me and her are really close, like. ( 3/24)</i></li> <li>• <i>That's like my best friend. Um, she's here basically, the same reason I'm here. But her mom put her here instead of herself. (3/24)</i></li> <li>• <i>I'm the girl that hangs out with the boys, so that I don't have drama. (3/25)</i></li> <li>• <i>When I reminisce on like what happened and what I've been through and what I've done to other people and like put other people in danger and stuff, I'm like, why would I ever do that? That's not really who I am. Today, that's not who I ever really was? I think I was just trying to fit in. Like I was trying to be one of them.</i></li> <li>• <i>Interviewer: Hmm.</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul> |

## Appendix D. (continued)

| Past   | Present   | Future  |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes. I was in there three weeks to a month. And um, my dad, like, since my mom wasn't really in the picture, my grandma came up there to stay with me so that my dad could go to work and stuff. And then, um, they told me they didn't know what was wrong with me. They still don't know what's wrong with me. They thought it was my back causing it because I have scoliosis.(3/12)</li> <li>• And I have a crack in my lower vertebra, but I was born with it so that wasn't anything. And then I'm still going to the doctor, 'til this day and they still can't tell me what it is. They try to say it's was like, I don't know what it's called, psychiatric, something like that.(3/12)</li> <li>• But they like gave me antibiotics for like pain and stuff, but that never really helped. So, but I just stopped going to school in ninth grade, for a long time. And then, my tenth grade year-(3/13)</li> <li>• I went for like three or four, five months my tenth grade year. And, um, then I told my dad, like when I was in the hospital, I told my dad, dad I want to go to this school called</li> <li>• And he's like, what's that. And I was like it's a school on the water they're like a Call to Recovery, JDC program-type school. And he was like iffy about it. He didn't want me to come here. He thought it was just straight delinquents. And I was telling him, like, that's what I want to do I need to get my credits up. I need to get my grades up and he was, he wasn't really for it. (3/13)</li> <li>• How did you hear about my cousin.(3/14)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant #2: And it worked. By doing what I did. And they respected me for what I did. And, I just, now that I look back, I'm like, wow. I was really nothing for trying to associate with people like them. But, its, I made a dramatic change.(3/31)</li> <li>• Some still talk to me to this day. Like, but most of them have babies now. The girls that I really hung out with, um, they have babies. And one's younger than I am. The girl that I fought and put her in the hospital, we got, we became friends. Um, she had a baby. She is just like a few months older than I am. And um, the other ones, they have kids. There's like only one that I associated with and she doesn't have a kid yet.(3/32)</li> <li>• Um, I'm still a virgin.(3/32)</li> <li>• It was fifteen dollars for just my dinner and I just had- (inaudible)(4/2)</li> <li>• Cause I feel like we're supposed, like we should be able to dress freely like, dress how we want to. And then some kids they get like favoritism and like, yeah. It's not fair to me.(4/8)</li> <li>• Um, so like, I sit like, um, I move around a little bit and I'll get into trouble for that. And I tell them, like, I can't sit still. It's just not what I can do. And he's like, well, you're gonna have to. Well, okay. I'm just gonna get in trouble, like I won't play games or anything, I just sit there and like talk and stuff. But like, I try not to distract the kids, if like, they're focused. Cause I feel like, they're here for a reason. Just like I 'm here for a reason. I wouldn't want them to distract me. I don't distract them, but if they talk to me I'll talk back.(4/11)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul> |

