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Pushed Out of High School: Narratives of Teaching Under the Testing Regime

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by

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Dedication

To my devoted father, Mr. Prosper Alexis, a farmer from Bainet, Haiti and loving

mother, Mrs. Gisele Alexis from Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Thank you for pouring unconditional

love, strength, and wisdom into me. You made me strong.

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Abstract

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was enacted as an education intervention to close the achievement gap by increasing student attendance, graduation, and standard testing rates. NCLB held teachers and administrators accountable for successfully meeting adequate yearly progress gains. However, the emerging NCLB research uncovered a culture of conflict with academically at-risk students being pushed out of the public school system and rise in disciplinary actions towards minority students. This study employed John Gultang's structural violence, John Burton's basic human needs theory, and adultification theory to highlight the significance of understanding the conflict in high-stakes testing regimes. This research employed qualitative narrative analysis to explore how federal education accountability measures influenced the experience of high school teachers and students from the tri-county South Florida area. The findings concluded the best protective measures for students in high-stakes testing regimes was to incorporate a curriculum that supported the use of more time for teachers to establishing relatable and supportive relationships with students by building a sense of community in the classroom. The implication of this study included encouraging a student and teacher relationship-building curriculum. This study also recommends embedding mandatory teacher professional development training on structural violence, adultification of minority youth, and push-out syndrome to commitment to exposing secret pipeline to prison.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the background for this study, the history of No Child Left Behind, the research statement, the purpose of the study, the theoretical frameworks, and the limitations of the study. Additionally, this chapter summarizes the research literature and describes knowledge gaps in the discipline and the study's contribution to the academic literature as well as its contribution to the field of conflict resolution.

Background of this Study

In 2018, one of the largest school districts in South Florida approved a contract with a for-profit alternative education provider. The purpose of the agreement was to positively impact graduation rates by using remedial education services for non-graduates. In partnership with the county public school, the for-profit program recruited 16-20-year-olds who did not earn a high school diploma due to dropping out early, being involved in the criminal justice system, or stopped out of high school, or was interested in earning a standardized high school diploma. The program was an open classroom concept and promoted the idea that academically at-risk students could learn at their own pace. The organization included a director, certified teachers, career and life coach consultants, and graduate assistants. The role of each member was to recruit at various locations, including visiting the homes of non-graduates and at shopping centers.

During recruitment efforts, the for-profit alternative education center discovered that their recruitment list from the county also included students with certificates of completion. The program also received a high volume of calls and emails from former students interested in receiving academic assistance to earn a standard high school diploma. The district and the for-profit alternative education center agreed to amend the contract to target students with certificates of completion. As a result of the shift, the program saw an influx of students who

desperately wanted study tools to pass the FCAT or earn concordant scores on the ACT or SAT. The majority of students were of Haitian or Latino descent. Most came from the lower socio-economic or the homeless community.

I worked for this for-profit academic center as a career and life coach, which served as the backdrop for this research. I conducted over 200 one-on-one interviews. I used the information to develop personalized academic and career success plans for each student. The interview questions focused on a student's past experiences, career, and life goals. Many students described their background as coming from lower socio-economic circumstances riddled with criminal activity, emotional, physical, sexual trauma, drug abuse, or severe mental health challenges. I observed during my tenure that while many students successfully passed all of their high school courses, the same students were unable to pass the high-stakes state or end-of-the-year exams. As a result, these students were awarded a certificate of completion rather than a high school diploma. Thus, while these students left school successfully passing all their courses, they experienced limited career and education opportunities since they did not receive a high school diploma. Furthermore, there was minimal assistance to help these students earn their high school diplomas.

The majority of students endured drug abuse, severe emotional, physical, sexual abuse, or experienced homelessness one or more times throughout the years. It was common to hear students sharing how they struggled throughout their academic careers. Furthermore, most students disclosed learning deficiencies and others struggled with English as a second language. Students' joint inquiry was their frustration of being advanced in school without having the necessary skills to pass the FCAT. The majority felt discouraged that a single test (FCAT or

EOC) would supersede their four years of successfully passing various coursework. As a result, attending school became more of a letdown, so they left or dropped out.

I also noticed another disturbing trend. In many cases, the school administrators or guidance counselor encouraged them to unenroll from day school to attend night school, enroll in an alternative school, pursue a GED, or drop out to enter the workforce. These students mentioned their disappointment with the educational system. Others felt relieved as if the school officials permitted them to leave school. Finally, a small group of students unofficially dropped out and noted that nobody came looking for them as if their disappearance did not matter.

Students with exceptional student education (ESE) designation shared that administrators had aged them out of the school system by their 18th birthday. Others with repetitive disciplinary records were warned that returning to the campus would lead to being arrested for trespassing. Those who were truant found themselves administratively unenrolled or just decided not to return to school due to fears of getting in trouble. Finally, those who did not pass the state-wide standard test were left to fend for themselves. Ultimately, most of the students in the program were involved in the criminal justice system.

I recalled a student asking me how she could have passed all her classes with a decent grade point average, but one test destroyed her future. She wondered if it was her fault that she completed the 12th grade but could not pass a test, or was it the teachers' fault for passing her if she did not know the material. These conversations were tough because I could not explain this discrepancy nor articulate a tangible solution.

This dissertation will focus primarily on learning more about the reported 6,485 (3.1%) dropouts and the 14,468 (6.9%) non-graduates. Research revealed that students in those brackets suffer the most in society. According to the 2018-2019 cohort-based dropout rate data, there was

a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic males and females dropping out than their White counterparts (FDE, 2020). To further maintain the upwards graduation trend and support the non-graduates, many for-profit alternative schools partnered with local public school districts to offer drop-back services geared towards increasing graduation rates.

Certificate of Completion

The Florida Department of Education (FDE, 2021) reported an overall graduation rate of 90% for the 2019-2020 academic year. The graduation rate by race/ethnicity was 91.7% for White, 86.6% for Black or African American, and 89.5% for Hispanic/Latino students. There was a 3.4% achievement gap for Black students and 0.5% for Hispanics. The data also confirmed a 3.1% increase over the past six years for all students.

The Florida Department of Education (2020) has stipulated a set of standards that all students must achieve in order to earn a standard high school diploma. These include: earn 24 credit hours, achieve a 2.0-grade point average or higher, pass the state-wide end-of-year course exam (EOC) and score a designated amount on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)—which replaced the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA). Students who do not pass the state standardized test in the tenth grade had the remainder of their high school time to take and pass the exam. Unfortunately, those students who meet all the other graduation guidelines except for passing the FCAT received only a certificate of completion.

While the certificate provides students the opportunity to enjoy graduation's pomp and circumstances, it does not afford them the lifelong benefits of a high school diploma. Coded as a non-graduate certificate, the certificate of completion is merely a notification of attendance. Florida does not consider these certificates of completion as meeting the criteria for receiving a high school diploma. Students with this type of certificate can attend a community college for up

to one year if they score within a specific range on a college entrance exam. However, students must produce a high school diploma or general education diploma (GED) to continue attending college. Moreover, these students are also not eligible for federal financial aid, which is a significant barrier for most students.

A student who needs tutorial services to earn a high school diploma will find minimal free community resources geared toward their development. Most academic resources for adult learners are fee-based and emphasize earning a GED degree. Furthermore, these students, who are most likely not academically inclined, must navigate earning a standard high school diploma or GED independently.

According to the United States National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2018b), the overall dropout statistic rate decreased for youth ages 16-24-year-old from 10.9% in 2000 to 6.1% in 2016. Although dropout rates have improved in the United States, one cannot overlook the overall negative impact on adolescents who live in the high school dropout statistical bracket. The dynamics associated with high school non-completers remain alarming. The 2018 NCES study reported high school dropouts to earn less income, experience increased health issues, live in poverty, and disproportionally higher percentages belong to the nation's institutionalized population.

The decision to leave high school before graduation can be detrimental and have a long-lasting adverse impact on the students. These effects can be even more harmful when trusted school officials participate in a cycle of violence. Research has indicated that high school students who depart before achieving their diploma face critical personal, academic, and societal issues (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Wang & Fredricks, 2014). In addition, young people without a high school diploma face the likelihood of

experiencing significant oppositional challenges in adulthood (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, Kewal, & Ramani, 2011; Dupéré et al., 2018).

No Child Left Behind Act

There has been a history of educational commissions and interventions that have attempted to address student achievement and graduation rates. For example, in the early 1980s, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE,1983) presented a report entitled "A Nation at Risk*"* demanding educational reform. The report brought about a new educational perspective on achievement testing, standards-based reform, and accountability (Jorgensen, 2003). NCEE used statistical evidence to report the current state of the educational system. The report documented a steady decline in academic achievement, college, and work readiness while demands of high-skilled employees were rapidly accelerating.

Encouraging a learning society, the NCEE (1983) made a landmark move by demanding standards and expectations. It charged the nation's schools to give attention to preparing U.S. youth for a globalized world. This new wave of federal education reform had a central premise, to provide all students with equal educational opportunities while holding educators accountable for meeting national standards of student progress known as adequate yearly progress.

The reform resulted in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) signed into law by President George W. Bush. The goal of one of the most effective forms of educational intervention was to meet the advancing needs of the global market and to close the achievement gap between poor and minority students (Hursh, 2007; Klien, 2015). NCLB has also deemed a remedy to increase the educational system's competitive edge while addressing the achievement disparities faced by minorities and those in the lower socio-economic class.

In 2015, the U.S. government paired back its influence on defining success and replaced NCLB with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which gave the states more autonomy (Klien, 2018). However, the performance-based accountability components of NCLB remain a substantial infrastructure for future reforms. Consequently, the infrastructure created to close the achievement gap has inadvertently widened the school disciplinary policy gap. Since the inception of the NCLB Act's accountability measure, there seems to be a significant shift in how schools manage academically at-risk youths, especially Black girls and boys.

In a 2014 article, Stanley Augustin penned an article entitled "No Child Left Behind and The School-to-Prison Pipeline: The Irony of a Progress Act" to bring attention to the push-out trend that hid academic deviancies. He highlighted three methods schools have used to increase their achievement scores. The first note is that holding back academically challenged students from advancing into the next grade to administer the test. The second, increase suspension rates during the testing window. The third, pressure students to find an alternate school or apply exclusionary discipline, which forced them to graduate. These tactics predominately impacted Black and Latino students.

The introduction of the NCLB testing regime and accountability measures created a violent trend of removing the most vulnerable of students outside of the classroom. The pushing out of academically vulnerable students into the pipeline to prison track to achieve academic success and graduation rates defeats the education system's purpose and confidence. According to the United States Department of Education's website, its "mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (para. 1). Additionally, one of its four core budgets is dedicated to "prohibiting discrimination and ensuring equal access to education" (para. 4). The testing culture

increased the punishment gap and violently destroyed minority and underachieving students' futures through its exclusionary school disciplinary tactics. Our minority boys and girls were disappearing from schools, bringing to the world's attention.

Statement of the Problem

The No Child Left Behind Act was developed to address student achievement and performance measures structure, known as adequate yearly progress (AYP) (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002). The AYP were specific mandates built into NCLB to measure and compare achievement goals across the nation. The federal government utilized a school's AYP results to perform a comparative analysis of state and national standards to document and determine student and school achievement progress (No Child Left Behind Act [NCLBA], 2001). To successfully meet AYP, a school must show progressive movement towards federally mandated goals or face corrective actions.

Correctional actions may include total restructuring of all or most of the school staff; evaluating the contracts with a private entity to manage the school; turning over the school's operation to the state; or adopting some other major restructuring of the school's governance (NCEE, 2008). As a result, a researcher found two emerging phenomena where administrators and teachers went through great lengths to secure high testing results (FDE, 2020). Thus, it is essential to explore how testing regimes impact academically at-risk students' vulnerability in the academic environment from conflict resolution and analysis framework.

A large body of literature has confirmed the high stakes testing as a barrier to academically at-risk and minority children (William, 2008; Croft, 2015; Hursh, 2007; Lewis, 2015; McNeil, 2008). Furthermore, minority children are the most vulnerable to the secret pipeline to prison from the covert and harsh exclusionary discipline policies used to push them

out of high school (McCargar, 2011; Bradley, 2011; "Dignity in Schools," 2010; Wilson, 2014; Doll, 2013). This dissertation investigates how testing regimes' pressures contributed to the structural violence and barriers to academically at-risk and minority students' basic human needs in the classroom. The findings will provide a conflict perspective to the pressures associated with high-stakes testing.

Purpose of the Study

Although the NCLB policy's impact has been studied in various ways, no studies have examined its dynamics from a conflict analysis perspective. Morris (2016) noted, "Historically, to be a scholar was a dangerous proposition for Black Americans, and countless Black women and men have died to be able to read and write. The lingering barrier to quality education and the transgenerational trauma associated with internalized ideas about performance in school has yet to be exhaustively measured" (p.7). This dissertation will provide a literature review on the NCLB accountability measures linked to the push-out syndrome and the secret pipeline to prison phenomena. Finally, I will employ Galtung's (1969) structural violence and Burton's (1998) basic human needs as theoretical frameworks for exploring how systematic violence was embedded within the testing regimes resulting in structural violence against Black and Hispanic students.

Research Question

How have federal education accountability measures influenced the high school teacher and student experience in the classroom?

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation will employ three theoretical frameworks to dissect how high-stakes testing became a violent tool against academically at-risk and minority youth. The first theorist is John Gultang (1969), who developed structural violence theory. His theory spoke about the

invisible and indirect violence embedded in society's policies and systems. He argued that structural violence was just as damaging as experiencing physical violence.

The second is John Burton (1998), a conflict theorist who created an iteration of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Burton's conflict perspective pointed out that humans will continue to have conflict until their needs are satisfied. A student whose needs are not being met, not only will fail the high stakes test but will also act out. Acting out is where the adultification of Black youth, racial biases, and exclusionary school policies negatively impact academically at-risk and especially for Black youth. Black students with unmet needs in the classroom who act up were vulnerable to being pushed out of the classroom and into the criminal justice system. Galtung's theory and Burton's basic human needs theory created a solid foundation for understanding violence in the classroom. This dissertation will use both theorists to provide a thorough understanding of the research question.

The third is adultification, which is the dehumanization of Black children by erasing their childhood innocence and assuming that typical childhood behavior is an expression of deviance or aggression. As a result, this mindset gives society permission to treat and view Black youth as violent adult criminals. Epstein, Blake, and Gonzalez (2017) defined it as:

> A process of socialization, in which children function at a more mature developmental
> stage because of situational context and necessity, especially in low-resource community
> environments and A social or cultural stereotype that is based on how adults perceive
> children "in the absence of knowledge of children's behavior and verbalization. This
> latter form of adultification, which is based in part on race, is the subject of report. (p.4)

Research Methodology

This dissertation's overarching methodology is grounded in qualitative research. This study implemented the qualitative research approach of narrative analysis to analyze the told story of each participant. The random selection of south Florida certified public high school teachers and administrators was purposely designed to provide classroom familiarity with an opportunity to share their experiences under a testing regime.

Dissertation Outline

This dissertation contains five chapters plus an appendix. The first chapter offers a brief background of standardized testing regime's performance-based accountability measures and their impact in the classroom, problem statement, and research methodology. Chapter two details are existing literature on push-out syndrome and the secret pipeline to prison, which emerged during NCLB implementation. The chapter also covers racial biases and adultification of Black youth, which lead to significantly high minority school exclusionary discipline rates. The chapter also includes the theoretical frameworks of Galtung's structural violence theory and Burton's basic human needs theory related to the testing regimes. The third chapter, the methodology chapter, provides a review of how Narrative Analysis was applied to understand the research questions and ethical considerations better. The fourth chapter discusses and presents the data gathered, while chapter five interprets the findings, discussion, and recommendations for future research and policy implications.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is that my professional experience is in post-secondary education. While I have observed high school teachers in a classroom setting, I do not have

experience teaching students under the NCLB or other testing regimes. This research relied heavily on peer-reviewed literature and the perspectives of the participants in the study.

An additional limitation is my own bias. As a career and life coach, I heard many narratives from students who had negative experiences in the academic environment with teachers and administered. I made a concerted effort not to allow the students' pre-existing narratives to influence the study or interpretation of the data.

To prevent my pre-existing knowledge from impacting the research, I made sure to include information on the history of testing regimes in America using reliable sources. During the interview process, I asked follow-up questions to allow the participants to elaborate on their thoughts to ensure I understood their perspectives. Additionally, I re-read the narrative data from interviews several times to understand the told story from the participant's perspective.

Contribution to the Field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Although the impact on NCLB policy has been studied in various ways, there is limited research utilizing a conflict analysis and resolution perspective. Thus, this study's findings will help educators and policymakers understand how conflict theory can mitigate violence associated with testing regimes.

Definition of Terms

Important terms used throughout the dissertation that are significant to the research context are defined as below.

Pipeline to Prison. A well-researched and documented phenomenon refers to the strong relationship between harsh policies, practices, and laws that tend to drive high-minority and high-poverty youth away from the educational environment and towards the criminal justice system (McCargar, 2011; Nance, 2018; Wald & Losen, 2007).

Secret Pipeline to Prison. According to McGarger,"The secret pipeline refers to the mechanisms and strategies employed by school districts to remove students who present academic and behavioral challenges while circumventing due process and skirting accountability and responsibility for the educational outcomes of those students" (2011, p.2).

Pushed Out Syndrome. The push-out syndrome is primarily driven by administrators pressured by the arrival of the NCLB and other test-based accountability measures to raise test scores, which exclude low-scoring and "problematic" students rather than addressing their educational needs (Rosborough, 2009). These pushed-out students ultimately face a life filled with challenges.

2001 No Child Left Behind Law. The reform resulted in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) signed into law by President George Bush. The goal of one of the most effective forms of educational intervention was to meet the advancing needs of the global market and close the achievement gap between poor and minority students (Hursh, 2007; Klien, 2015).

Annual Yearly Progress. Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), as mentioned by Linn et al. (2002), are specific mandates built into NCLB to measure and compare achievement goals across the nation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will focus on reviewing relevant literature that provides a fundamental understanding of the research question. Hart (1998) contends that a literature review should consist of the following elements: distinguishes, discovers, synthesizes, and rationalizes; enhances the understanding of what has been done; and establishes the context and essential variables relevant to the topic. These interrelationships between the literature assist with structuring and developing a solid familiarity with the subject.

This literature review will show "command of the subject area and understanding of the problem; to justify the research topic, design, and methodology" (Hart, 1998, p.11). The first portion presents a historical overview of standardized testing and its impact on minority students. It will then discuss the literature that links high-stakes testing with the push-out syndrome and zero-tolerance school discipline research. Finally, this chapter will present further insights into the implications of the punishment gap.