## Appendix D. (continued)

| Past  | Present  | Future |
|---|--|--------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• But, um, when I came here I decided like to open up to my dad and like tell him. I left school so many times, that you never knew about. He was just like, thank you for being honest with me. (3/18)</li> <li>• She was talking about me but was like trying to be slick about it. Like, she wasn't trying to let me know she was talking about me. I'm the type of person like my mouth has no filter. I say what's on my mind at all times.(3/22)</li> <li>• My first fight was in elementary school, in the bathroom. My fifth grade year. This girl called my mom a crack head at lunch. And I wasn't having that. So, well, she was in the bathroom and was peeing. I kicked in the stall and I just started fighting her.(3/25)</li> <li>• I was smiling and like walking away. But I got suspended for ten days. Yeah. ( 3/26)</li> <li>• No. Um the second biggest fight I had was with this boy. I think it was like seventh grade year. Yeah, seventh grade year. It was like almost the ending. I had like three more months of school left.(3/26)</li> <li>• I didn't care about nothing then. Um, then, it was like my last day of Trace Academy this girl tried to fight me. And I wasn't gonna fight her on my last day, I could have got sixty more days. (3/27)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So, um, they referred us to a person who deals with stuff like that. So, we went to the lady and she like questioned me and did blood work and all of that stuff. And um, she was like, you know what you're going through isn't psychological. It's actually something really wrong with you. Um, you have no symptoms of anything. But I have PTSD and I have depression.(4/12)</li> <li>• No. My dad, since he's in AA, he doesn't want me on any medication or anything. And he told the lady that, but she told him that um, if I was diagnosed with ADHD that I would have to be put on medication. And he's kind of iffy about it.(4/13)</li> <li>• To be honest, whatever she thinks is going to cure me. I don't think you can cure ADHD but, hey. And I'm bi-polar.(4/14)</li> <li>• 'Cause that's where his um, alcoholism and drug abuse started. And he doesn't want me to go down the same path. Which, I refuse to smoke. I refuse to drink. I think liquor and beer is just disgusting.(4/14)</li> <li>• And they usually start surgery at a thirty-three, in-between there. And, um, they said if it goes up to like a thirty-seven to a thirty-eight they're gonna have to do emergency surgery and put a metal rod in my back.(4/17)</li> <li>• *Yeah. I feel like teachers think it's like all roses and sunflowers t home, when it's not all the time.( 4/20)</li> </ul> |        |

## Appendix D. (continued)

| Past  | Present   | Future |
|---|---|--------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>And I was not gonna do that. So, um, like a week later, it was summer. I seen her at the apartments, that my cousin lived at. And my mom and them they were doing drug deals. I seen her with my friend Asia. And she was walking with these two boys and they were going to the store. When she came back I told her that I wanted to fight her. Um, so I did. And she went to the hospital. I got another charge for that.(3/28)</i></li> <li>• <i>And that's who I really associated with. We sold drugs. We shot at people. We stole. We stole cars and, um, yeah. I was really bad. (3/29)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah. There was nights I wouldn't come home at all and my parents would like have a conversation with me the next morning and they wouldn't even know ( pause) like that I was gone. So, I started doing stuff like that. And then I went back to regular school when it started again. And, um, my grandpa, that's around the time that my grandpa was dying. So, I really just like wanted to be left alone. I really didn't want to associate with anybody.</i></li> <li>• <i>And then um, I got shot at. Um, there was like a drive-by shooting and my best friend got shot. He died instantly. He was only thirteen. Um, then that's when I knew I needed to stop what I was doing and like get out of this. This was not the place for me. This is not what I should be doing at this age. I'm too young to die.(3/29)</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>It's like they can treat you anyway and not get the same respect they gave you back I'm big on that. Like, you respect me and I respect you. You don't respect me. I won't respect you. And that's how – Teachers don't like that. And, ( pause) I don't care. And so.(4/20)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah. And my best friend was like, they have clubs and adults are there, but we're allowed to go and we can drink. And I was like, but I don't do that type of stuff. (Laughter.) I'm not, not like that. And she was like, I know, but it's okay because we'll have fun. And I was like okay, whatever. (5/11)</i></li> <li>• <i>Okay, so you know how like when they like are celebrating like, their sponsor goes up and gives a speech about how they were and all that. I had to do that.(5/12)</i></li> <li>• <i>And, oh my God. They were the most aggravating people with it like, if I were to have like mascara on or something, they'd be like, you're not supposed to wear stuff like that. You need to cover your arms. You need to cover your legs, like it's a-hundred-and-something-degrees outside. And I'm not going to wear a long sleeved shirt and some jeans. I'm sorry. (5/14)</i></li> </ul> |        |