Moreover, this literature will look at the end roads for academically at-risk minority students impacted by structural violence. The review will expand on the secret pipeline to prison, which should not be mistaken for the school-to-prison pipeline. Finally, this section will explore the ideological standpoints of conflict theorists Johan Galtung and John Burton.

Historical Overview of Standardized Testing

To understand the structural violence underpinnings of high-stakes tests, one must recognize the historical divisiveness associated with standardized testing. Historically, standardized testing was created to provide a theoretical and statistical justification for classifying the population into social and intellectual categories. Thus, testing regimes provided

the scientific rationale for grouping the American population into stratified groups based on their intelligence (Au, 2016; Gershon, 2015; Grodsky, Warren, & Felts, 2008; Sacks, 2000).

In the early 1900s, social scientists began researching methodologies to help redesign a societal class that benefited academically. To do so, French scientist Alfred Binet was one of the first to develop a diagnostic tool to measure school children's intellectual level. Binet coined the new assessment as the Intelligent Quotient (IQ) test, being that it measured one's intelligence. Thus, the IQ test results would determine which children were considered educable versus those who were not (Sacks, 2000). This ideology was the beginning of using a scientific method to stratify the human population based on intellectual advantage.

In 1916, Lewis M. Terman of Stanford University imported the Binet scale America to serve as the new standard. Terman built upon the Binet scale to develop various tools to measure intelligence. The Stanford-Binet scale development was then commercialized and marketed to the American people to identify human potentials. Through effective marketing, "Terman and other promoters of the IQ test succeeded in convincing policymakers and the public that the intelligence test amounted to a final, indisputable measuring stick of human performance"(Sacks, 2000, p. 27). The commercialization of measuring intelligence in the 21st century transformed how intelligence was measured and regarded, especially within the education system.

Impact of Standardized Testing on Minorities

Grodsky et al., (2008) explored the evolution of standardized testing and how its reproduction transformed the social inequality within the United States. They found three major fundamental contradictions around testing that persist today: 1) that testing is a means of social reproduction, 2) competing notions of equality of opportunity, and 3) the fundamental contradiction its effect on the curricular content. The authors examined these contradictions by

remarking on the validity of tests. Grodsky, Warren, and Felts pontificated, "A test score that accurately measures what it seeks to measure and yet is used to deny students opportunities from which they would benefit may lack consequential validity" (p. 392). The article reviewed standardized testing reliability and biases, testing for diagnostic purposes, and gatekeeping testing.

In essence, these tests increasingly serve to gradually stratify available resources to those who can function in a modern bureaucracy's demands. Regarding the sociological implication of testing, Grodsky, Warren, and Felts alluded to Weber's (1978) work to note that "education in general, and exams in particular, serve to 'limit the supply of candidates for [socially and economically advantageous] positions and to monopolize them for the holders of educational patents" (p. 386). The use of testing to stratify society creates conflict among those deemed educable and those who are not. Grodsky and associates concluded:

> We agree with many critics who contend that there is far too much-standardized testing in contemporary American education, we do not believe that test scores are the main problem. The real issue is the stratified distribution of knowledge and skills reflected in students' scores on standardized tests. In the context of formal schooling, we believe that opportunities to learn are the linchpin of social stratification. (p.400)

Au (2016) has argued that high-stakes testing is a racial projected which consistently reproduces social and racial inequalities historically and contemporarily in the United States. The researcher stated:

> The central point of my argument here has been to assert that all claims to the use of high-stakes, standardized testing to promote racial equity and justice are ideologically

driven and demonstrably false in the face of the materially racist effects of testing on children of color. (p.54)

He asserted that high-stakes tests serve racialized neoliberal ideologies that played a direct role in constructing race-class nexus within education, thereby shifting racial discourse in education policy. The idea that standardized test provides a fair and objective measurement of individuals subconsciously asserts all students despite their culture, racial, or economic background receive equal educational opportunities and failure is based on one's deficiencies and denying systemic racism within the educational system. Au further noted:

> The ideology of meritocracy asserts that, regardless of social position, economic class, gender, race, or culture (or any other form of socially or institutionally defined difference), everyone has an equal chance at becoming "successful" based purely on individual merit and hard work. (p.46)

Thus, the foci of the blame rest within the individual disposition rather than critically analyzing the racial undertones linked to testing results. The link between high-stakes, standardized exit exams and the school-to-prison pipeline, Au further noted, negatively impacted more African American and Latino students than their White counterparts. He asserted, "High-stakes, standardized testing, as a racial project of neoliberal multiculturalism, empirically works to surveil, discipline, and punish Black and Brown children, all in the name of racial justice and neoliberal anti-racism" (p.53).

Other researchers have linked standardized testing with socioeconomic status, drawing a connection between high scores and high economic status in society rather than economic growth and post-secondary placement. For example, Sacks (1997) has noted that "there is a mounting body of evidence that such tests played a key role in a rigged game, one that favored

society's well-positioned elites under the guise of 'merit'"(p. 26). By the 1980s, various anti-testing movements from academic research protested against standardized testing. These movements challenged the assessment's ability to predict academic success and argued that results reflected socio-economic status rather than innate ability. In addition, there was widespread disenchantment with its impact on curricular instruction.

The anti-testing movement has resulted in numerous studies investigating the impact of testing on culture, race, and socioeconomics. Neill and Medina (1989), leading anti-testing proponents, challenged the validity of these so-called objective measures for accountability and motivations. They argued that the instruments often produced inaccurate, inconsistent, and biased results against minorities, females, and students from low-income families. By narrowing the curriculum, frustrating teachers, and driving students out of school, these standardized tests undermined school improvement instead of advancing its cause. Moreover, instead of promoting accountability, tests shift control and authority into the hands of an unregulated testing industry. According to Neill and Medina, "Using standardized test scores as the primary criteria for making critical educational decisions will lead to less public understanding of the schools and a weaker educational system"(p. 689). While the political movement's intentions may seem advantageous, the outcomes had many unintended adverse effects on the most vulnerable populations. Minorities in lower socioeconomic classes were more likely to be negatively impacted by high-stakes testing, further generating racial and socio-economic divides.

There is a large body of work exploring the role NCLB had on the school-to-prison pipeline. However, several years into the NCLB act, there was a shift in the literature. As a result, researchers set out to investigate the undercurrent behaviors and actions taking within the

school environment, which led to students being pushed out of school as tactics to evade the federal government's punitive actions.

The highly investigated school-to-prison pipeline is one notable pathway, which is known as the secret pipeline. As one researcher noted, "The secret pipeline refers to the mechanisms and strategies employed by school districts to remove students who present academic and behavioral challenges while circumventing due process and skirting accountability and responsibility for the educational outcomes of those students" (McCarger, 2011, p.2). Schoolteachers or administrators would subtly advise or coerce underperforming students from traditional high school settings for charter schools to artificially boost their test scores. Unfortunately, many of these students had a history of victimization and suffered from other traumas. The secret pipeline is critical to explore. The literature review will explore journal articles, books, electronic magazines, and websites highlighting how the school-to-prison pipeline has emerged into a secret pipeline under the guise of zero-tolerance discipline policies and rooted in testing regimes.

Zero-Tolerance: Exclusionary School Discipline

The new era of high-stakes testing coupled with severe punishment policies resulted in a violent structural space where zero-tolerance school discipline policies thrived. The pressures associated with passing adequate yearly progress, maintaining high graduation rates, and keeping schools safe had taken a toll on the American education system. Strong no-tolerance discipline policies with arbitrary school administration applications left the most vulnerable students at risk for being pushed out of school by misusing the system. Klehr (2009) stated this best in his observation of NCLB, no-tolerance policies, and the impact on students deemed disruptive by the institution.

As a result of federal laws such as the No Child Left Behind Act and state and school district laws and policies, schools and districts are under enormous pressure. Administrators are expected to produce data that shows students are achieving. Simultaneously, these administrators are subject to social and political pressure to remove disruptive students from school entirely. Given these dual pressures, many states and school districts have adopted zero-tolerance policies, under which students are suspended or expelled for misbehavior without considering individual or mitigating circumstances. Thus, perhaps NCLB and the subsequent consequences and pressures on schools contribute to schools' phenomenon actively leaving children behind. One glaring example of a policy that excludes a large number of students from school is zero tolerance. (p. 585)

The dual pressure of enforcing zero-tolerance disciplinary actions on troubled students and ensuring that the schools met the NCLB standards ultimately led to an increase in structural violence within the public school system. According to the Advance Project (2010), a multi-racial and multi-generational justice organization, "Applying criminal justice practices designed for adults to youth is fraught with problems. Such punitive treatment ignores the critically important emotional, psychological, and physical developmental needs of young people" (p.10). When administrators apply criminal justice practices in the school system, the result is an increased number of children's chances of having some form of contact with the criminal justice system.

In the name of safe education spaces, President Bill Clinton signed the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, which included policies that introduced zero tolerance towards specific misbehaviors in the education environment (Kafka, 2011). All schools that received federal

education funding must adhere to the new policy. According to Advance Project (2010), "Zero-tolerance policies operate under the assumption that removing students who engage in misconduct will deter such behaviors and allow others to continue learning, making schools safer and creating an improved climate for those students who remain" (p.10). Through the adaption of harsh, vague policies, children can be legally removed from the classroom and placed on suspension, expulsion, or funneled into the criminal justice system. Such policies were commonplace. In fact, the Advance Project found that "there have been dramatic increases in the use of lengthy out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, referrals to alternative schools, referrals to law enforcement, and school-based arrests"(p.10).The Zero-tolerance school discipline policies structured after zero-tolerance criminal laws introduce our youth's criminalization in the classroom.

In the *History of "Zero Tolerance" in American Public Schoolings*, Judith Kafka (2011) wrote about individual and social costs of zero-tolerance policies. Kafka explored zero-school policies and concluded that the policies did not significantly affect individuals or the school environment. Under the law, students can be suspended or expelled for non-criminal and non-violent acts, including tardiness, truancy, and similar acts. Most students who have these infractions do not have parental oversight at home. Banning students with these behaviors only perpetuated more unsupervised criminal behavior. Additionally, applying such stringent policies to at-risk youth decreased the likelihood of at-risk youths with the opportunity to become more academically and economically inclined in the future.

Essentially, the zero-tolerance school discipline policies familiarize vulnerable youth with the criminal system before committing a crime. Education threatens at-risk youth's livelihood and future by holding the penal system above their heads to close the achievement

gap. Figure 1.1 illustrates the streamlined effect of how NCLB pressures work in tandem with zero-tolerance policies, secret pipeline, school to prison pipeline, and the criminal justice system. The disciplining and criminalization associated with existing at-risk youth in an academic setting can be daunting, especially for young minorities surviving in that space.

Figure 1

NCLB flow-chart

The converge of NCLB and the zero-tolerance school policies had the unintended consequences of acclimating at-risk youths to the criminal justice system. According to the Advancement Project (2010)'s report entitled "Test, Punishment and Push-out: How 'Zero Tolerance' and High Stakes Testing Funnel Youth into the School-to-Prison," zero-tolerance school discipline and high-stakes testing are direct threats to the educational opportunities of America's youth. The report explored how the principles of both high-stakes testing and zero-tolerance school discipline policies increasingly mug students of their opportunity to an education. The Advance Project noted, "There have been dramatic increases in the use of lengthy out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, referrals to alternative schools, referrals to law enforcement, and school-based arrests" (2010, p.10).

The expression "mugged" is used as a physical descriptor to illustrate the zero-tolerance school discipline's structural violent implications. The Merriam-Webster (n.d.) dictionary defines mugged as an assault, usually with the intent to rob or to attack suddenly. Every time zero-tolerance policies are wrongfully applied to a child, the child is robbed of its educational

environment and future opportunities. According to Flannery (2015), "A suspension can be life-altering. It is the number-one predictor – more than poverty – of whether children will drop out of school and walk down a road that includes a greater likelihood of unemployment, reliance on social-welfare programs, and imprisonment" (para. 5). Furthermore, the zero-tolerance policies are not objective. Iselin (2010) noted that "zero-tolerance policies are not straightforward and arbitrary to the administrator, often implemented for minor infractions, and have not been shown to improve academic or dropout rates"(pp.1-2). Leaving room for administers and teachers to enforce policies subjectively may result in racially biased decisions. These subjective policies may be used as a vehicle of structural violence to remove students from impact high-stakes testing results.

The NCLB Act was created to address the learning gaps between minorities and their non-minority peers. Strict policies and high-stakes testing were put in place so that the federal government can guide and monitor the progress. According to the Advance Project, "There have been dramatic increases in the use of lengthy out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, referrals to alternative schools, referrals to law enforcement, and school-based arrests" (2010, p.10). However, the same stringent policies created to close the minority achievement gaps are being used to punish teachers violently and creating divisions stratifying the youths into the haves and have nots. Klehr (2009) argued that "zero-tolerance rules push so-called disruptive students out of school entirely, thereby also removing the pressure to teach these students to achieve academically" (p. 585). The criminalization of childhood rebellion in the classroom to avoid structurally violent policies impacts more minority children than their non-minority peers.

Punishment Gap: When Do I Go from Cute to Dangerous?

The Black Lives Matter movement emerged in 2016, with people taking to social media to voice their discontent at the systemic and intentional treatment against people of color. In 2020, activism took to the streets after the recorded death of George Floyd, which reaffirmed their suspicion that society disregarded Black lives. Americans from across the United States marched to bring attention to the racially biased system that killed Black women and men. Amid this national cry for equality, young protestors held powerful signs questioning their existence in society. Young children also held protest signs protesting the injustice, with examples including "When do I go from cute to DANGEROUS? #protecttheyouth." However, protests over George Floyd's death also led Black families and children to bring forth the racial disparities in the school system.

As a response to the Black Lives Matter Movement, 9-year-old activist Havana Chapman-Edwards recited a poem she wrote with her father on society's current state of affairs. The poem explored her place in society, and she questioned why society only depicts Black people as inferior when she knew her history of royalty. Finally, she addressed the fear associated with being Black in society. The fact that she included school curriculum and fear in the same poem led me to believe that topics are not mutually exclusive. Her poem was prompted by the signs held up by Black children worldwide who also expressed their shared fear.

These signs ask a daunting question that Black parents from around the world have to address. How do minority parents navigate their children through a racially divisive system where Black males are stereotyped as violent and Black girls' existence is dehumanized by how society treats and views them? In the 2000s, I also experienced the internalization of racial preference in a pre-school setting. The daycare was located in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The

school children were predominantly Black and lived in low socio-economic housing. The program was for mothers recovering from drugs and alcohol.

My job as a social worker was to provide educational resources for children's daycares in lower socio-economic areas in Fort Lauderdale. During this evening, I provided technical assistance for teachers to teach the curriculum about families and healthy boundaries. During one of my teachings, a Black student, averaging four years old, interrupted the session and asked me why I talked "White." I explained to him there was no such thing as "talking White." He then began to snicker and look around, looking for confirmation from his peers, who also snickered.

As I was nearing the completion of my presentation, a young Black boy raised his hand and asked, "Why does the family only has two children?" I responded, "That was the size the mom and dad wanted." The student then proceeds to snicker while blurting out, "I know they are not ghetto! We ghetto and suppose to have sex and make many babies!" While his disruption may have been seemed defiant, I knew that he was challenging preconditioned racial basis ideas he internalized. According to Flannery, "The bias starts early. Black children represent 18 percent of pre-school students, but account for 48% of pre-school suspensions" (2015, para.13). Yes, we are talking about 4-year-olds. During this child's short time on the earth, someone or something labeled him ghetto and gave him an impression being "ghetto" was being hypersexual, fatherless, and producing babies.

The idea that being Black is inherently bad has been subconsciously embedded in many Black children's minds. Kenneth Clark and Mami Clark (1950) tested this phenomenon in their famous Clark Doll Experiment. The study aimed to examine the racial attitudes Black children between ages 3-7 who attend segregated nursery schools. The experiment displayed a black and white doll. The participants were young children who were asked to select the doll that would

result in good or bad behavior. During each instant in the study, participants selected the Black doll as "bad" and white dolls as nice, prettier, and well-behaved. As a result of the study, most participants rejected the Black doll showing a marked preference in Black children to associate good with being white. This study was significant because it demonstrated that racial preference was internalized in children at a very young age and continued to manifest until that thought process is challenged. According to Kohli, Johnson, and Perez (2006), internalized racism describes the conscious and unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy where Whites are consistently ranked above others. Suppose the thought process is not challenged or interrupted. In that case, the internalized racial views are then projected into behaviors, policies, and laws that continue to dehumanize Black and Latino children in the classroom.

Huber, Johnson, and Kohli (2006) noted the significant contributions made by Carter Woodson, Malcolm X, and bell hooks when they said, "They all describe the school as a place entrenched with white supremacy where Students of Color are socialized towards a negative self and racial-group perception; and although they may not directly name it, they are critical of the school's role in internalized racism" (p.3). Furthermore, Huber, Johnson, and Kohli noted that each pioneer of racial discourse contributed to the more considerable understanding of internalized racism in schools by highlighting the oppressive educational structure on racial white supremacy and self-hatred amongst Black children. This internalized racism and bias within the education system unconsciously perpetuates how the system, teachers, and administrators relate with and respond to Black children.

The messages create an incubator of violence and self-hate for Black children. Huber, Johnson, and Kohli stated, "The constant bombardment of messages embedded in the curriculum about the superiority of whites and the inferiority of non-whites (which can be explicit or

implicit) can indoctrinate students about their placement on the racial hierarchy about their race. This contributes to internalized racism and potentially damages the self-concept of non-white students" (p. 7). Thus, the unconscious racial bias, implicit or explicit, is embedded in white-dominated culture and has manifested into society's permission to label Black children as inferior and dangerous.

This dissertation will briefly explore the racial bias and unconscious stereotypes that negatively impact students of color in the classroom. In 2020, the Brooking Institution (2020), a not-for-profit public policy organization in Washington DC, published an article entitled "Stack, Sinclair, & Warikoo's" on American educators' racial biases in the classroom. The study explored teachers' perceptions and biased general attitudes towards different races. The research concluded teachers have the same bias as the general public, which spoke to the institutional racism that continued to plague the education system.

Racial bias towards Black people became even more standardized by the federal government and education system during Clinton's "super predators" era and no tolerance laws. To combat the war on drugs, the Clintons invited John DiLulio Jr. to dinner at the white house to discuss how to address high juvenile crime. As a result of that dinner, DiLulio's view of juvenile crime spread throughout the political and criminal realm.