## Appendix D. (continued)

| Past   | Present   | Future |
|--|---|--------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>And I was talking to my dad and he was like, there's nowhere else we can go. This is our home and you can't go back to Florida. Nothing like that. And so, I stayed with the gang and stuff. I was talking to them about how I got shot at. They were telling me you're going to be okay. You're going to be fine, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. I went to the fair one day and there were these girls, the girl that I fought and her friends, well her ex-best friends they still like hated me because I was from the Bloods and they were from Crips. I was walking by myself. They came up behind me and cut my throat with a razorblade.(3/30)</i></li> <li>• <i>Thirteen. Thirteen, fourteen. Yeah. And then when I got out, it was around Easter. I was only in the hospital for like a day. Um, I got out, it was around Easter and I decided I was going to steal my parents' car. They woke up Easter morning, I was gone. They called the cops. They found me in two days. I got arrested for grand theft auto. Um, yeah.(3/30)</i></li> <li>• <i>When I reminisce on like what happened and what I've been through and what I've done to other people and like put other people in danger and stuff, I'm like, why would I ever do that? That's not really who I am. Today, that's not who I ever really was? I think I was just trying to fit in. Like I was trying to be one of them.</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>She's really close with this girl named X's mom. And me and X, we were really close. And X's gay and so she dated that girl, X. And then, um, X thought me and X had something going on, but I don't like girls, so. I tried to tell her like, I don't like her, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. And so, yeah, I guess she found out where we lived. And popped up at the house and we were fighting and um, I kind of knocked her bottom tooth out. But- Yeah, she just like scratched me. But like her girlfriend, when I was on top of her, her girlfriend like pushed me off of her and I like hit my head on the um, ground. Really hard.(5/29)</i></li> <li>• <i>I don't know. I don't really like open up and express like my life story and like tell my story to people.</i></li> <li>• <i>But, like, I don't know. I feel like I've been so much smoother during the day knowing that like you're coming and that. Yeah.(5/33)</i></li> <li>• <i>And I told Mr. the other day, I was like, you know honestly, I feel like I wouldn't even be on the right track to graduating if it wasn't for. (5/34)</i></li> <li>• <i>I know. Me and my dad talk about it all the time. He asks me like, how do you think's changed you? I'm like, I don't know. Then I just like – We start talking about it and he'll be like, well I think like changed you. You have so much more respect. You do what I ask you to do when I ask you to do it. You're not lazy. You just changed as a person. Yeah.(5/36)</i></li> <li>• <i>Up until the point where I came to and then like, my first interaction was with Mr. He was like my first teacher.(5/36)</i></li> </ul> |        |



## Appendix D. (continued)

| Past   | Present  | Future |
|--|--|--------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>And it worked. By doing what I did. And they respected me for what I did. And, I just, now that I look back, I'm like, wow. I was really nothing for trying to associate with people like them. But, its, I made a dramatic change.(3/31)</i></li> <li>• <i>No, but um, in middle school, I got in trouble so often that um, every morning I had to go get this piece of paper. It was just like, every teacher had to sign and say how my day was and stuff like that. Then I would have to take it to the principal. (4/7)</i></li> <li>• <i>And then like once I get into trouble I miss so many days of class because they want to give me ISS or ABS. If I don't have a ride to ABS hen I can't go to ABS and so I get suspended. (4/8)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah and then I would have to sit in ISS all day if my dad didn't bring me pants or something.(4/9)</i></li> <li>• <i>'Cause I realized that, like, I need to go to class or I'm gonna end up here again. My credits are gonna drop. My grades are gonna drop. (4/10)</i></li> <li>• <i>Best day of school?</i></li> <li>• <i>I don't think I've had one. I mean like, high school, like we have our Red and White games, which is like out spring games. And we have our, what's it called? Character week. Those are fun. I wouldn't say like I've had a best day.(4/19)</i></li> <li>• <i>What's the worst day?</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>And I could explain to him like, it's so much better. Like the teachers actually interact with you and they help you. People actually get to know you and stuff. They don't just put a number on you and call it a day.(5/37)</i></li> </ul> |        |

## Appendix D. (continued)

| Past   | Present | Future |
|--|---------|--------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What is the worst day? The day I got a phone call saying that my uncle had passed away. It was my mom and I was walking to class. And um, so I go off the phone with her and went in and told my teacher that I needed to go to the office. And she had no understanding. Like she didn't care. She wanted me in class and it was really bad.(4/19)</i></li> <li>• <i>It's like they can treat you anyway and not get the same respect they gave you back I'm big on that. Like, you respect me and I respect you. You don't respect me. I won't respect you. And that's how – Teachers don't like that. And, ( pause) I don't care. And so.(4/20)</i></li> <li>• <i>Mm hm. That was seventh grade. And then, I got suspended for inciting a riot. Which I didn't do. Um, these girls were jumping this girl and I was like trying to pull them off of her. And the one girl that I was trying to help told that I hit her, when I didn't! But I got blamed for everything. And I got kicked out of school.(4/21)</i></li> <li>• <i>Life was good then. (4/22)</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah. Oh there was this one time and it was before we moved to and we lived with this guy. I think his name was Mike. Yeah. His name was Mike and now to me, all Mikes are creepy. ( Laughter) All Mikes. So, we were living with him and he used to always act. Like he was a really nice man. He used to let, um, he used to ask my dad like, could he take me to the movies and stuff. And you know my dad thought nothing of it. He was just like, okay. So um, then he would like, if my mom and dad wanted</i></li> </ul> |         |        |

#### Appendix D. (continued)

| <i>Past</i>  | <i>Present</i> | <i>Future</i> |
|--|----------------|---------------|
| <p><i>to go out, he would offer to babysit me. And you know my parents thought nothing of it. (4/22-23)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>And like my parents thought nothing of it because they were strung out on drugs. They were drunk. And um, one time, the police came, because the guy that my aunt was seeing at the time – my mom and my aunt were into it. My aunt had left clothes in our house and she sent her boyfriend to come get them. So my dad like, superman punched him and he flew off our balcony. So my dad got arrested. And then two weeks later, we move out. And we moved, I forgot where we moved.</i></li> <li>• <i>Um, and my dad gets a phone call from the police, thinking like they were going to tell him his court date or something. No. They told my dad that we were living with a sex offender. And that he, um, they did a raid on his house and all this. They found pictures of little girls and it was like child pornography and a whole bunch of stuff. And then like, it all clicked to my dad. And um, the guy used to ask my dad if he could take pictures of me and stuff. Yeah. He told my dad he was a modeling agent or something like that. (4/23)</i></li> <li>• <i>Um-hm. Just so I could beat him up. That's what I used to tell my dad all the time. I want a brother so I can beat him up. And my dad's like, what is wrong with you? You're crazy, dude. (laughter) Hey, oh well.(5/22)</i></li> </ul> |                |               |

## Appendix D. (continued)

| Past  | Present | Future |
|---|---------|--------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>And if you don't have classes, they yell at you. I don't got time to be yelled at. He literally brought me out of class today because I was sitting next to two boys which didn't make no sense because that was my assigned seat. That was their assigned seat, so. But you know you get in trouble here for anything. You get in trouble for anything.(5/26)</i></li> <li>• <i>No. He pulled me. This is what he said, he called me, he was like, come here. I start walking towards him. He goes, go log off. So I logged off. Then he was like, I need to talk to you and I was okay. I walk into the hallway and he goes, um, she'll be here at one-thirty today. And I was like, okay.</i></li> <li>• <i>And I went to go walk back in class and he was like, no, no, no. Go get a lap top. And I was like, okay. I went to get a lap top and tried to go back to class and he goes, no. Go into this room. Which is where you sit when you're in trouble. And I was like, why? I didn't do anything. And he was like, just go in there.</i></li> <li>• <i>And so I went in there and then we did our class switching and stuff. And then um, he goes – What'd he say? He was like, um, now can you go back to class? So I was like, I guess, I didn't do anything, so yeah, I guess. And he was okay, take your lap top and I want you to sit right next to Mr.</i></li> </ul> |         |        |

**Appendix D. (continued)**

| <i>Past</i>   | <i>Present</i> | <i>Future</i> |
|---|----------------|---------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• . I don't want you to be around any of them boys.(5/27)</li><li>• And I could explain to him like, it's so much better. Like the teachers actually interact with you and they help you. People actually get to know you and stuff. They don't just put a number on you and call it a day.(5/37)</li><li>•</li></ul> |                |               |

**Appendix E. Assent  
of Participant**



**Assent to Participate in Research**

**University of South Florida**

**Assent for Children 12-18 Years of Age Who Are Being Asked To Take Part in Research Studies**

**TITLE OF STUDY:** Girls at Risk

**WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?**

You are being asked to take part in this project because you are a girl who attends \_\_\_\_\_.  
About 5 other students from \_\_\_\_\_ will be asked to participate in this study.

**WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?**

The people in charge of this study are Jessica Curtis, and Dr. Brenda Townsend Walker of USF's College of Education.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

By doing this study, we hope to learn more about your experiences in school before you came to\_\_\_\_\_.

**WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT**

**LAST?**

The study will take place at \_\_\_\_\_ from October 2014 – September 2015.