In the article "The Coming of the Super – Predators," DiLulio's (1995) painted a gruesome description of a crime-prone generation of inner-city Black boys living in abject moral poverty. He also called them superpredators. DiLulio stated, "They are perfectly capable of committing the most heinous acts of physical violence for the most trivial reasons (for example, a perception of slight disrespect or the accident of being in their path)" (para. 24). Furthermore, DiLulio described superpredators as children who grow up on abject moral poverty and "...they

place zero value on the lives of their victims" (para. 28). He framed the super-predator theory around statistics, which highlighted children of color as criminals invading white neighborhoods. Politicians and the media consumed DiLulio's theory, making it easier to justify the dehumanization and criminalization against Black children. Figure 2 illustrates how the mass stereotyping of Black boys is compelling, violent, and debilitating to society and the children who live with overcoming super predator stereotypes.

Figure 2

Black boys stereotypes
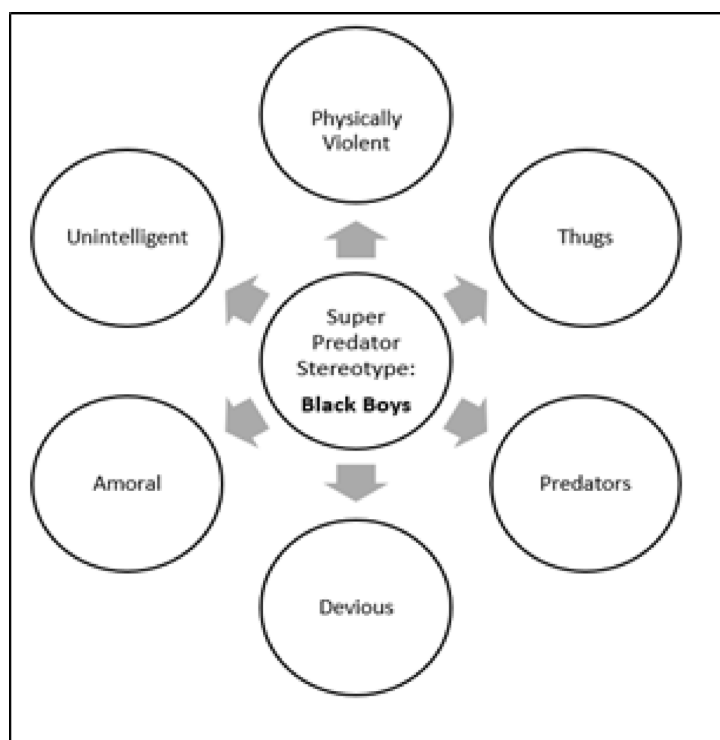
In a 1996 news conference at the Keene State College, First Lady Hillary Clinton mentioned that the federal government was making a concerted effort to go after "super predators." She stated, "They are not gangs of kids anymore; they are often the kinds of kids that are called super predators with no conscience, no empathy. Her language of linking Black kids to the unfounded super-predator theory was another example of how radically racial, political views

were systemically reinforced using media coverage, enactment of laws, and policy implementation.

Even though the super predator myth has been dispelled, the law-and-order discourse against young Black males dominates society to this day. Carson (2006), for example, was critical of the super-predator myth. He argued that the mental association between the superpredator myth and Black males being prone to violence had the consequences of lawmakers continuing to disproportionality punish young Black males. Recent scholarship has also started focusing on the experiences of Black girls and social injustice.

The National Women's Law Center's report "Dress Coded: Black Girls, Bodies, and Bias in D.C. Schools" concluded that dress code policy enforcement unfairly targeted Black girls, echoing anecdotal evidence that every part of Black girlhood — from their hair to their bodies and attire — has the potential to be penalized (Meadows-Fernandez, 2020). The gross abuse of Black girls in the classroom, no accountability, and the lack of research to understand the phenomena spoke to Black girls' neglect. Furthermore, Annamma, Ayon, Joseph, Farrar, Greer, Downing, and Simmons (2016) argued that the Black girl experience is missing in the criminalization discussion of Black youth. They noted that there had been an increase of Black girls being suspended in the last decade, which increased their probability of being involved in the criminal justice system. Therefore, society must humanize the Black girl experience to address how they are viewed and lessen the disciplinary gap.

In another study, Monds and Henderson (2020) found that Black girls were three times as likely to receive one or more in-school suspensions, referred to law enforcement, likely to be retrained than white female students from their analysis of data collected from school disciplinary trends. These apparent disparities in exclusionary discipline continue to alarm

researchers. To address the discipline gap, the authors suggested hiring more Black teachers to create a more diverse school environment, prioritizing anti-racism communication that demands an equitable school environment, and finally working toward examining indicators that will reduce exclusionary discipline.

Black girls pushed out of school because of exclusionary discipline are more susceptible to poverty and involvement in the criminal justice system. According to Morris, "Schools are, not surprisingly, one of the largest influences on the life trajectory of Black girls" (2016, p. 25). The stakes are high for addressing the overrepresentation of disciplinary practices towards the Black girl. Hines-Da "As research on Black girls and school discipline has evolved, there has been an increased focus on how school policies punish students in more extreme ways" (Hines-Datiri, D, & Carter Andrew, D. 2017, p. 1). Researchers began to examine and address the disciplinary gaps as it relates to young Black girls. Black girls in school must combat the gender, adultification, and racial biases associated with being Black, girls, and childhood erasure. The representation, scholarship, and magnification of Black girls' experience in school are necessary and crucial to understanding disciplinary gaps.

The Black girl's plight is one of not who they are but how society sees them. To reconcile both views can lead to internal and external conflict. As a Black female, I understand the internal struggle to reconcile and negotiate with the external world you are in versus how implicit biases impact how people see you. It can be challenging for Black girls to reconcile their internal identity with society's description of what it means to be a Black girl. Figure 1.3 illustrates society's dominant assumptions of Black girls.

As I reflect on my elementary years, I remember wondering why the White, blue-eyed, and blonde hair girls got all the teacher's attention. I desperately wished for that same attention. I

wanted to be Caucasian not for the color but because I associated whiteness with being smart and rewarded positive attention for good behavior. Morris (2016) noted this to be the case because

Black women and girls in America are subjected to dormant assumptions about their sexuality, their "anger" or their "attitude. They have long understood that their way of engaging with the world—how they talk, how they walk, how they wear their hair, or how they hold their bodies is subject to scrutiny, especially by those in positions of power. (p.35)

Figure 3

Black girls stereotypes
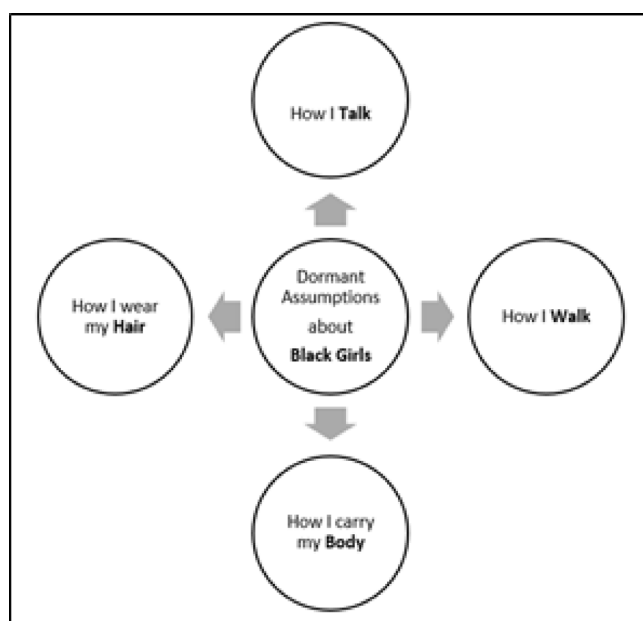
I always found myself in the back of the classroom, trying very hard to be noticed and appreciated like my White female counterparts. By middle school, I noticed a clear divide in teachers providing attention in the classroom. I learned that I only received negative attention for behavior infractions like my attitude or asking too many questions.

I remember not understanding why the smallest of infractions resulted in referrals or in-school suspension. Again, Morris (2016) stated that "as children or as adults, Black girls are

treated as if they are supposed to 'know better,' or at least 'act like' they know. The assignment of more adult-like characteristics to the express of young Black girls is a form of age compression" (p.34). By high school, I mastered learning on my own. After being called a "slut" for the first time, I quickly learned that I had to master becoming even more invisible in school to stay out of trouble. My body was developing faster than my mind. I was not prepared for the attention I received in the classroom from my peers. I did not feel protected. I was not only ignored but left to manage predatory behavior on my own.

Not being able to reconcile the adultification of my youth was significantly frustrating and dehumanizing. I went from being an invisible Black girl to being labeled a hypersexual because of how my body developed. My peers, teachers, and parents began to treat me like an adult but wanted me to "stay in a child's place." I internalized most of my confusion during this very confusing time. I never felt understood, protected, or safe in school. The constant signal that I received from society was how devalued my thoughts, ideas, and identity were outside the classroom.

My adaptive defiant behavior marginalized my learning experience, and I worked to matched my teachers' implicit biases and affirmed the adultification of my youth in society. Much like Morris (2016) mentioned, "Black girls learn adaptive behaviors—ways of responding to oppressive conditions defined by race, sexuality, class, and gender" (p.5). I was fortunate to have a healthy family system and not become part of the juvenile justice system. Nevertheless, my experience leads me to feel connected to the complexities of navigating the world of academics as young, poor Black girls.

As an adult, I still find it challenging to address the intersections of being a Black woman. Therefore, I share my childhood experience to add to the literature that speaks to the

internal conflict of navigating Black girls' external adultification. In *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools,* author Monique W. Morris (2016) explored the complex narratives of identity, academics, and zero-tolerance policies of Black girls. Morris conducted a four-year study exploring the traumatic violence experienced by Black girls in the school environment. She found that,

> The central argument of this book is that too many Black girls are being criminalized (and physically and mentally harmed) by beliefs, policies, and actions that degrade and marginalize both their learning and their humanity, leading to conditions that push them out of schools and render them vulnerable to even more harm. (p.8-9)

She collected Black girls' narratives experiencing exclusion discipline or school-related arrest for exposing societal, educational, and judicial inequalities confronted. Each pointed story exposes how zero-tolerance exclusionary discipline pushed vulnerable Black girls towards dropping out, incarceration, poverty, and abuse. According to Morris, "The criminalization of Black girls is much more than a street phenomenon. It has extended into our schools, disrupting one of the most important protective factors in a girl's life: her education" (p.3). The Black girls in Morris' book overwhelmingly understood the importance of school. The books highlight one of the most impactful absences in each girl: a sense of belonging to the educational experience and environment. If they did not feel accepted in school, they remain vulnerable and susceptible to criminal behavior, child exploitation, and abuse.

A large and most influential part of a child's life is in the classroom, and the social adultification of Black children complicates the confusing childhood experience, especially in the classroom and outside the real world. The implicit biases that label Black boys super-predators and dehumanize Black girls seem to justify students' heightened policing in schools.

As discussed earlier, the zero-tolerance school discipline system was tailored after the criminal system. It is as if society created two education systems. One system focuses on prepare all that follow the dominant white culture to become productive members of society. In contrast, the second system prepares those who do not follow the dominant white culture for poverty and the criminal justice system.

The juxtaposition between the criminal system shaping the zero-tolerance discipline policies causes children of color to be vulnerable to racialize disciplinary disparities in the classroom. According to Carter and associates (2017), "Racial discipline disparities are a consequence of U.S. history, of the biases and stereotypes created by that history, and of the still strong divisions in lived experience between groups that we call 'races'" (p.2). The author explored the idea that racial disparities in school discipline were not being addressed, evidence which illustrates Black children were being disciplined at higher rates than their White counterparts. They noted, "Corrosive stereotypes—such as the dangerous Black male—rooted themselves deep in our nation's psyche and, whether or not they reach our consciousness, remain entwined in our thinking and our practices today" (p.18). To decrease schools' achievement gaps, one must address the alarming rates. Black girls and boys are being disciplined out of school and into the criminal justice system. When did they go from being cute to being dangerous?

Disciplinary Actions Against Black Youths in Tri-County Florida

The 2019-2020 Florida Department of Education's county-level disciplinary data shows a disparity in the number of Black children disciplines. Figure 4 shows that in Broward County, 17,108 Black, White, and Hispanic children faced some form of exclusion from school discipline. Of the total amount of Broward students disciplined, Black children account for 63% of the data, White children accounted for 13%, and Hispanics accounted for 25%. The data

shows 10,739 Black children compared to 2,094 white, 4,217 Hispanic were suspended in school, suspended out-of-school, placed in an alternative education setting, or experienced physical constraints.

Miami-Dade County data also shows the same level of disparity for the minority. The county has a large minority population of Hispanics. The data reflects a similar percentage for the Black minorities in Broward County. Of the total number of children disciplined, Blacks accounted for 19%, Whites accounted for 19%, and Hispanics accounted for 75% of the suspension. Again, the immense majority of minorities seem to face the most disciplinary actions.

Palm Beach's number reflects a similar trend, with 15,573 White, Black, and Hispanic children being suspended in various forms. The county data show Black children represented 53% of disciplinary actions, White children at 18%, and Hispanic children at 28%. Again, each county is showing Black children receiving the highest number of disciplinary actions. Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach county's data show that in-school suspension was the most extensive form of discipline. Interestingly all three counties show Black children with the highest physical restraints and placement in alternative education settings.

Figure 4

Disciplinary actions by race for Broward, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach

District Name	Student Discipline Data by Race/Ethnicity and Gender County Level 2019-20	White	Black or African American	Hispanic/ Latino
BROWARD	Suspension In-School	1,726	8,214	3,454
BROWARD	Suspension Out-of-School	355	2,483	804
BROWARD	Placement in Alternative Educational Setting	*	*	*
BROWARD	Physical Restraint	13	42	17
	Total	2,094	10,739	4,275
MIAMI-DADE	Suspension In-School	430	1,193	5,215
MIAMI-DADE	Suspension Out-of-School	67	347	1,187
MIAMI-DADE	Placement in Alternative Educational Setting	10	59	119
MIAMI-DADE	Physical Restraint	11	31	33
	Total	518	1,630	6,554
PALM BEACH	Suspension In-School	1,171	2,941	1,688
PALM BEACH	Suspension Out-of-School	1,599	4,942	2,629
PALM BEACH	Placement in Alternative Educational Setting	47	303	77
PALM BEACH	Physical Restraint	57	88	31
	Total	2,874	8,274	4,425

According to the "2017-2018 State of Suspension School Punishment" report, 9.4% (626,568) of Black children and 4.3% (1,077,899) students were suspended out of school. The data show a 5.1% difference in Blacks being disciplined even though White students outnumbered Black students in the state by 451,331. Of the 144,611 disciplined students, 59,097 were Black students making 41% of the number of students disciplined in Florida.

Between 2012 and 2018, Florida's disciplinary rate for White students averaged 4.4%, while the average disciplinary rate for Black students averaged 10.8%. In total, the disciplinary rate of Black students was 6.36% higher than White students. Hispanic out-of-school was at 3.4% (3,998). The data demonstrated that Black students had the most significant disciplinary percentage than White, Hispanic, and other race children.

In Miami-Dade County, where there is a large Hispanic population, the 2017-18 data show 1,005 Hispanic students were suspended, 349 for Black students, and 71 for other students were given an out-of-school suspension. Broward County out-of-school data shows 3,209

(roughly 3%) Black students were suspended. There were 55,726 (roughly 0.7%) White students who were suspended from school. Palm Beach schools show an out-of-school suspension rate of 10.4% (54,470) for Black students, 3.6% (59,873) for White students and 4.0% (65,765) for Hispanic students. Interestingly, the data shows the school districts that have the highest minority feel the brunt of out-of-school suspension in all cases. White students experienced the least number of out-of-school suspensions throughout the state of Florida. The data clearly show a racial divide in out-of-school suspension rates.

Zero-tolerance policies have been the vehicle where minorities experienced structural violence more often than their peers. For instance, academically at-risk students may show their frustration through misbehaving in the classroom. Zero-tolerance policies then became a conduit to push students who manifest frustration in the classroom through emotional and behavioral conduct out the door, making it easier for school administrators to push the students out of the classroom to meet the AYP standards. Jacqui Greadington, chair of the NEA Black Caucus, noted these dynamics when she said, "It is crystal clear that Black students, especially boys, get it worse. Studies have shown that a Black child, especially a male, is a bigger threat just because they are. They are. They exist" (as cited by Flannery, 2015, para. 14).

In one study, Skiba and Williams (2014) conducted a study looking at various data to compare Black students' misbehavior versus their White peers. The researchers could not find justifiable reasons why Black students were disciplined at a higher rate. The researchers concluded that experienced teachers had fewer disciplinary issues than less experienced teachers. However, the author did not explore how race played a part in the disciplinary decision. As noted earlier by Cartel et al. (2017), society needs to address the racial issues that continuously divide the suspension rates of Black children in the classroom.

School-to-Prison Pipeline

The violent consequences of adultification of Black youths, racial biases, high-stakes testing, and zero-tolerance policies push Black children towards the school-to-prison pipeline, as demonstrated by Figure 5. To fully understand the effects of the secret pipeline to prison, one must begin with a brief historical overview of the school-to-prison pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline metaphor is a well-researched and documented phenomenon that refers to the strong relationship between harsh policies, practices, and laws that tend to drive high-minority and high-poverty youth away from the educational environment and towards the criminal justice system (McCargar, 2011; Nance, 2018; Wald & Losen, 2007). For example, administrative zero-tolerance guidelines and mandated exclusionary practices in schools increase students' likelihood of entering the criminal justice system (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013; Advance Project, 2010; Shore & Shore, 2009).