### **WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?**

You will be asked to take part in individual interviews which will take approximately 60 minutes. You may also be asked to keep a journal if you choose to do so (this is not mandatory). The journal can be used during the interview or at your home. The amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately 60 minutes every other week. I will be asking you to tape record our conversations. If I should find information that is of concern I will have to contact the program administrator. Examples of information that would be of concern would be a suicidal thoughts or unreported child abuse.

### **WHAT THINGS MIGHT HAPPEN THAT ARE NOT PLEASANT?**

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing will not harm you or cause you any additional unpleasant experience. If I should find information that is of concern I will have to contact the program administrator. Examples of information that would be of concern would be a suicidal thoughts or unreported child abuse

### **WILL SOMETHING GOOD HAPPEN IF I TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

We cannot promise you that anything good will happen if you decide to take part in this study.

### **DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?**

You do not have to take part in the study if you don't want to. You should talk with your parent(s)/guardian or anyone else that you trust about taking part in this study. If you do not want to take part in the study, that is your decision. Nothing will happen if you decide not to participate. You should take part in this study because you really want to volunteer.

### **IF I DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, WHAT WILL HAPPEN?**

If you do not want to be in the study, nothing else will happen.

### **WILL I RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?**

You will not receive any reward for taking part in this study.

### **WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?**

Your information will be shared with research staff and your name will be kept confidential in the study so no one will know who you are.

### **CAN I CHANGE MY MIND AND QUIT?**

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to change your mind later. No one will think badly of you if you decide to quit. Also, the people who are running this study may need for you to stop. If this happens, they will tell you why.

## Appendix E (continued)

### WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You can ask questions about this study at any time. You can talk with your parents or other adults that you trust about this study. You can talk with Jessica A. Curtis . If you think of other questions later, you can ask them. Or you can contact USF IRB 813-974-5638.

### Assent to Participate

I understand what the person running this study is asking me to do. I have thought about this and agree to take part in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

---

Name of person agreeing to take part in the study

---

Date

---

Name of person providing information to subject

---

Date

---

Printed name & Signature of person providing information (assent)

---

Date



## **Appendix F. Parental**

### **Consent Form**



#### **Parental Permission to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk**

##### **Information for parents to consider before allowing their child to take part in this research study**

**IRB Study #** Pro00018048

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The following information is being presented to help you and your child decide whether or not your child wishes to be a part of a research study. Please read this information carefully. If you have any questions or if you do not understand the information, we encourage you to ask the researcher.

We are asking you to allow your child to take part in a research study called:

##### **Girls At-Risk**

The person who is in charge of this research study is Jessica A. Curtis. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by Brenda Townsend Walker PhD, JD.

The research will be conducted at \_\_\_\_\_

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##### **Purpose of study: why is this research being done?**

The purpose of this study is to find out about girl's experiences in school prior to coming to \_\_\_\_\_. Jessica A. Curtis will be interviewing your student about her school experiences.

## **Appendix F (continued)**

### **Why is your child being asked to take part?**

We are asking your child to take part in this research study because she a girl who is receiving educational services outside of a typical school setting. We want to find out more about her education prior to placement at \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Study Procedures: What will happen during this study?**

If your child takes part in this study, she will be asked to:

Your child will be asked to spend about 3 months in this study. I will be interviewing your student approximately 5 times within those months to gather the information about her schooling experiences. Typically, I will visit with your child once every other week.

A study visit is one your child will have with the person in charge of the study. Your child will need to come for no more than 5 study visits in all. Most study visits will take about an hour. Some study visits may be shorter. The length of the interview is determined by flow of the interview.

There is nothing that your child will need to prepare prior to the first study meeting

At each visit, your child will be asked:

To discuss her school experiences from the time she was in kindergarten to the present day. She may use a composition booklet (which I will provide for her) to express her feelings or to write thoughts down that come to her after our conversation. She will need to bring this booklet with her to each interview.

- I will be asking questions to gather information about your student's background such as, what grade she is in, has she been expelled, whether she receives Special Education services, if she has any children and who she lives with.
- The interview questions that may be asked relate to school and peers. Sample questions include:

## **Appendix F (continued)**

### **Sample questions for interviews in no particular order**

1. Tell me about school.
  2. Tell me about your favorite teachers.
  3. How did you feel about school prior to coming here?
  4. Who did you hang out with at school?
  5. Tell me about your family.
  6. Was there a moment when you felt you needed help?
  7. Tell me about why you are here.
  8. What would you do after school before you came here?
  9. If you could change one thing about your previous school, what would it be?
  10. Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently?
  11. Tell me about your childhood.
  12. Did you have a boyfriend/girlfriend in school prior to coming here?
  13. Tell me about your friends.
- The final visit will consist of me clarifying any information with your student and asking if there is anything else she would like to add. Also, I am interested in asking how your student felt being interviewed.
  - These interviews will be audio taped. The study staff will have access to these recordings. There will be pseudonyms for each participant so no identifiable information will be available on the tapes. Also, these recording will be uploaded to a password protected computer which only the Principle Investigator has access to. Protocol states that the tapes must remain in tack for five years and then must be destroyed. At that time, the digital recording will be deleted and any files shredded.