Figure 5

School-to-prison pipeline
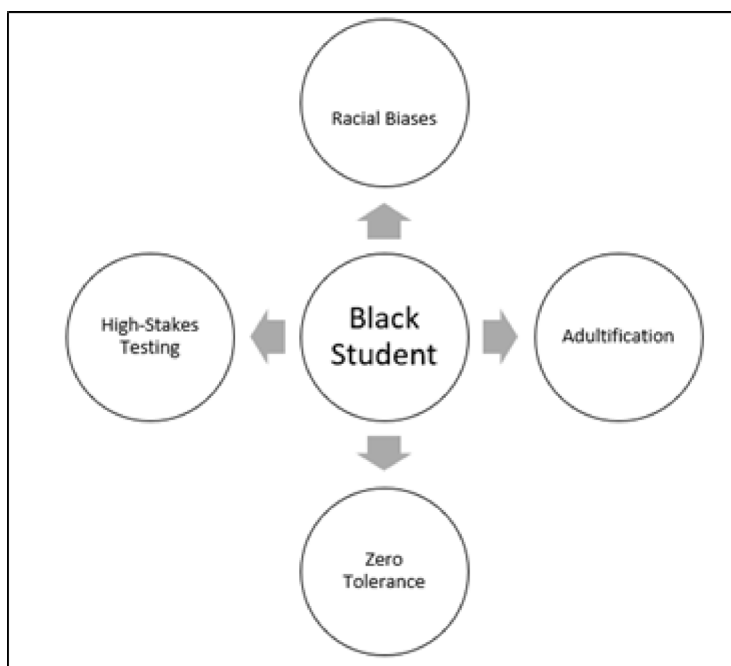
According to the American Bar Association's (2018) "Taskforce on Reversing School-to-Prison Pipeline" report, Black students accounted for 16 % of the student population in 2011-2012. However, Black students experienced disproportionately higher incidents of punitive consequences when compared against their counterparts. In another study, Nance (2018) found that children of color "represented thirty-two percent of students who received an in-school suspension; thirty-three percent of students who received one out-of-school suspension; forty-two percent of students who received more than one out-of-school suspension; and thirty-four percent of students who were expelled" (p. 38). These alarming statistics denote the critical need to explore and expose various pathways that funnel youth into the school-to-prison pipeline.

Secret Pipeline from School to Prison

Pushouts occur when administrators coerce the students to leave school because they are too far behind in credits to graduate, their test scores are too low, or they have missed too much school, when, in fact, they are legally allowed to stay in school (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). According to Rosborough (2009), "pushout syndrome" is primarily driven by administrators pressured by the arrival of the No Child Left Behind Act and other test-based accountability measures to raise test scores. As a result, it is easier to exclude low-scoring and "problematic" students rather than addressing their educational needs. These pushed-out students ultimately face a life filled with challenges. An increasing number of students alleged they did not voluntarily leave the school system but were covertly coerced out by administrators (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011; McCargar, 2011; Rosborough, 2009). McCargar (2011) suggested, "Our nation's most vulnerable and struggling students do not choose to leave school but are effectively pushed out" (p. 2). Rosborough (2009) explained pushouts to have several standard components:

First, the students affected do not leave the school of their own full volition. Instead, they are formally or informally told to leave or are "counseled" which they would be better served in another educational setting such as a General Equivalency Degree (GED) program. Second, regardless of the stated purpose, the administrator's reasons and methods for excluding the students are illegitimate and usually illegal. Finally, the discharged students and their parents are often unaware of their educational rights and thus are left stranded in an educational no man's land. (p. 669)

Research suggests pushout practices tend to be linked to test-based accountability policies, which seem to make low performing students more likely to experience being pushed out of the educational system (Clarke, Haney, & Madaus, 2000; Doll et al., 2013; Green & Griffore, 1980; Advance Project, 2010; Rosborough, 2009; Tate, 2008). A student pushed out of the educational system due to behavior or academic issues ultimately enters what researchers call the secret pipeline to prison. Wald and Losen noted this to be the cause because "as they pass invisibly in and out of our schools, many educators look away, remove their names from enrollment records, and most disturbing of all, actively push some out to improve their own school's test scores" (2007, p. 24). Unfortunately, students who are pushed out of the educational system into what is termed the secret pipeline experience increased challenges in adulthood, such as higher rates of unemployment, incarceration, health concerns, and lower wages (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004; Rosborough, 2009; Tate, 2008).

McCarger (2011) stated those funneled into the secret pipeline never return to school. Thus, not only do these behaviors negate civil rights to education, but these students are also practically pushed out to for-profit alternative schools or GED programs to fend for themselves. McCarger further stated:

Those who attempt to finish often find themselves in alternative or adult education

programs, which are often ill-equipped to meet students' needs, yield startlingly low

completion rates and risk is accelerating rather than curbing the flow of young people

into the justice system. Gaps and loopholes in data collection and reporting mechanisms

sustain the secret pipeline by rendering these students' experiences and outcomes mostly

invisible. (p. 2)

While these NCLB corrective measures were put in place to benefit students, advocacy

groups such as FairTest have challenged the supposed beneficial impact of these assessments and

instead argued about the mounting pressures impacting low-performance students during testing

and its negative impact. FairTest argued that NCLB increased school administrators' use of

disciplinary actions such as suspensions and expulsions to push low-performing students out of

school during testing periods. FairTest argued:

Since NCLB, there has been increasing use of strategies such as withdrawing students

from school rolls or sending them to alternative schools or GED programs. Out-of-school

suspensions and expulsions are also on the rise nationally, with startling increases in

many states. (para. 4)

By removing students from the school environment during testing,

underperforming students are not included in test scores, rendering them invisible in the data.

Other detailed media reports also began to surface, recounting high school students' experiences

of being called into the school administrator's office. For example, Newsome (2007)

described high school students' stories of being forced out of Myers Park High due to their

performance. Former students, parents, and school employees claimed the school used tactics to

unofficially push out underperforming students by labeling them as dropouts or transfers. The

school was under pressure to increase student achievement scores upon further research.

Students who perform poorly often find themselves being rerouted to alternative or adult

education programs, often ill-equipped to meet special needs, yield low completion rates

and increase the risk of young people entering the justice system. For example,

ProPublica author Vogell (2017) wrote about the emerging patterns of underperforming

students who were pushed towards alternative schools under the guise of school choice. Other

public outlets such as the *Voice of San Diego* shared various stories of a school district admitting

to encouraging students with a 1.75 GPA or below into charter schools to avoid

negatively impacting high school graduation rates (Koran, 2017). The secret pipeline has become

the de facto method for saving schools and professional careers at the cost of pushing young

adults into the criminal system.

Theoretical Framework

Adultification Theory

In February 2021, the *Washington Post* reported a suicidal 9-year-old Black girl

handcuffed by a Rochester police officer. While the child was kicking and screamed, the officer

pepper-sprayed her and shouted, "You are acting like a child!" the child responded through her

sobs and sticking eyes, "I am a child!" (Peiser, 2021). This type of policing and treatment of

Black children supports the stereotype that Black children are seen and treated like adults and

perceived as less innocent and more violent than other races.

Adultification can be best explained by Meadow-Fernandez (2020), who noted that as

"…the world ages Black girls up, which leaves them unable to access the privileges of

childhood, like the benefit of the doubt in punishment situations and support figures like

mentors" (para. 11). Epstein, Blake, and Gonzalez (2017) argued that adultification could take two essential forms: a process of socialization and a social or cultural stereotype (See Figure 6). For the latter, it is a process by which "…children function at a more mature developmental stage because of situational context and necessity, especially in low-resource community environments" while the former a process by which "…is based on how adults perceive children "in the absence of knowledge of children's behavior and verbalization. This latter form of adultification, which is based in part on race, is the subject of report" (p.4).

Figure 6

Adultification defined

Adultification Can Take Two Essential Forms:

1.A process of socialization, in which children function at a more mature developmental stage because of situational context and necessity, especially in low-resource community environments and

2.A social or cultural stereotype that is based on how adults perceive children "in the absence of knowledge of children's behavior and verbalization. This latter form of adultification, which is based in part on race, is the subject of report. (Epstein, et al., 2017, p. 4

The dehumanizing of Black children is the erasure of childhood innocence and the assumption that typical childhood behavior is an expression of deviance or aggression. This mindset gives society permission to treat and view Black youth as violent adult criminals. Eberhart, Goff, Purdie, and Davies (2004) completed research to understand Black Americans' association with crime. The study participants were police offers and white college-aged

students. Participants were shown pictures of different races and asked to estimate age and violence. The study showed both college students and police officers were more likely to perceive Black youth as less innocent than white students. Black children were perceived as adults around the age of 10.

This type of implicit bias impacts how justice stakeholders seek justice in society and the classroom. Sterling (2013) stated, "Implicit biases based on racial stereotypes conflate assessments of youth culpability, maturity, sophistication, future dangerousness, and severity of punishment " (p.1067). Treating Black children as violent adults when they are displaying appropriate childhood behavior threatens their ability to feel safe, resulting in a false sense of self-worth and esteem.

While adultification impacts Black girls and boys, Black girls are disproportionately impacted by it and are often placed in vulnerable positions. In the past several years, the media has captured young Black girls being violently handled by law enforcement. For example, in 2015, a Black girl in a Los Angeles school was violently thrown from her desk in her classroom for not complying with the teacher's instructions to put away the cellphone (Jarvie, 2015).

School administrators called a resource officer to deescalate the situation; instead, the officer escalated the situation by arguing and physically dragging her from her desk, throwing her across the room, and following up with an arrest. The physical altercation left the young Black girl bruised and battered and the police officer without charges. Other stories began to erupt in the media of other young girls who were also brutally mistreated in the classroom by school resource officers as a form of discipline. In Florida, Green, Walker & Schapiro (2020) reported that "Kaia Rolle was only six last year when police officers escorted her, hands bound behind her with zip ties, from her school in Orlando after employees there said she had a temper

tantrum" (para. 6). These images speak to how young Black girls are treated in American schools.

In *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girl's Childhood*, Epstein, Blake, and Gonzalez (2017) found conclusive data to show that adults viewed Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their White counterparts, as early as age 5. Furthermore, they found that Black girls indeed were treated at a much harsher rate. The researchers stated,

> The consequences for such punishment are profound: researchers have determined that students are more likely to be arrested on days they are suspended from school, and that suspensions are connected to higher dropout rates and increased risk of contact with the juvenile justice system. (p.9)

In addition, Black girls who experienced disciplinary tatics were more likely to experience diminished opportunities in life. They concluded, "Findings indicate that adults impose differential views and expectations about the development of Black girls, stripping them of their identity and innocence as children and potentially diminishing their access to the very rights the system was designed to protect" (p. 13). These findings bring light to how subjective discipline and adultification of Black girls impact their lives.

Structural Violence

Education has proven to be the key to opportunity and socio-economic stability. It is such an essential commodity that slaves' masters forbade the fundamental building blocks, reading and writing. Slave owners knew that the lack of education would further divide the population and keep African slaves entrenched in poverty. The weaponizing of knowledge has weaved itself throughout the development of the United States education system.

The education system has always weaponized access to poor Black girls and boys. The 1954 *Brown vs. the Board of Education* lawsuit gave Black children access to the same quality of education as their White counterparts. According to Hensfiled, "The impetus for this landmark decision was the notion that was educating students in 'separate but equal' schools is inherently racist and, therefore, unfair to Black students" (2011, p.141). Still, the famous picture of Linda Brown walking to school while being yelled at and spit on by her White peers marked the violence associated with Black children accessing education. Sixty years later, people are no longer streaming at Black children, but certain structural violence against Black children still remains. Physical violence is no longer needed because structural violence is more impactful and invisible to the untrained eye. Physical violence has transformed into high-stakes testing regimes, zero-tolerance expulsionary policies, increased policing of schools, adultification of their youth, and at-risk youth industries.

The education system cloaks violence against Black children with offers opportunity, safety, and prosperity. However, to maintain that access, a Black child must learn at a young age to dodge pathways that lead them directly into the school-to-prison pipeline. Students who are academically inclined, belong to the dominant race, live in good neighborhoods with a stable family pay little to nothing to access and maintain their privilege in the system. However, suppose a student does not fit the right demographic, academically at-risk, or lives in a lower-socioeconomic zip code. The highway to the education system is full of barriers, self-hate, strife, victimization, violence, and racial microaggressions. The pathway to success or the school to prison pipeline starts off looking similar. Still, results are mostly controlled by a Black child's response to daily racial microaggression signals and structurally violent policies and laws reactionary to the Black schoolchildren experience.

The media often paint Black male adolescents as thugs due to their skin color and clothes, while Black girls are depicted as hypersexualized rather than as strong Black women. The media has framed a structurally violent picture that dehumanized the Black child and the adultification of the childhood experience, making it difficult to navigate society. Most Black children are aware of the stereotypes that follow them when they enter a classroom. But, do they fight for their identity through micro-aggressive behaviors from their teachers, administrators, and peers to eventually end up in the criminal justice system or allow racial discrimination to consume my identity to navigate peacefully through the education system?

The type of protective measures needed by Black boys and girls do not require increased policing, metal detectors, or severe discipline. The quiet microaggression words and behaviors of invalidation and inferiority consume Black children in white-dominant school culture. Henfield (2011) states that "There are three types of microaggressions: (a) micro assaults,(b) microinsults, and (c) microinvalidations. Micro assaults are intentional verbal or nonverbal attacks" (p.142). Black children must go against a society that deems them less intelligent and aggressive than their White counterparts. The invisibility of structural violence towards Black children and the lack of protection or validation of threats makes acknowledging the Black experience challenging to resolve.

Henfield (2011) conducted an interview with black males ages 13-14 who attend predominately white schools to learn more about their experiences. The study revealed, the black males experienced microaggression in the form of assumptions of deviant behavior, the universality of the black American experience and the assumption of the superiority of White cultural values and communications style.

While Black boys are stereotyped and received in school as deviants, the adultification of young Black girls makes it difficult to experience a childhood. Black girls left unprotected by education are vulnerable to be exploited and manipulated by society. Epstein, Black, and Gonzalez (2017) sought to discover the factors that render Black girls more like adults. They administered a survey on 325 adults on their beliefs about child development in the 21st century. They found that participants viewed Black girls as more adult and needed less compassion and understanding than their White peers. As a result, Black girls, "especially in mid-childhood and early adolescence," are regarded with harsher treatment and in need of less protection, "despite their status as a child" (p. 7-9). These findings speak to the increase of Black girls being pushed out of schools. Teachers may position Black girls in a space where they are constant victims and perpetrators at the same time.

Theorist Johan Galtung (1969) thoroughly explored the connection between structural violence and its utility or consequence on society. As Galtung explained, "structural violence is injustice and exploitation built into a social system that generates wealth for the few and poverty for the many, stunting one's ability to develop one full humanity" (p. 171). By privileging some classes, ethnicities, genders, and nationalities over others, it institutionalized unequal opportunities for education, resources, and respect, preventing one's ability to develop their full potential.

The historical development of the US education system is layered in inequities of power and controlling of resources. Williams (2005) explained the patterns of power and resource allocations in education result in structural violence. Policies such as zero-tolerance are written to help youth but ultimately become the catalyst for structural violence. The NCLB act served to use the federal government's power and resource allocations to design a structurally violent

system that made underperforming students a symbolic threat, resulting in behaviors such as being pushed out and creating the secret pipeline.

Since the tragic massacre of Columbine High School, school administrators have enforced zero-tolerance policies to protect students from gun violence. As a result, the security and safety concerns of students became paramount. Kupchik's (2010) book, *Homeroom Security*, focused on the increased focus on school security. He pontificated the shift to zero-tolerance discipline and increased police officers' visibility in all schools, especially in urban school environments. Kupchik noted, "Not surprisingly, considering these new security measures, the numbers of students being suspended and expelled from public schools have increased dramatically" (p.15). Under the guise of safety and control, this dramatic increase of disciplinary actions, testing regimes, and pushout tactics creates a perfect structurally violent system that prohibits students' right to learn in a safe environment. This type of bait and switch learning environment for minority and at-risk children can be defined as structurally violent.

Accordingly, Gultang's (1969) work on structural violence theory will serve as a theoretical framework for understanding the violence associated with being an underperforming student within a performance-based accountability system. As a leader in the conflict analysis and resolution field, Galtung took a radical stance on how the field and society viewed and defined violence. In his article, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," Galtung (1969) critically examined how and in which ways society interacted with and viewed violence. While a practical societal understanding of violence evolved around the direct application of physical violence, Galtung challenged that perspective by reframing the focus from direct to indirect violence. He believed the strength of indirect violence could be just as coercive and destructive as direct violence. Galtung asserted, "…violence is present when human beings are being influenced so

that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" (p. 168). This form of indirect violence can be seen when indirect outside forces compromise a human's ability to reach their full potential.

The theory demonstrates the conflicting opposition between the systematic influences woven into social structures and its inconspicuous yet violent impact on society resulting in deprivation. Galtung's (1969) ideologies of structural violence offer a mindful and contradistinctive perspective on the meaning of violence. It provides a definition of violence that identifies invisible factors that respond positively to inequities of power and injustice. Vorobej (2008) shared that social justice arguments force society to acknowledge and take responsibility for social systems to maintain indirect violent outcomes against humanity. Structural violence offers a perspective on understanding how NCLB influenced the push-out syndrome resulting in the secret pipeline.

Dignity in Schools' (2010) advocacy work highlights one of the first organizations comprised of youth, parents, community leaders, and educators to prevent the pushout syndrome. The group addresses on their website the systematic failures that encourage the disenfranchisement of youth. The website states:

> These factors include, among others, the failure to provide essential components of high-quality education, lack of stakeholder participation in decision-making, over-reliance on zero-tolerance practices and punitive measures such as suspensions and expulsions, over-reliance on law enforcement tactics, and ceding of disciplinary authority to law enforcement personnel, and a history of systemic racism and inequality. These factors have an impact on all students but have a disproportionate impact on historically disenfranchised youth. (para. 1)

The reliance on high-stakes testing coupled with punitive measures creates structurally violent hurdles to graduation, primarily for underrepresented students.

Studies show that punitive policies such as suspension, arrest, expulsions, and other disciplinary actions on students only increase the likelihood of being involved in the court system. Nance's (2018) analytical assessment of longitudinal data from various research examining suspension rates and better school outcomes illustrated a student's odds of dropping out of school escalates from 16% to 32% if they experience out-of-school suspension. The statistical chances of dropping out of school increase with each additional suspension. Nance's study did not show a correlation between increased disciplinary actions and high achievement outcomes. However, disciplinary actions to encourage students continued to be associated with schools meeting high-stakes testing achievement goals.

The indirect violence commences at the doorstep of the federal government and trickles into the criminal justice world. Performance-based mandates create an elaborate system of pressure, causing educators and administrators to utilize various loopholes to avoid negative consequences for not meeting performance goals (Ayers, Landson-Billings, Michie, & Noguera, 2008). Unfortunately, the loopholes created a situation where the most vulnerable children in the chain of power receive the most violent consequences. As a result, underperforming students are quietly being pushed into the secret pipeline, and this is only heightened by racial inequities and an economy built on at-risk youth's demise.

Lizbet Simmons' *The Prison School* provides a grisly perspective on schools' policing and mass incarceration of children in the United States. Her book looks to uncover the at-risk youth industry and connects the financial dots. Simmons stated, "The tight link between educational failure and incarceration was not lost on private youth correctional firms. These

corporations sought to capitalize on youths who had been disenfranchised by educational inadequacy and disciplinary severity before incarceration" (2010, p.56). She discovered major investors would use terms like "a growth industry" because of growing crime, increased drug use, rise in child abuse, and dropout rates. There was also a boost of government contracts to security companies, alternative for-profit education centers, and social services programs. Each sector is prepared to capitalize on the at-risk population in schools across the country.