### **Total Number of Participants**

About 5 individuals will take part in this study at USF.

### **Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**

If you decide not to let your child take part in this study, that is okay.

You should only let your child take part in this study if both of you want to. You or child should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study to please the study investigator or the research staff.

### **If you decide not to let your child take part:**

- Your child will not be in trouble or lose any rights he/she would normally have.
- Your child will still get the same services or health care benefits he/she would normally have.
- Your child can still get their regular treatments from his/her regular doctor.
- Instead of being in this research study your child can choose not to participate.

**You can decide after signing this informed consent form that you no longer want your child to take part in this study.** We will keep you informed of any new developments which might affect your willingness to allow your child to continue to participate in the study. However, you can decide you want your child to stop taking part in the study for any reason at any time. If you decide you want your child to stop taking part in the study, tell the study staff as soon as you can.

**Benefits: what are the potential benefits to your child if you let him / her take part in this study?**

Your child will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this study

**Risks or Discomfort: what are the risks if your child takes part in this study?**

There are no known risks to those who participate in this study.

**Compensation: will your child be compensated for taking part in this study?**

Your child will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

**What will it cost you to let your child take part in this study?**

It will not cost you anything to let your child take part in the study.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will keep your child's study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your child's study records. By law, anyone who looks at your child's records must keep them completely confidential. Although it is highly unlikely, legal authorities may request and obtain access to the study data which will include your child's responses to study tasks, interviews, surveys, and questionnaires. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, and all other research staff.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your child's records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your child's rights and his/her safety.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP), and\_\_\_\_\_.

## Appendix F (continued)

- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, staff in the USF Office of Research and Innovation, USF Division of Research Integrity and Compliance, and other USF offices who oversee this research.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your child's name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who your child is.

If the PI should find information that is of concern (i.e. suicide or unreported abuse) the education director will be contacted.

### **You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Jessica A. Curtis at \_\_\_\_\_.

If you have questions about your child's rights, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

### **Consent for My Child to Participate in this Research Study**

It is up to you to decide whether you want your child to take part in this study. If you want your child to take part, please read the statements below and sign the form if the statements are true.

**I freely give my consent to let my child take part in this study.** I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to let my child take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent of Child Taking Part in Study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Parent of Child Taking Part in Study

### **Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

I have carefully explained to the parent of the child taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their child's participation. I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he/ she understands:

- What the study is about;
- What procedures will be used
- What the potential benefits might be; and
- What the known risks might be.

## Appendix F (continued)

I can confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in the appropriate language. Additionally, this subject reads well enough to understand this document or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her. The parent signing this form does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore make it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give legally effective informed consent. The parent signing this form is not under any type of anesthesia or analgesic that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and, therefore, can be considered competent to give permission to allow their child to participate in this research study.

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Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

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Date

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Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix G. IRB Form



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799  
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

12/3/2014

Jessica Curtis, M.S. Teaching and Learning  
4202 E. Fowler Ave.  
Tampa, FL 33620

RE: **Full Board Approval for Initial Review**

IRB#: Pro00018048

Title: Girls at Risk: A Narrative Inquiry of Girls at Risk of Incarceration and Their Perceptions  
of Their Previous Educational Experiences

**Study Approval Period: 11/21/2014 to 11/21/2015**

Dear Mrs. Curtis:

On 11/21/2014, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents outlined below.

**Approved Item(s): Protocol Document(s):** [Girl At-Risk protocol](#)

**Consent/Assent Document(s)\*:** [Adult Consent Minimal Risk.pdf](#) [Assent.pdf](#)  
[Parental Permission.pdf](#)

\*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).

This research involving children as participants was approved under 45 CFR 46.404:  
Research not involving greater than minimal risk to children is presented.

## Appendix G

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638. Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John A. Schinka, Ph.D." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson  
USF Institutional Review Board