Gaining access to vulnerable at-risk children from school has become a significant commodity. The structural violence contained in the pathway from school to prison is well structured. Black girls and boys seem to be impacted the most by zero-tolerance school discipline policies. The least impacted by these exclusionary school discipline practices are white boys and girls. This assumes that the government discipline policies are geared towards keeping white children safe and separate from Black children. The pushing out of academically at-risk Black children is not coincidental but strategic, deliberate, and profitable.

The research suggests that the pushing out of students results from actors within the educational system attempting to avoid the consequences of not meeting federal educational goals (McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008; Newsome, 2007; Advance Project, 2010; Rosborough, 2009). If academically at-risk students do not receive the educational resources needed to live to their full potential, they face structural violence (Galtung, 1969). The performance-based accountability piece of NCLB, created to protect, has inadvertently marked underperforming students as threats. The scenario incentivizes ushering out underperforming students through the back door so that administrators can prevent their deprivation of resources and continue meeting their basic human needs.

Evolution of Basic Human Needs Conflict Theory

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs model offers a motivational understanding of the human needs process to self-actualize. Most people would define needs as a required source needed to survive. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is usually illustrated into a triangle-shaped image broken into basic needs, psychological needs, and self-fulfillment needs. Each layer offers specific satisfiers that must be met before a human being can achieve self-actualization.

Based on Maslow's theory, illustrated in McLeod's (2007), one must first meet physiological needs, including food, water, warmth, and rest. The next layer of the triangle is safety needs that come in the form of feeling secure. Belongingness and esteem need fall into the psychological need category. Once all those layers are meet, a person can achieve self-fulling needs. This paper will look at how John Burton, a social scientist, defines needs from a conflict resolution perspective.

Conflict theorist John Burton's basic human needs theory perspective expresses that conflict can be influenced by human satisfaction, unmet needs, human behavior, and conflict (Tidwell, 1998). Burton's basic human needs conflict theory and evolution of Maslow's hierarchy of needs allows one to understand, acknowledge, and connect competing intersections of the human condition such as human needs, exhibited behaviors, and conflict. Figure 7 demonstrates the core needs expressed in Burton's theory and the conflict pattern. For instance, the pushing out of students is considered structurally violent behavior; however, it is also essential to identify the origins causing such violence. Christie (1997) explained:

> Burton maintains that needs are constant and find their expression under changing
> conditions of the environment. For instance, the need for security is constant and

becomes apparent only when the environment is perceived to threaten security. Although needs are constant, actions in pursuit of satisfiers vary across time and space. (p. 316)

The human needs theory explains how to satisfy needs that are showing up as a conflict. Figure 7 illustrates that identity, recognition, and freedom are essential parts of the human experience.

Figure 7

Basic human needs theory
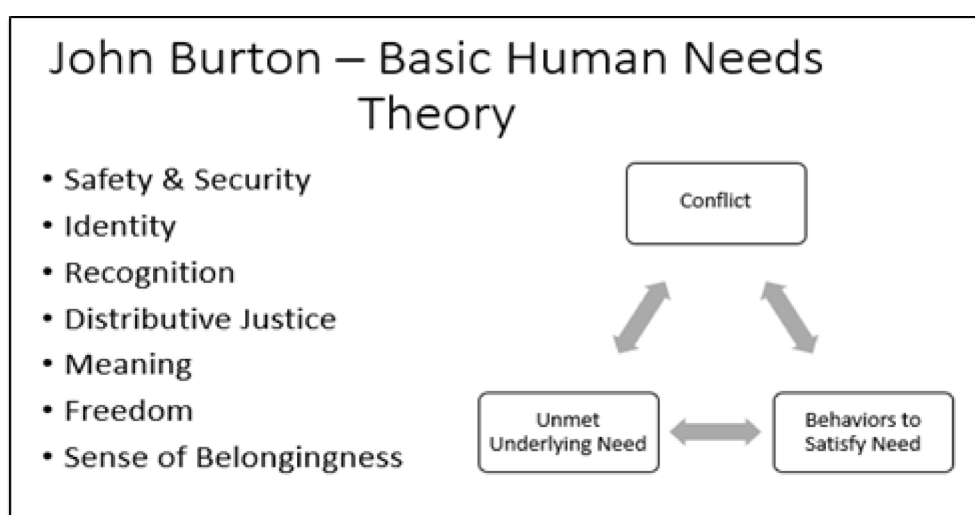
The literature shows Black girls struggle to meet these needs in the classroom. A Black girl's ability to establish her identity, recognize herself as a child, and freedom to be herself can cause conflict if facing adultification stereotypes in the classroom. Morris (2017) explains, "The question of survival among Black girls has always been about whether they are seen, and if so how they are seen, particularly in economically and socially isolated spaces"(p.18). A Black girl's basic human needs are essentially based on how the people of power view how she navigates her own identity based on the majority racial biases.

To be "loud" is a demand to be heard. To have an "attitude" is to reject a doctrine of invisibility and mistreatment. To be flamboyant—or "fabulous"—is to revise the idea that

socioeconomic isolation is equated with not having access to materially desirable things. To be a ghetto Black girl, then, is to reinvent what it means to be Black, poor, and female. Under these conditions, volume and force are powerful tools, but so too are love and loyalty. (Morris, 2017, p.19)

The understanding of why and how Black girls navigate their identity in a classroom is essential. Each one of the behaviors described above could land a Black child in the grips of zero-tolerance disciplinary action. The struggle to rehumanize oneself as a Black girl or boy and demand an identity is filled with conflict, especially within a racial bias classroom or school environment. Burton describes the need for identity as a non-negotiable need. Thus, a Black child who demands to be seen and continues to be dehumanized will continue the battle to seek that identity that surpasses the need to pass a test.

The previous sections emphasized the systemic issues negatively impacting Black children in the education setting. We explored how high-stakes testing creates an imbalance of power in the classroom. As a result of microaggression, perceived deviance, and racial biases, Black children are being shuffled into the school-to-prison pipeline. Now let us examine the impact of the human need on teachers, administrators, and students.

The 2001 NCLB not only changed the landscape of education; it also seemed to create sources of insecurity for all associated with high-stakes testing. NCLB delivered a new form of accountability in education. It also created competing interests in the educational landscape. Administrators were in fear of losing control of the school to the federal government. Teachers fear job loss from administrators. Finally, students felt the pressure of passing and the fear of failure. This high level of tribulation impacts how the distribution of power and conflict is managed or exploited to satiate one's basic human needs.

The human needs perspective offers insight into how conflict is used to meet needs (Burton, 1998). Burton's basic human needs theory provided conflict resolution as a framework to explore conflict outside of power-based resolutions. Burton subscribed to the ideals that human needs are continually evolving with society, and their pursuit of safety, belongingness, self-esteem, personal fulfillment, identity, cultural security, freedom, and distributive justice are determined by their participation in society (Rubenstein, 2001). The basic human needs approach creates a space to consider the human condition's effects as institutional policies evolve.

One can deduce the use of zero-tolerance exclusionary discipline to push out students is a means of educators and administrators using the power of conflict to secure satisfiers related to their basic human needs. The theory suggests that humans are always seeking and creating satisfiers to as a means of resolving conflict. Unfortunately, the resolution may shift violence to others, which continues the circle of violence. Rubenstein (2001) asserted that the human needs approach provides specific perspectives to analyze the conflict. It recognizes the differences between negotiable and non-negotiable needs, acknowledges underlying satisfiers, and resolution focuses on individual needs. The basic human needs approach strays away from using power and delve into individual needs as a form of conflict resolution. For instance, by overlooking power, one can use the basic human needs theory to understand how underperforming students can be viewed as a barrier to meeting one's needs. This perspective offers a different analysis of why students are being pushed out of schools.

Researchers such as Rosborough (2009), Orfield et al. (2004), and Advancement Project (2010) suggest administrators push out underachieving students to avoid the consequences of the NCLB accountability system. Burton (1998) implied that aggression and conflict result from incompatible institutional and societal norms with human needs. Humans will exhibit behavior to

meet those needs one way or another. Based on the theory, students' pushing out exhibits how some administrators and educators adapted to a perceived threat of facing federal consequences for low-performing AYP data. While this behavior is not condoned, understanding why the behavior is exhibited helps explain the conflict and resolve it.

The human basic need theory objectively identifies satisfying human needs as a priority to resolving conflict. Burton's (1998) theory, combined with a systemic approach to structural violence, provides a basis for understanding conflict resulting from one's perception of unmet needs. The inherent unmet needs of the human condition can cause strife until those needs are met. Conflict resolution is grounded in the basic human needs theory and commences once needs are met void of coercion or the use of power (Rubenstein, 2001). Figure 8 demonstrates Burton's human needs theory, combined with structural violence's systemic approach, offers a multilayered approach for understanding conflict surrounding the pushing out of students into the secret pipeline.

Figure 8

Burton's human needs
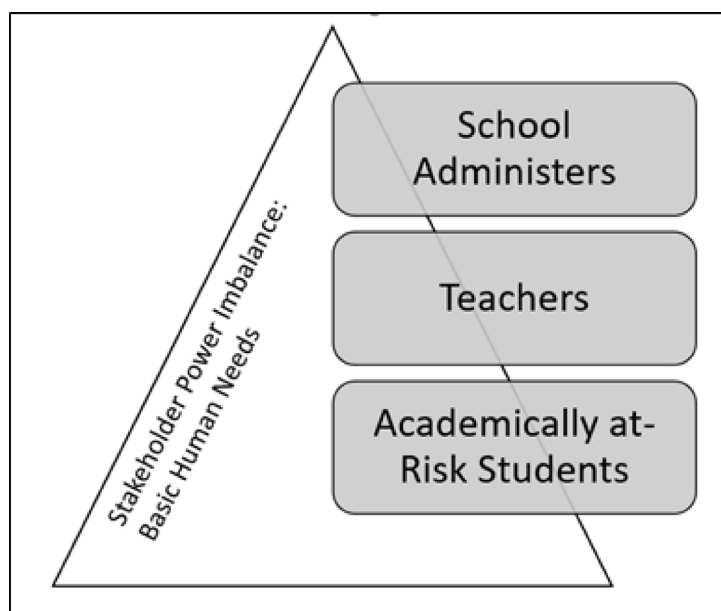
The combination of stressed administers, frustrated teachers, and vulnerable Black children creates a toxic survival of the fittest atmosphere. Each level of power is trying to adjust themselves to meet goals to avoid negative accountability. In the search for teachers and administrators working to avoid.

In closing, this chapter has provided literature that speaks to how the pressures of testing regimes create conflict in the classroom that impacts the educational needs and experiences of minority children. The following chapter will focus on the methodology used to inform the dissertation research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The methodology chapter will focus on describing the specific techniques and processes used to investigate the research question. This dissertation applied qualitative narrative analysis techniques for the data collection process, data analysis, and results. This section will provide a detailed overview of how the narrative analysis informed the delivery of the reach.

Research Question

The purpose of this research is to investigate how past federal educational accountability measures systematically created and perpetuated the secret pipeline from school-to-prison phenomena. Although the impact on NCLB policy has been studied in various ways, there is limited research utilizing the policy to understand the dynamics between one's struggle to maintain or meet AYP and structural violence to shuffle students in the secret pipeline prison to meet those needs. To better understand the linkage between AYP and the secret pipeline to prison, I opted to employ qualitative narrative analysis as the approach to provide a lived experience account of how AYP perpetuates students shuffling the secret pipeline from school to prison. This study utilized narrative analysis to align participants' storytelling with the theoretical approaches of structural violence and basic human needs with the goal of better understanding the emergence of violence towards academically at-risk students under the testing regime.

Narrative Analysis Approach

Reissman (2008) described the narrative analysis approach as a family of methods used for probing intentions, inspecting the sequence of actions, looking at how the story serves the experience, and how the language used communicates meaning. The object of this qualitative research will be to take an introspective examination of the lived experience of South Florida

teachers employed in a traditional high school who were affected by federal accountability systems and how those systems impact how they see underperforming students.

I employed qualitative research rather than quantitative research is to give preference to how the art of storytelling offers a diverse and meaningful perspective to human existence. According to Birk, Chapman, and Francis (2008):

> The researcher must delve into the world of their participants with the aim of developing a shared understanding of how existence in this social arena is influenced by phenomena under study. Achieving this aim is dependent upon the use of techniques that aid in the exploration of issues with unreserved fervour yet which permit acknowledgement of subjective influences and maintain quality in the research process. (p. 67)

I interviewed participants to integrate multiple lived experience perspectives to a topic. I have no post-secondary teaching experience. Weiss (1994) states, "Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived " (p.1). Narrative analysis coupled with thoughtful interview questions will help understand the studied phenomenon and offer authenticity to the findings.

The narrative analysis allows one to delve deep into the story's elements so the researcher can explore and expand topics to grasp meaningfully. In keeping with the human needs and structural violence theory, this dissertation will use storytelling to examine and explain the participants' human experience analytically. Qualitative research methodology, coupled with storytelling, will provide an opportunity to analyze the connectedness between pushout syndrome, secret pipeline testing, and educators' experiences. The application of this methodology will produce an opportunity to collect narratives to help better understand the participants.

Study Timeline

I was a bit ambitious in developing a three-month timeline for this study. I dedicated one month to recruitment. I allotted the second month to allow scheduling flexibility for participants. The third month was scheduled for data analysis. The purpose of the timeline was to keep the research moving towards completion.

As I commenced the recruitment process, I had to readjust my timeline. I found it challenging to find participants with my specific criteria and volunteer their time for the study. After two months of recruiting, I was able to find interested participants. Once I found participants, the interviewing process took three weeks. The analysis of the data took some time. I purposely did not want to rush the process. Overall, the study took a total of five months in the field.

Semi-Structured Interview Approach

There are various types of interview strategies used in the qualitative research interview process to organize verbal exchanges. According to Qu and Dumay (2011), "Interviews provide a useful way for researchers to learn about the world of others although real understanding may sometimes be elusive" (p. 239). While interviews are usually the primary practice used for qualitative research, it is essential to briefly note the benefits and criticisms. Kallio, Pietila, Johnson, and Kangasniemi (2006) noted, "Despite the popularity of this data collection method, there is a lack of uniform, international advice in the literature on how to develop a semi-structured interview guide, and this review aimed to produce a rigorous tool for this purpose," (p. 5). However, for this study, acknowledging the criticism only enhanced the creation of a carefully designed semi-structured interview process.

The semi-structured interview approach is among the most popular practice in qualitative research. According to Qu and Dumay (2011), "The semi-structured interview enjoys its popularity because it is flexible, accessible and intelligible and, more important, capable of disclosing important and often hidden facets of human and organizational behavior" (p.246). I selected the qualitative research semi-structured interview approach primarily for its flexible and informal tone yet structured presence. Newcomer (2018) argues that "the dialogue can meander around the topics on the agenda—rather than adhering slavishly to verbatim questions as in a standardized survey—and may delve into totally unforeseen issues" (p.492). I also selected this approach because it fit my personality. Acknowledging that the interview is an interpersonal experience, I also wanted to be as authentic as I wanted the respondence to be during the encounter. Before forming the interview process, I researched various academic articles and books to increase my awareness of how to structure and implement the interview process.

To enrich the interview process, emphasis was placed on preparation and identifying barriers. A few authors offered vital insight; Weiss (1994) increased my knowledge of preparing for an interview and responding to dilemmas. Kallio, Pietila, Johnson & Kangasniemi (2006) shared a detailed guide on developing semi-structured interviews. Finally, I utilized John Bolton's book *People Skills* to strengthen my listening skills. Bolton (2009) asserts, "The art of good listening involves the ability to respond reflectively to demonstrate understanding and acceptance during the communication process" (p. 50). To add to the research rigor, I selected an interview approach that promoted my authentic self and researched how to develop an interview process using best practices. Qu & Dumay (2011) explain the organizing the qualitative research interviews is not a trivial process; "It requires not only the use of various skills, such as intensive listening and note-taking but also careful planning and sufficient preparation" (p.239). Once I

felt comfortable in my selection and preparation for interviewing, I focused on developing interview questions.

<div align="center">**Generating Semi-Structured Interview Questions**</div>

The literature review played a significant role in how the research questions were formulated. I reread my literature review to look for inspiration and insight. This activity aimed to brainstorm the first draft of questions to inform gaps in the research gathered. The list grew to over twenty-five questions. I then organized the questions to see if any specific themes can help guide my questions. Based on the themes of the list of questions, the focus was mostly on the "how" testing regimes impact teachers, administrators, and academically at-risk students' interactions in the classroom.

Figure 9

Interview questions

<div align="center">**Interview Questions:**</div>

1. Please state the county in which you teach?

2. What grade do you teach?

3. Tell me a bit about your school and classroom?

4. Based on your experience, why do you think some students leave school?

5. What's the best way to support struggling students?

6. Have you seen anything that works well to prevent students from leaving?

7. Do you feel as if you've had to change how you teach due to Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)? Goals and testing regimes?

8. Tell me how you feel AYP goals impacts teacher/administrative and student relationships?

I decided to use indirect questions to explore the "how" in the research. To fully understand my research questions, I generated questions that illicit reflective responses rather than polar answers. Figure 9 lists my final list of questions. Cautiously crafted inquires such as, "Can you share more about that incident?", "Tell me?" or "How did this experience impact you?" deliver more of an in-depth recollection of storytelling.

Qualitative studies are usually exploratory and more hypothesis-generating rather than testing. Therefore, it is necessary to frame the research question(s) to provide the investigator with enough flexibility and freedom to discover the topic in some depth. (Corbin & Strauss, 2002, p. 25)

Thus, my data collection strategy relied heavily on an open-ended inquiry-based approach. Perceived relationships, meanings, and understanding of experiences will take their shape using this strategy. The formation of the questions was to solicit various accounts and examples of teachers' lived experiences with the demands of meeting AYP goals. This research will serve as an informational baseline for developing and designing programs that help reduce conflict in the classroom and keep at-risk students in school. To get the best data possible for the study, I chose currently certified high school teachers residing in Florida's tri-county area (Miami-Dade, Broward, or Palm Beach).

Developing an Interview Guide

The next interview preparation step was creating a guide. Weiss (1994) explains, "An interview guide is a listing of areas to be covered in the interview along with, for each area, a listing of topic or question that together will suggest lines of inquiry" (p.48). I chose to create a guide to ensure consistency and structure for each one-on-one interview. For example, Figure 10 list the reminders included in the guide that included building rapport, explaining the purpose of

the study, sharing the length of the interview, and reiterating confidentiality standards. The

reminders were written into a script to avoid sounding robotic to make the exchange more

relational. I also included the list of research questions as part of the guide.

Figure 10

Interview guide

Interview Guide
Create a script with the following reminders: • build rapport • explain the purpose of the study, • share the length of the interview, • reiterate confidentiality standards. • fictious name, • date of the interview • schedule time • guide to capture my thoughts during the interview • write down my follow up questions

I provided a hard copy of the interview guide for each interview. Each guide had the

respondent's fictitious name, date of the interview, and schedule time. According to DeMarris &

Lapan (2004), "By spending time constructing guiding questions that participants will address,

researchers, make clear in their minds what they want to talk about and how best to engage

participants in these conversations" (p.62). I used each guide to capture my thoughts during the

interview. I found it extremely helpful in maintaining the structure of the interview. It also

reminded me to write down my follow-up questions rather than interrupting the respondent or

forgetting my questions.

The use of field notes during the interview process is an essential element of qualitative research. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) expand on field notes by sharing the benefits. They mention that field notes help construct thick data, enhance the data, and provide more rigor to the analytical process. I created a reminder to write down my thoughts during and after each interview. If needed, I planned to use my field notes to support or enrich each interview's data analysis. Additionally, it also aided in exploring any biases or ethical dilemmas described in my bracketing disclosure.

Bracketing

As a researcher conducting a literature review and interpreting data, I must bracket this research by stating that I have not taught in a traditional public-school environment but have experiences that may lend themselves to my data interpretation. According to Tufford and Newman (2010), "Bracketing is a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process" (p.1). As a career coach and social worker for an alternative high school program, I have worked closely with high school students who have left high school before earning their diplomas. I have heard many emotionally charged conversations between students and parents about their opinions on high-stakes testing and explanations as to why the student did not return to school. These emotional conversations have made it difficult not to form specific assumptions about how high-stakes testing results have impacted minorities.

As a Black female, reading about the plights of your poor Black children is a susceptible subject. Much of the research that I am examining about the Black girls' plight in schools speaks to education experience in predominately white schools in New York and South Florida. I have emotionally and mentally connected with the narratives shared in the research and online news

articles. I did not realize how much the research on the adultification of Black girls would trigger my emotions and reflect on my childhood academic years.

I also feel the emotional connections with Black girls' narratives; I am also a parent of a Black son with learning disabilities and a high school girl. According to Flannery, "Students with disabilities are twice as likely to be suspended than their non-disabled peers, and LGBT students are 1.4 times more likely to face suspension than their straight peers" (2015, para. 12). This research contained in this dissertation enlightened and frustrated me at the same time. I now realize the magnitude of barriers Black and Brown children have to overcome to feel safe with their teachers in the school environment. The racial injustices that minority children have to bear on their shoulders coupled with testing are overwhelming. The research has been a personal emotional challenge that I had to channel to continue to research objectively.

Figure 11

Reflective questions

How do I connect to the topic, participants and data?	
Emotionally	Mentally
What should I examine prior to engaging the data?	
Personal Biases	Values System
Who will be my support system?	
Professional Colleagues	Ph.D. Colleagues
Reflection Tools:	
Reflection Notebook	Intentional Pauses
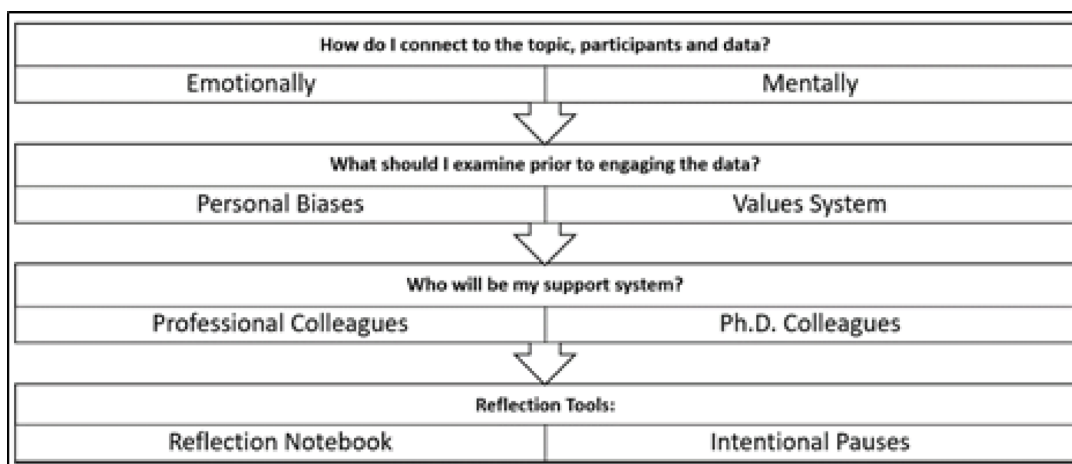
To mitigate my personal biases, values, and beliefs, I wrote reflection pieces after each interview to examine how my thoughts are interacted by the data collection process. Figure 11 maps out my reflective questions. As mentioned by Cutcliffe (2003), writing memos help researchers examine their reflections during data collection. An additional form of bracketing

suggested by Rolls and Relf (2006) is having reflective conversations with others to help bring insight to the research. By my current support system of high school teachers, education administrators, criminal justice administrators, faculty, and staff in higher education, I was able to request time with my associates to debrief and have insightful conversations about my feelings and assumptions that may or may not hinder the analysis process.

Participant Criteria

The selection process consists of choosing contributors who can offer in-depth knowledge and understanding about the subject matter being studied. As a result of my line of questions, I decided my selection criteria would include only public high school teachers and school administrators. Each participant had to be a certified public high school teacher in the Florida tri-county area of Miami-Dade, Broward, or Palm Beach with at least one year currently teaching in a traditional public high school setting under a testing regime. Selected school administrators must currently work in a public high school traditional environment under a testing regime with at least one year of experience.

Recruitment Process

The recruitment stage aimed to collect as many participants as possible. Figure 12 demonstrates the three stages of the recruitment process. I targeted professional networking events, solicited my professional contacts, and posted recruitment flyers on various Facebook groups to achieve this goal. DeMarrais and Lapan (2004) shared, "It is more likely that a qualitative researcher will use a network selection in which he or she locates one participant who fits into the selection criteria and that person who refers the researcher to others who also fit the criteria." (p. 60). I found network selection to be most fruitful when recruiting participants. All my participants were a result of referrals from other teachers or within my professional network.

I received no response from Facebook. In total, I had 12 potential participants who shared an

interest in the study.

Figure 12

Recruitment strategies

The study recruited seven women and two men from the Miami Dade County and

Broward County Public Schools. The bulk of the participants describe their schools as Title I

schools. According to the Florida Department of Education, Title I schools receive additional resources for economically disadvantaged students. The school population averaged over 3,000 ethnically diverse students, with the majority being Hispanic and Haitian students.

Technical Considerations

I conducted the interviews via Zoom, a video conferencing, web-based platform. I set up a free Zoom account specifically for the interviews. Before I used the study tool, I scheduled a time to visit the Zoom website for job aids. I understood all the tool's technical functions and how best to navigate the security, video, and recording features on the site. I used my new knowledge to set specific parameters for the meeting.

I provided each interviewee with a separate Zoom invitation link. However, each session had the same security settings. For example, each session was set up with a private password and meeting ID to avoid zoom bombing. Zoom bombing is where the Zoom session is interrupted by an uninvited guest. I also set up each session to automatically record the Zoom cloud interview and enabled the audio transcript feature. To maintain anonymity during the recording, I disabled the use of the guest's camera. I also enabled the waiting room. This function controls who enters the room to prevent unauthorized persons from entering the room.

I created an Excel spreadsheet with all the Zoom interview links. The purpose of the spreadsheet is to add the participant's pseudonym next to the link. The spreadsheet allowed me to keep my contact and links in order. I also included the day and times for each meeting. I then transferred the data to my personal Outlook calendar account. The Outlook calendar facilitated reminders and invites to the participants. On the invite, I only included pseudo names to protect the identity of each person.

I arrived 15 minutes early to set up each electronic interview environment. First, I made sure the meeting link was working. Next, I double-checked the administrator settings to confirm that each session was being recorded, and I facilitated a microphone check. Finally, upon the arrival of the participant, I made sure the red recording light was on.

All audio recordings were saved in the Zoom cloud. Upon downloading the audio transcripts, they were transferred to my private Microsoft One Drive account under coded names. The audio was then transferred to Temi for transcription services. Temi is a fee-based audio-to-text automatic transcript service. Each Zoom audio session was uploaded and transcribed by Temi services.

Ethical Considerations

Considering the ethical consideration of this study was a priority. I used Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board's general social behavior informed consent form to structure this study's consent form. Each participant was sent a consent form to review, sign, and return to ensure privacy and confidentiality. The document shared specifics about the study. For example, who is doing the study, what is the study about, why are we asking for participants, what will the participants be doing during the interview process, risks associated with the study, and a research consent and authorization signature section? I emailed each participant a copy. For the interviewee to continue participation, each must sign a copy and return it before or on the day of the interview.

 DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) shared other important ethical issues to consider during the interview process. To prevent any unanticipated harm, I asked participants not to use their real names or others' names during the interview. For example, part of the interview script

reiterates that the session is being recorded and not using their real names. In addition, I placed a strict setting on Zoom to prevent unwanted disruptions.

Additionally, I used pseudonyms to represent and save each interview in a private cloud file. The interviewees' transcripts were never printed. The paper version of my field notes destroyed after uploaded into a cloud folder. Finally, all signed consent forms were also saved under fictitious names. Finally, to avoid exploitation, I did not offer reimbursement or perceived benefits of any kind for participating in the study.

Conducting the Semi-Structured Interview

Now that I have established an interview guide with questions, recruited participants, I finally conducted the interview. I remind each participant who entered the Zoom room that the interview was being recorded. The interview started with a focus on establishing a comfortable research relationship with the respondent. Each person was thanked for their time, asked about their day and comfort level. Next, I read the pre-written script to reintroduce the study, explained the interview process, and finally provided them with an opportunity to ask questions. To ease into the interview, I read the script to quell any nervous energy from the respondent or myself.

In preparation for the interview, an introduction script was written to ensure the respondence received the same introduction. I used my interview guide to explain the purpose, length, and confidentiality of the interview. Once I read the script, I noticed most interviewees seemed more at ease. Before starting the questioning phase, I asked each participant if they felt ready and comfortable answering questions. I did not start asking questions until the respondent agreed to start. Weiss (1994) discusses the importance of managing the interview process by setting interview guidelines. He encourages interviewers to allow the respondent to share what is on their mind without interruption with minimal interruption. One should also be mindful of

sharing information about oneself that shifts the focus of the interview. I was also mindful of managing transitions and having built-in checkpoints during the interview to check how the interviewing partnership is going. The script introduces those concepts and sets the stage for the interview.

Even though I allocated an hour for each interview, on average, each interview lasted thirty minutes. The interview guide helped to structure the flow of the interview and organize my thoughts during the process. As a result, the respondents and I felt at ease during the questioning and answer stage. The majority of the participates seemed eager to share their experiences. However, there were a few participants who were reluctant to answer questions openly. In those instances, some questions were repeated in hopes of getting additional data from the participant.

I upload each audio into Temi, a transcription service that provided rapid transcriptions of audio recordings. Once the audio was transcribed, a review of the audio against the text was done to guarantee accuracy. The data was saved on a private electronic drive only accessed by the researcher. The files do not contain any identifying information. The following steps include extracting meaningful data from the audio.

Field Text: Data Collection

Once the data has been collected, I employed William's model to interpret data for the following two months. William's narrative research model focuses less on specific concepts and more on the overall holistic interpretation of a story, and it "does not fracture the biographical account into thematic categories as grounded theory coding would do but interprets it as a whole" (Riessman, 2008, p. 57). To result in a holistic interpretation of the data, William's model uses several techniques to formulate a theory. Riessman (2008) mentioned techniques reflecting on the whole story as it evolves and examines the inclusive references to language

related to the studied phenomena. The data will be examined for references that connect emotion, behavior, and how storytelling brings meaning to a participant's experience.

Riessman (2008) supported focusing on one interview to isolate and order relevant episodes into a chronological and biographical account. For example, after collecting data from the participant, the data will be isolated, categorized, and chronologically ordered to appreciate the narrative evolution better. Placing the raw data into categories also creates a more manageable format (Bleakly, 2005). The benefits of unifying the stories' events in chronological order prepare one for further exploration of thematic families and underlying theoretical consideration.

Furthermore, synthesizing my literature review on the topic will help to discover and identify general patterns. Narrative analysis is a process of synthesis of experience and ideas through narrative. It is reconfigured here as synthesis through narrative (rather than narrative synthesis). This term has acquired meaning as a way of synthesizing research data produced by methods other than randomized controlled trials (Bleakly, 2005).

After isolating and ordering relevant episodes, including people and physical settings, the next step focuses on underlying assumptions. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), "The researchers zoom in, identifying the underlying assumptions in each account and naming (coding) them. Particular cases are then selected to illustrate general –range and variations and the underlying assumptions of different cases are compared" (p. 57). During the analysis stage, I explored thematic coding — using language and metaphors to explore underlying assumptions. Using these methodical steps ensured that I provide a holistic and thoughtful approach to explaining the data.

Underlying assumptions in William's model also allows the researcher to understand the narrative's holistic content better. For instance, in my research findings, I provided a summary of the case by restating the narrative in a manner that aids in understanding the causal linkages among ideas and my interpretations (Creswell, 2012). My analysis demonstrated how each author shaped their story by describing and linking specific experiences to meaning-making in the storytelling process. Bleakly (2002) stated, "The qualitative researcher reads these stories for the meaning they convey; not to determine whether one account is more accurately reflects than another event" (p. 579). While William's model will be followed to ensure data analysis accuracy, I was cautious not to exclude personal limitations to the research.

The Analytical Process

The analytical process began with reading for accuracy, reading to read, reading to understand, and finally reading for connections. Each stage created a deeper understanding of the data and further immersed me in the participants' experiences. Reading to read involves getting acquainted with the stories and the structure of each interview. Reading to understand is my interpretation of using theoretical models to shape my underlying assumptions. Finally, reading for themes to create categories and groups for meaning. To be faithful to the respondent's narrative, I employed several steps to understand the data better. I completed each reading days apart to ensure I had a clear goal and fresh perspective when engaging the data.

Transcription Accuracy

There are benefits to using a web-based transcription service. The data was transcribed and available within minutes of downloading. However, one must ensure the accuracy of the data. To validate the accuracy of the transcription, I compared the audio-to-text for each

interview. Each transcription review took over one hour to validate. Once I felt comfortable with the data's accuracy, I moved on to the analytical process's next steps.

<p style="text-align:center">First Cycle Coding Methods</p>

Reading to Read

Reading to read is the process of engaging the text without any motivation. Figure 13 explains each stage of the coding cycle reads. It is a fresh read of the data without taking notes.

Figure 13

Engaging the data
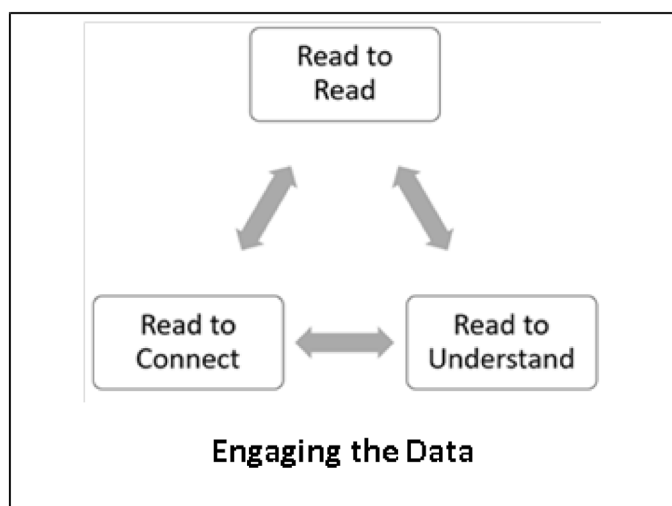
The purpose of the stage to simply read and reflect on the interviewing experience and get acquainted with each participant's story.

I printed each interview on a separate piece of paper. I gathered the data and separated them per participant. I stapled each set of data and placed it in an individual folder. I would take out one story at a time to flirt with the text.

As I read the data, I wanted to become familiar with the content. I read the content as if I was reading a story out of a book. I wanted to make sure the data flow and organization were ample to tell the participant's story. In this stage, I was satisfied that I gave the participants the

time needed to articulate their answers to the best of their ability. To complete this stage, I read each interview separately from one another. I took one-hour breaks in between to ensure that I had a fresh perspective for each read. I spent a total of ten hours on the reading-to-read stage of the analytical process.

Reading to Understand

After waiting a day to refresh my thoughts, I returned to the data with a fresh perspective. I wanted to make sure that my critical mind shifted to probing for a deeper understanding of each story. Reading to understand aimed to use Galtung's and Burton's theoretical underpinning to deduce the story and its interpretation. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) subscribe to the analytical tools for narrative inquiry such as broadening, burrowing, and storying and re-storying to fully engage the data.

Broadening Tool

It was vital for me to learn the untold story seen between the text as a researcher. The broadening tool "is about making a general description of the participants' character or values or the social, historical, or cultural milieus in which your research takes place by looking at your field notes and literature review"(Kim, 2016, p. 207). Utilizing this study's literature review provided context. It helped trace the participants' answers to specific questions back to the historical literature account of how NCLB impacted a teacher's perspective on high-stakes testing. For example, many of the participants felt pressured when it came to testing. The research on the NCLB and its accountability measures help understand the participants' perspectives on why they felt pressured. Also, answers to why students leave the classroom supported the theoretical elements of basic human needs and structural violence understanding.

Burrowing Tool

Burrowing is the act of focusing on more specific phenomena to understand the feelings or dilemmas described in the narrative. For example, I focused on how each respondent's story unfolded. I paid particular attention to how participants unpacked their stories. Some shared with a lot of passion and frustration. Others sounded resigned to the state of affairs in the classroom. The data reflects who was most enthusiastic about sharing their story and others influenced by the negativity associated with testing regimes. While storying and re-storying assisted with capturing the past experiences of each respondent.

Storying and Restorying Tool

The strategy of analyzing data includes analyzing how the participants told and retold the story. Some participants used many reiterations as a way of emphasizing extreme behaviors. Others told similar stories but used different perspectives to rationalize student, colleague, or administrator behaviors. I found that the retelling of stories in the field text corresponded with words and phrases to represent or suggest attitudes and values within their story.

The told story of each participant is more than just text. Each column created was used to organize the field data and my thoughts. I divided the document into three columns. The first column had the interview questions. The second column was used to document emerging themes. The final column was used to select which theory best represented the emerging theme. As shown in the figure, the document allowed me to arrange the data with the corresponding theoretical framework. This document facilitated the reading to connect stage.

Structural Coding Method

The type of coding one selects to analyze narrative inquiry is best which coding practice will help the researcher best analyze the data. According to Saldana (2013), "Selecting a coding

method is based on reading and reading a story until one's subconscious develops insight that creates a connection" (p. 60). This study used structural coding because it would allow the text to be rigorously segmented into major themes and categories, allowing a thorough analysis of the data.

The narrative analysis methodology and the semi-structured gathering of data are most compatible with structural coding. According to Saldana (2013), "Structural coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies but particularly for those employing multiple participants standardized or semi-structured data gathering protocol, hypothesis testing, or exploratory investigations to gather topics lists or indexes of major categories or themes." (p. 84). Structural coding provides analysis elements that help identify and associate complex networks of terms, thoughts, and structure within the told story.

Structural Coding: Reading to Connect

During this stage of analysis, I started the reading process with a clear perspective. First, I made sure to take one day away from the field text to clear any thoughts and biases. Then, I started the reading to connect process by reading one transcript at a time. Finally, after reading a transcript, I would read it once more to start the structural coding process.

I labeled and indexed recurring words and phrases for each participant and question to capture the text's essence. As I absorbed the data, I followed Saldana's (2016) suggestion to pull out words and phrases that provided insight or highlighted a particular commonality, difference, or relationship. As I pulled out words from each transcript, I generated a word list for each participant. Once I completed analyzing and creating a word list, I moved on to tallying activity. I gathered all the word lists formulated by each participant's transcript. I then tallied the frequency of each word or a similar phrase. I then analyzed the list for emerging themes to

connect the data's feelings and needs. Chapter four will discuss the extrapolated data and strategies used to arrive at the study's findings.

During this stage, specific phrases were pulled out from all the interviews to help shape the collective story's understanding. I organized all the respondent's answers under the heading of each question. I selected responses that I felt providing a meaningful contribution to the understanding of the study. I also looked at my interview guide notes for any connections in my notes. While the memo assisted with pacing the interview, it did not contain additional data to support the answers further. In total, I isolated over one-hundred and fifty interview responses.

Once the list was complete, I began to isolate specific words from the list of quotes to create themes. To discover themes, I looked at the repetitive nature of the isolated words or phrases. Once I noticed the repetition of words, I counted how many times the response mentioned the word or phrase. For example, when asked about why students leave school, respondents mentioned purpose fourteen times, support nine times, joining the workforce eight times, and personal issues with learning two times. As a result, the data showed that finding purpose was a significant theme, and learning was the least mentioned theme. I continued this pattern of counting repetitive words to uncover themes or patterns. To illustrate the repetitive nature of the data, I used a word cloud generator.

Data Clouds

The narrative analysis relies on the interweaving of words how repetitive data is used to create a collective insight on data. The illustration of the data provides a deeper understanding of how each participant's words evolved into themes. Figure 14 demonstrates how I used word clouds to generate each word's illustrative presentation in interview answers to show the raw data in an organized fashion.

Figure 14

Word clouds flow
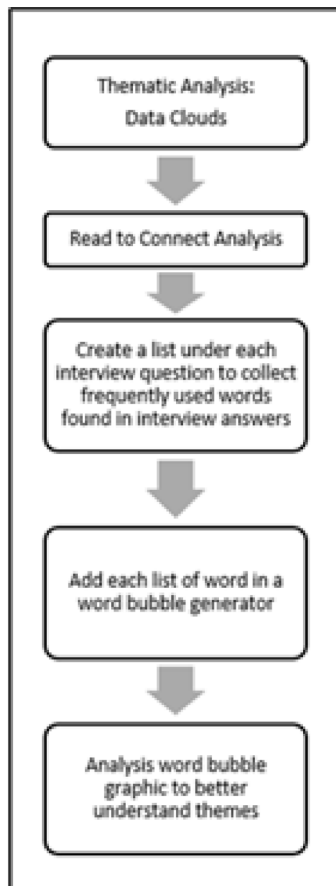
A word cloud generator is an online service that uses the frequency of words to create a graphic. The graphic gives greater prominence to words based on frequency. For example, the word "need" is used very frequently. As a result of its frequency, the word cloud will prominently display the word "need." The remaining cluster of the words will display on various sides based on their frequency.

Word clouds provide additional analysis points during the thematic analysis. The activity illustrated in the figure – allowed following the words. The data collection creates a list that generates an illustration of possible themes to support one's analysis. It provides a check-in

balance process and a reflection piece if my meaning-making finds differed from the words stated by our participants.

To create the word cloud, I used the word lists that I created during the 'read to read' stage of the analysis process. For example, I generated a list of frequently used words used to answer each specific question. Next, I took each list and added the words into the word bubble generator. The system then generated a pictorial based on frequency. The words that were repeated the most in the data showed were the most prominent.

In comparison, other words that were used less frequently were shortened in size and appearance. Each word bubble will be displayed next to its related questions to help support the data's understanding. After isolating and organizing the data, I was able to discover seven themes. Each theme demonstrated the collective underline meaning from the words of participants. To provide a visual component to the storytelling, create word clouds. Word clouds allow for the illustration of words based on frequency.   In chapter four, I will expand on the study's findings and my interpretation of the data.

Chapter 4: Results

The Methodology chapter focused on the gathering and analytic process of the study. It provided a detailed explanation of the narrative analysis approach, data collection and described the analytical process. This chapter will focus on data analysis and interpretation of the data. Kim (2016) states, "As we understand the narrative data analysis and interpretation work in tandem, I want to suggest that narrative analysis and interpretation is an act of finding narrative meaning" (p. 190). This chapter will include organizing the data by exploring one question at a time.

Narrative analysis aims to find meaning within, in between, and unseen areas of the data. Taking one time to explore each section of the survey's data is essential to honor the participants who took time to share their information. To honor the participants and the significance of the data, I decided to isolate each question, theme, and analysis of the data for the readers through structural coding.

Figure 15

Coding emerging themes

Interview Questions	Emerging Themes	Theoretical Framework
• Why do you think some students leave school	• Need a Sense of Purpose and Support	• Basic Human Needs (personal fulfillment)
• What is the best way to support struggling students	• Offer a Relatable Learning Experience • Opportunity	• Basic Human Needs (personal fulfillment)
• What works well to prevent student from leaving	• Establishing Relationships • Create a Sense of Community • Opportunity	• Basic Human Needs (Belongingness)
• AYP goals and testing regimes Impact on teaching	• Sense of Strong Impact	• Structural Violence (Inequities of Power and Injustice)
• AYP Teacher and Student Relationship Impact	• Sense of Pressure and Resentfulness	• Structural Violence (Inequities of Power and Injustice)
• AYP Administrator and Student Relationship	• Sense of Pressure to Perform	• Structural Violence (Inequities of Power and Injustice)
• AYP Administrator and Teacher Relationship	• Sense of Conflict and Pressure	• Structural Violence (Inequities of Power and Injustice)

Each semi-structured interview question and the associated theme will be displayed in isolation with the associated structural coding theme and associated conflict theory, as seen in Figure 15. The coding theme will allow the reader to concentrate on one survey question, structural code, and analysis before reading further. I also utilized word bubbles to illustrate the thematic frequency of text within the collective transcripts. The isolation of each data set and illustration of the word bubble allows the reader to appreciate the data's significance in the research findings.

Research Findings

The initial part of the analytic process commenced with reading, reading, reading to connect, and reading to understand. During the reading to connect state, I was able to tally the text that providing meaning to the collective stories. The practice of structural coding is displayed in Figure 16. It illustrates the count for each word found in the interviews per question. The counts are used below to analyze why the words were emphasized and the meaning it brings to each question.

Figure 16

Structural coding

Based on Your Experience, Why Do You Think Students Leave School?

Structural Code: Students Need a Sense of Purpose and Support

During the read to understand stage, I scanned each participant's story for similar words or phrases. The data reflected a significant frequency of the word 'need' as seen in Figure 17. The word 'purpose' also showed more than fourteen times. Next on the frequency scale was 'workforce.' Across the interviews, participants shared students left school to join the workforce. Similar words were part of the language used to explain students leaving school as personal issues and learning. Figure 17 represents a visual compilation of the words most used by participants and added to thematic coding.

Figure 17

Student needs, purpose, and support

The data shows a strong relationship between a student leaving the school environment and feeling a lack of purpose and support within the classroom. Burton's human basic needs theory speaks to the conflict that arises until one's needs are satisfied (as cited by Tidwell, 1998). Based on this theory, at-risk students will remain conflicted within the school environment until the school creates an environment of purpose outside of testing that satisfies their basic human

needs. For example, one participant expressed, "So, a kid that leaves, I just think has not found like purpose or benefit to staying in school."

Another participant also mentioned, "So just students may feel like, school, is not providing meaningful opportunities for them." Words such as "not motivated," "not engaged," "need support," and "lack of support at home" were repetitive throughout all the interviews. Feeling connected to the learning process seems to be an essential protective factor for keeping students in school.

Another participant mentioned, "I think that the students leave school because they do not connect with the information. So, they are not engaged with it". There was also a significant theme that spoke to the lack of connections in the classroom, which leads students to leave school to fulfill a sense of purpose and identity. Students leaving school to join the workforce or finding a source of connection in outside criminal activities seem to be filling a void that is not found in the classroom.

A job not only provides a sense of purpose but instant economic gratification. A student in conflict with how they fit in society or even a classroom may find outside forces more appealing to their sense of belongingness and identity. A student in a job can define themselves based on their position and role. Based on John Burton's basic human needs model, a youth who leaves school is labeled a dropout. However, that student may be seeking a sense of belongingness. For example, A student who feels invisible in the classroom leaves school. The student then becomes a cashier. Society may see that student as a dropout. However, that student has gained a sense of identity and feels productive in an organization and family system. That student has filled a void which society was unable to meet.

Interestingly, many participants mentioned that students who do not feel they "benefit from school" were said to leave school to join the workforce—their sense of survival conflicts with a classroom environment that does not meet their immediate needs. For example, a participant shared:

> When you are living in an under-resourced community, and you need money today to feed your family today, it is kind of hard to connect the dots with how Pythagorean theorem it is going to feed your family either today or tomorrow.

> Others answered, "Oftentimes they have to leave school to help out the family to make more money, et cetera"; "And so, I have had students that have ended up leaving or dropping out because they have to get a job to support the household"; and "They need to eat and keep sheltered today." So, if school is not relatable or engaging a one's sense of purpose, then students seem to leave to resolve the conflict by finding a sense of meaning elsewhere.

There seems to be a collective sense amongst the participants that students need to feel a sense of belongingness. If a student is not getting a purposeful experience at school, internal and external conflicts arise, resulting in students leaving to satisfy that need. Christie (1997) explains, "Although needs are constant, actions in pursuit of satisfiers vary across time and space. Furthermore, people will fulfill needs through socially sanctioned activities or, if unable to do so, will conspire to satisfy needs in proscribed ways" (p.316).

Most participants who express this connection worked at a Title I school. For a school to get a Title I designation, 40% of the students are considered low-income (FDE, 2020). The system is not built to address and sustain students conflicted with immediate survival needs. For example, a participant emphatically proclaimed, "The school system is not built in a manner in which students can be educated while at the same time, provide resources for their family."

Students in Title I schools are feeling the heavy burdens of poverty coupled with an unrelatable educational experience, which creates a vicious cycle of unmet needs rooted at the core of systemic violence.

According to Christie (1977), "Structural violence is the operationalization of violence embedded systemically, which feeds economic and political resource inequities" (p. 323). The data reports that participants' perspective is that the school system is not built to meet students' needs deemed at-risk. Others report that the school system should not only prepare students for college but offer opportunities for students to learn a trade, "Instead of trying to force every kid to have a higher SAT score and get into a four-year college and pursue a degree that they may or may not need." Feelings of not being supported, the educational system not meeting students' immediate real-world needs, coupled with standardized testing, makes for a vicious cycle in the classroom. Further, the research participants' stories will illustrate how the testing regime created an environment that supports students' pushing out into the secret pipeline from school to prison.

What is the Best Way to Support Struggling Students?

Structural Code Two: Offer a Relatable Learning Experience and Opportunity

Question two asked participants to reflect on the best way to support struggling students. The majority of the text focused on words like patience, understanding, influence, and more. However, the significant themes that evolved in the word bubble in Figure 18 were need, support, motivation, and word see.

Using the basic need theory, the word 'see' can be connected to meeting the need to be seen in the classroom. One cannot provide academic assistance if teachers do not acknowledge the student's identity in the class. How can one motivate or show support without an authentic desire to 'see' students in the classroom?

Figure 18

Relatable learning experience

During the analysis process, I discovered that participants used words and phrases that shared a common understanding that building authentic relationships with students was an essential factor in preventing students from leaving school. The following phrases share common themes of belonging from relationships which helps motivate and influence positive connections associated with the school environment:

- "Trying to establish some relationship with that student to let that student know that you are there to help them."

- "When kids seem to be a part of a cohesive unit, it is less of a reason to become frustrated and to want to leave. Cause they feel like you care."

- "I have seen those stories where a kid kind of gets motivated, um, from an experience that they have in school, whether it is with a teacher that believes in them and pushes them or a class they discovered, you know, that they did not know they had a skill for."

In addition to authentic relationships, there was a repetition in the data that suggested that being aware of at-risk students' needs is vital to provide them with relevant opportunities and resources beyond the classroom setting. Words and phrases such as "address their actual needs," "create opportunity," and "Let them figure out what they are good at and provide those opportunities." These phrases, coupled with words such as "opportunity," "network," "support," and "community," shape the narrative towards the need for providing opportunities to students. Collectively, the data suggest that a sense of connectedness to teachers, peers, and the school environment is an essential factor to consider when supporting struggling students. Creating relationships with students allows teachers and administrators to learn how to provide meaningful learning opportunities and opportunities to engage the learning environment.

To prevent structural violence towards students, one must look at how the system satisfies students' immediate basic human needs who are leaving school. A system that does not speak to the community's needs or has education stakeholders similar to the demographics works to exclude participants from achieving economic and political equity.

Have You Seen Anything That Works Well to Prevent Students from Leaving? Structural Code: Establishing Relationships, Sense of Community and Opportunity

The collection of words and phrases that were inputted into the word bubble generator highlight the word "help" as the most frequent word highlighted in Figure 19. The next level of words includes "create" and "shape." Each word was speaking to how to prevent students from leaving school.

Figure 19

Establishing relationships

The word "help" was used by participants to describe the necessary teacher-student relationship. To provide help, participants mentioned that a relationship needs to be created to make students feel comfortable. Additionally, the word "creates" and "shape" was used to describe how teachers must be intentional about their classroom culture. Participants felt that teachers have the power to create an inclusive atmosphere where establishing relationship shape the environment.

Establishing relationships, creating a sense of community, and offering opportunities is a reoccurring theme between questions 2 and 3. Both questions refer to how to assist struggling students. All participants' data supported that establishing time in the classroom to create meaningful and supportive relationships with students is an essential factor in student success and well-being in the school environment.

Many participants use active words such as "establish," "create," "form," "shape," and "reinforce" to describe the molding process needed to prevent students from leaving the school. The data supports that the human interaction that engages a student's spirit is critical to their

success rather than just teaching to the book in the classroom. For example, a participant mentioned the importance of having conversations that touch on social-cultural issues to facilitate the classroom's inclusion process. The same participant felt that testing took away from that personalized interaction and created a more standardized engagement with students that no longer felt authentic.

Participants also said that a sense of community played a significant role in helping students to feel safe in the classroom. A sense of community also touches on a reoccurring theme of a sense of belonging. It seems that participants' stories are leaning towards making a deep connection with students to understand that they are supported and belong in an environment that can help them be successful. Adversely, when asked the following questions regarding AYP goals, teachers shared how standardized testing has taken away from having those authentic forming relationships with students, creating an environment where outros students' needs are not being met.

Do You Feel as if You Have Had to Change How You Teach Due to Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Goals and Testing Regimes?

Structural Code Four: Increased Sense of Pressure in the Classroom

The word cloud illustrated a strong emphasis on participants agreeing that AYP goals have changed teaching. Figure 20 shows a strong emphasis was placed on the word 'absolutely.' This question received an overwhelming response from all participants. The emphasis showed in the word bubble and stories shared by participants. The participants were all in agreeance that AYP impacted how they teach. Many felt it created a "rigid environments," "pressure," "takes away from exposing student," and that " life really gets put on the back burner because you're so

focused on its these kids do not do well, then it doesn't look like they learned anything in your class."

Figure 20

Increase sense of presence

The data continues to illustrate the structural violence embedded in testing regimes. Participants felt testing took away from providing students the skills, relationships, and exposure needed to feel a sense of belongingness in the classroom. While the teachers felt disillusioned by how testing has negatively impacted the classroom, they remain aware that their ability to meet their own human basic needs dependent on the test. According to the data, participants support the idea that testing regimes have changed teaching. However, the data also shows that the significant shift in teaching to the test diminishes the protective mechanism in building a strong student-teacher relationship. I isolated data based on the school environment's various relationship types to understand further how teaching to the test has impacted relationships.

Tell Me How You Feel AYP Goals Impacts Teacher/Administrative and Student

Relationships? Teacher and Student Relationship?

Structural Code: Sense of Pressure and Resentment

Based on interview data and word bubble Figure 21, AYP seems to create a sense of pressure for teachers and students. One participant shared, "There's no time for creativity for doing any other kinds of assignments that you would want to do. Everything is very structured because you want to get from point a to point." In addition, teachers feel pressured to meet district goals, which seem to trickle down how they relate and view at-risk students. However, some felt, "Um, for me, I was a bit rebellious, so I would still kinda sneak things in between pacing guide or whatever it is required of me" and "I was still trying to sneak other things in." Others also shared that some teachers reacted differently to the pressures of AYP.

Figure 21

Sense of presence and resentment

A participant shared, "So I know some of those teachers who calculate, okay, I need 10 of my 20 students to pass, or I need 50 of my 125 students to pass. Like they, they sit there and calculate like that." Others expressed how at-risk students pose a sense of threat to teachers,

"Like I know that that is not my fault either, but there are teachers who stress about the data, you know, really becomes an issue for them." The participant explains,

They start to kind of like resent the kid that scores bad, or try to get them out…You kind of start to resent the kid that is lazy or sleeping in your class because you feel like man, this kid probably going to bomb the exam and that data is going to look bad on me.

The data also showed that participants felt teachers and administrators became more rigorous with students. One participant noted, "I have heard of teachers from the beginning of the year purposely, you know, putting pressure or trying to get certain kids taken out of their class because they do not want that data showing up against them in a negative way." Other participants stated the lack of opportunity to build meaningful relationships impacts their relationships with students.

Several participants shared their concern on how the focus on data is damaging to the teacher-student relationship. One noted, "I think it causes them to have to spend less time on social-cultural issues and more time on academic issues." Another participant expressed, "You're putting most of your energy in data; you can miss things such as mental health, which we've had a huge problem with suicide and mental health at our school because you're so focused on hitting a data point." Interestingly, the participants are very keen on what is not happening in the classroom. However, as the researcher, I notice more of what is happening in the classroom's void of relationship building. Each time there is a missed opportunity for a meaningful interaction in the classroom, it leaves at-risk students susceptible to structural violence. This type of structural violence can't be reported but can be profoundly damaging to one's future. In contrast, every attempt to build a relationship provides a layer of protection from exposure to the secret pipeline from school to prison.

For example, one participant shared that she uses her school's afterschool program to build relationships with her student, "As far as the relationship with the student, I would have afterschool tutoring and, you know, hours that the system is not controlling me. So, I would still have those times where I could, you know, address students' needs and concerns". Others described me as being "bold" for focusing on the student and not the data. Based on the narratives, the focus on testing data ensues violence in the classroom as it takes away from building a community of support for students.

Administrator and Student Relationship

Structural Code: Sense of Pressure to Perform

Participants were more reserved when discussing administrator and student relationships. It became apparent that the questions were moving into an area of discomfort. However, once I reiterated the purpose of the study, many were more forthcoming with their storytelling. Word bubble Figure 22 showed that most participants were concerned about how administrators viewed at-risk students negatively impacting their data points.

Figure 22

Sense of presence to perform

A participant shared, "They do not care so much about catering to at-risk kid's family or parents, or they may be looking for a reason to get that kid out." Another participant explains instead of assisting at-risk students with their social-cultural needs,

> Instead of them counseling again, back to that social-cultural piece, they are calling in students to make sure they know how the test will be proctored on what day it will be proctored, um, what their scores are and what that means for the students.

Others share administrations use tactics to preserve the testing data,

> The FTE period, which is when we, um, basically take attendance to get credit for, um, students and, and, um, get the funding for them, um, they would start to, um, administratively, uh, take students out of school if they were of, uh, I think it is, um, 16 and above that, they can quickly, uh, disenroll the students.

> The word tactic was used several times when describing the student administrator

relationship.

> Across most of the interviews, the narrative suggests, participants felt that administrators focused more on data results rather than cultivating relationships with students. A participant described the administrator-student relationship as "Shifting from personalized to standardized." The focus on data seems to be described by participants as more of a strategic relationship to benefit their data.

> Earlier, the data showed that relationship building was a mechanism of protection from violence in the classroom. Many noted that standardized testing and meeting AYP goals make it challenging for at-risk students to stay in school. One participant described her administrators' actions as "disgusting tactics" as she recalled being a part of a discussion where students were being "filtering out to unenrolling because they wanted to keep their numbers up." Others shared

administrators would provide a false sense of compassion in an attempt to advocate for an at-risk student to leave their school, "By transferring them into something else, maybe transferring to alternative schoolwork, or maybe it is a night school, you know." These orchestrated closed-door meetings are essential to push out students to circumvent the impact of low-test data; this is an example of how the secret pipeline from school to prison was created.

Earlier, "pushout syndrome" was explained as the result of administrators pressured to meet test-based accountability measures to raise test scores, which exclude low-scoring and "problematic" students rather than addressing their educational needs (Rosborough, 2009). As a result, these pushed-out children find themselves in the secret pipeline from school to prison. In the absence of meaningful relationships and a sense of purpose, these children are exposed to violent tactics. For example, one teacher said, "I have heard of schools where the counselors keep a birthday list in the cloud, in their office. And as soon as that kid hit 16, that kid's getting called down to be counseled out into night school." Thus, these children, unaware of their educational rights, were illegally removed from their school and into the secret pipeline. Research shows they can expect a life of increased adulthood challenges (Walden & Losen, 2007). As a result, these students no longer become a threat by falling off the public-school radar and become vulnerable to the judicial system. The strained relationship between administrators and students was also apparent with teachers.

Administrator and Teacher Relationship

Structural Code Seven: Sense of Conflict and Pressure

The data revealed an apparent disconnect between the teacher and administration relationship as it relates to AYP. In the previous data, teachers expressed the importance of building relationships, whereas they feel the administration has a laser focus on meeting AYP

goals. Teachers who focus on student relationships use words as "rebellious," "sneaky," and "bold" when describing making time to build a community in their classroom. These phrases speak volumes as to how teachers view behaviors as an act of resistance toward administration.

Figure 23

Sense of conflict and pressure

Intriguingly, the teachers' data previously reported building a relationship with at-risk students is an essential factor in their classroom success. However, teachers describe their actions to build those protective measures as an act of resistance against testing regimes. Many felt conflicted about the state of how at-risk students were being treated and the need to meet their professional and family responsibilities. There also seems to be an overwhelming sense of pressure felt by teachers from the administration.

Participants used words as "hectic," "forced," "stressful," and most often, "pressured," to describe the teacher administrative relationship, which was reflected in word bubble Figure 23. Some participants shared stories of stressful AYP meetings with the administration, "I have been in meetings where, you know, teachers and administrators are arguing, teachers are in tears. Um, it, it gets pretty tense. It gets pretty hectic, um, when you are always being forced to do certain things". Based on the data, the need to show successful data has created a violent survival of the

fittest culture, starting with the administrators and trickling down to the teachers and ultimately the students. Unfortunately, the most vulnerable of students will be negatively impacted by the silent vicious cycle.

Other examples of the violent cycle of test regimes included a narrative that illustrates how data has become the catalyst for violence in the classroom. There was also a sense of fear of not meeting AYP goals. A teacher explained, "I have sat in meetings with administrators where it is a whole department of maybe 20 colleagues, and the administrator will put the data up on the board with your name and your percentage of kids passing." These tactics and the dehumanization of students into data create immense pressure and cause changes in the way students are viewed. Dehumanization of at-risk students also desensitizes the violence occurring against them.

A teacher shared how the pressure of data resulted in changing her teaching style. "I have worked at the pressure from the administration for students to pass the test was to the point where yes, uh, it, it, um, I had to curve the way I did things because if the numbers of my passing rates went down, then I would, you know, have a conversation." To evade experiencing violence, this teacher described how she had to put her own needs in front of her students to meet her own basic human needs. Additionally, a teacher mentioned, "Um, you know, there is that list during the third quarter of the year, um, that list is produced and we're already, we have to inform administrators, okay, these are the ones who will pass." The focus on testing perpetuates the administrators exposing teachers to structural violence to avoid their demise, exposing students to violence to avoid violence, and showing outbursts of violence resulting in high disciplinary rates for at-risk students. Hence the birth of the secret pipeline from school to prison. This

phenomenon provides a covert method of avoiding violence by brushing at-risk children under the rug.

One participant mentioned, "Administration does not offer the support that the teacher needs, it can cause the teacher to have like a burnout, basically," Participants attribute most of the stress to the pay for performance outcomes associated with meeting AYP goals. One stated, "Administrators, teachers that are frightened because their pay or the performance is attached to testing." The data supports testing regimes have created an adversarial relationship between teachers and administrators.

Memo Reflections

During the interviews and analysis, the purpose of memo writing was to provide opportunities to write down my thoughts, assumptions and jot down essential ideas. According to Birks and associates (2008):

> Memoing as a research technique is not restricted to the analytical phase of research. From the time a study is conceptualized, memos can help to clarify thinking on a research topic, provide a mechanism for the articulation of assumptions and subjective perspectives about the area of research, and facilitate the development of the study design. Writing of memos is not undertaken according to a predetermined schedule or system of task allocation. (p.69)

Recording my thoughts allowed me to go back to the research's preliminary stages to compare my assumptions with the findings. It also allows auditing my analytic strategy. For example, the method read to reading, reading to understand, and reading to connect process originated from how I articulated my process in my memos. I also used the memo to extract assumptions.

My assumptions focused more on high-stakes testing, but the data revealed that the most prominent violence in the classroom was the relationship and feeling of belonging. The memo also allowed me to process the subject of adultification. The adultification term was very new to me, but the experience of what that feels like was jolting. I used the memo to write down my experiences which I expressed in the writing of this dissertation.

In closing, the application of narrative analysis offered a qualitative interpretation of the data, which honored the significance of the told stories. Structural coding revealed the significance of a child feeling a sense of purpose and support in the school environment. The findings concluded that students are most influenced by their ability to seek a sense of community, establish relationships, and have a consistent learning experience. Since the school setting did not provide those connections, at-risk students sought these connections outside of the school system. The data also spoke about teachers feeling frustrated that high-stakes testing. Moreover, the data indicated that relationships influence the school environment. How high school teachers, administrators, and students experienced that relationship impacted how federal educational accountability measures influence the classroom. In chapter five, I will use these findings to provide recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This dissertation employed the conflict theorist Galtung's structural violence and Burton's basic human needs theory in conjunction with narrative analysis to better understand the narratives of high school students dealing with the testing regimes. The study used semi-structured questions to collect data from high school teachers in Broward, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach. The structural coding themes concluded that the type of relationship teachers, administrators, and students experience influenced how the federal education accountability measures impact the classroom. This concluding chapter will interpret the findings, limitations, recommendations, implications, and application of the study.

According to the research findings, the teacher-student relationship is the best protective measure against structural violence in the classroom. The power imbalance in the classroom allows the teacher to curate how students are seen and treated. However, pressures from testing regimes may trickle down to students leaving the academically at-risk or minority students vulnerable. As reported by several participants, fear of administrators breeds conflict. The conflict associated with administers and teachers avoiding consequences incites a culture of fear. As a result, the type of relationships created under the conflict of meeting accountability measures removes that protective layer associated with creating a sense of community and positive relationships. As a result, there seems to be a trending breakdown of teacher, student, and administrator relationships. Unfortunately, the most vulnerable population—academically at-risk students and Black children—suffer the most as a consequence.

Building community, offering relatable learning experiences, and providing opportunities were emerging themes for supporting struggling students. Participants often spoke about the need for students to feel connected to the education material. The data reports that creating a

curriculum that follows testing timelines prevents teachers from teaching real-world and relatable experiences that may alienate struggling students. Offering relatable information and opportunities to apply the information creates a personal connection that may satisfy the need to feel personally fulfilled by the educational experience. Burton's basic needs theory discusses the importance of having a sense of belonging and identity, and creating a curriculum that does not allow relationships, identity, and community to flourish increases conflict between stakeholders.

The findings suggest that the school needs to meet students' basic human needs, relating to high school dropout preventative measures. Meeting students' basic human needs can be done by providing opportunities for feeling a sense of belonging and identity in the school environment. Emerging themes support establishing in and outside the classroom relationships to provide students with outlets to receive support and the opportunity to satisfy unmet needs.

The most prominent interconnected theme to aiding struggling students to stay in school is the importance of establishing supportive relationships with their teachers. Interestingly, when reviewing the data that speaks to how testing regimes impact that relationship's functioning states, the data uncovers emerging themes that include teachers and administrators feeling a sense of pressure and resentfulness towards struggling students.

The data shows that establishing relatable and supportive relationships with struggling students is essential in keeping them in school. However, my data also indicates that testing regimes have created barriers to building those formative relationships due to the pressure teachers experience to meet performance goals. The data supports, the most prominent structurally violent result of testing regimes is the deterioration of meaningful teacher-student relationships. As a result, students act out or leave to satisfy their basic human needs such as purpose, identity, and safety.

Galtung's (1996) structural violence theory speaks of the violent repercussion of indirect violence. He describes structural violence as injustice and exploitation built into a social system that generates wealth for the few and poverty for many. My findings suggest that testing regimes create a violent environment that tends to withhold vital basic human needs satisfiers, forcing struggling students to be pushed out or leave in search to satisfy their needs and find personal fulfillment.

The violence towards struggling students is indicated in several ways with the interviews. For example, participants shared the pressure to meet AYP goals, leading teachers and administrators to target underperforming students to either leave a classroom or the school entirely to meet performance goals. Participants described the way struggling students are being funneled to night school as "disgusting." Furthermore, the data shows, the pressures of meeting AYP goals create a culture of tension and conflict within the relationship-building process for a teacher, administrators, and students. As the data suggested in my literature review, academically at-risk students feel the brunt of the violence enacted by testing regimes due to the inequities of power.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This research's strength was the ample amount of reputable literature available to provide a strong understanding of each phenomenon. For example, there was robust literature discussing the impact of NCLB Act policies on the education landscape. Moreover, the NCLB coupled with zero-tolerance policies showed how minorities were impacted. Additionally, there was a large body of work studying the impact of school-to-prison pipeline research. However, some phenomena had limited literature.

While previous scholars have examined the relationship between academically at-risk students being pushed out of school, few scholars have investigated the relationship between being pushed about and the silent pipeline to prison phenomenon. Similarly, I argue that research on the adultification of Black girls needs to be strengthened. Thought leaders such as Monique W. Morris, The Casey-Funded, and books such as *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood* have shed light on how society perceives Black girls. While limited, the current research was enlightening and provided great information.

Another strength of the research was being a Black female and mother researching topics that speak to my life. The relationship between the literature and my experiences as a Black girl and a woman help me understand the research better. Also, I was able to add my experience in the literature review, which can be added to stories about the Black girl's experience.

A final strength is the willingness of participants to share their stories. Participants were very forthcoming and shared many details to understand how testing regimes impact the classroom. While respondents were candid, I was mindful that my study only represented a minimal subset of the teaching population. Furthermore, there are thousands of narratives that are not included in this study. For example, the Florida Department of Education reports over 45,000 licensed, certified teachers in Broward, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach counties. My research offers a narrow perspective of teachers within the tri-county area. In addition, my findings speak to the thoughts and perspectives of those teachers being interviewed.

Conflict Culture: Lack of Relationship

The research finding shows an overwhelming theme that expressed the importance of establishing meaningful relationships with struggling students. Furthermore, many participants connected meaningful relationships to student success. The hope is that this study will encourage

educators to view the lack of relationship-building in a curriculum or school environment as an act of structural violence because it does not allow students to satisfy their sense of belonging.

Besides adding to the literature, I hope this study will help grassroots organizations strengthen their resolve towards highlighting the structural violence embedded in testing regime policies and procedures aimed predominately at academically at-risk and Black high school youth. This study's findings can be used as a literary source to accompany community narratives or policies which speak to identifying and resolving the violent underpinnings, such as the secret pipeline from school to prison and pushed-out syndrome phenomena of testing regimes. As a result, my recommendation is any school that falls under the test regime must offer opportunities within the curriculum to build relationships with children. The insertion of a relationship-building curriculum would encourage a safe and secure environment for children and teachers to build community.

Structural Violence Prevention: Opportunities for Meaningful Relationships

Indirect violence in the classroom has lasting effects. The collective research found that high school students who drop out of school fair a more tumultuous lifestyle and face significant challenges in their adulthood (McCarger, 2010; Tate, 2008; Wilson, 2014; Grodsky, 2008; Au, 2016). The public school system must evaluate how to mitigate the violence associated with the testing regime's impact in the classroom. My data maintains that the teacher-student relationship is vital to student success. Therefore, the education system must view the lack of established teacher-student relationships as structurally violent.

Based on the data, what respondents most desired was the ability and time to create those meaningful relationships with students, colleagues, and administrators. The testing regime seems to have created an environment where administrators, teachers, and students employ conflict to

meet their basic human needs. Each stakeholder exerts power and coercion to avoid the structural violent consequences of testing regimes. The literature review and research data provided insight into the most influential factors influencing stakeholders in testing regimes. According to the research, relationships seem to be the most critical factor to prevent conflict. Below I provide recommendations on mitigating the violence associated with academically at-risk and Black children lacking relationships in the classroom or school.

Structural Violence Prevention Training: Adultification of Black Youth

In the words of one participant in the study, "Authenticity is an essential factor to building relationships with students." However, how can one be authentic if they have not acknowledged unconscious biases that thrive within and structure how discipline is handled in a classroom? A teacher with unconscious or conscious bias and controlling the classroom can be extremely dangerous to minority students. Therefore, while culturally responsive training is essential, I recommend including adultification of Black children as part of the training.

The culturally responsive training should deliver clear messaging that adultification is a form of violence towards children. According to Deborah Simons at North American Association for Environmental Education:

> Cultural responsive practice is intended to ensure that all groups are benefitting equally from instruction and classroom management practices. It is often applied for race and ethnicity but should be considered whenever there is a group with poorer educational outcomes.

Evidence should show how the adultification of Black children increases their risk of being pushed out of school and into the school-to-prison pipeline. The violence prevention

training should also provide evidence that supports anti-violent remedies such as relationships and community building.

Feeling a sense of belonging to a community or classroom builds a layer of protection around children, which prevents them from falling into various pitfalls in society. The adultification of Black children must be addressed as violence and prevention training should be offered to teachers and administrators to mitigate conflicts within the education setting.

Structural Violence Prevention: Expose the Secret-Pipeline from School to Prison

This dissertation study aimed to understand how conflict within the testing regimes resulted in violence towards academically at-risk high school youths. While my research has ample information about school-to-prison literature, I found literature surrounding secret pipeline to be limited and a growing online grassroots organization working towards exposing schools' practice academically at-risk students out of the educational environment.

Peace Education Training Administrators and Teacher: View Conflict from a Needs Perspective

The conflict resolution research of John Burton clearly explains and shows a correlation between conflict and the need for humans to meet their basic human needs. Burton's framework can be further developed to introduce how administrators and teachers can resolve conflict. Instead of resorting to external disciplinary actions, there should be an option to dissect the conflict. For example, creating a basic human needs questionnaire that asks students specific questions that can help the administrator and/or teacher understand the student's needs. This checklist can be used to dismantle conflict in a way that meets the students' needs rather than moving straight to external disciplinary actions. This would allow the school system to help high school students rather than pushing them out of the system.

Review the Need for High Stakes Testing in High School

According to my research, the participants expressed that preventing students from leaving school makes them feel connected to the educational material and environment. Feeling a sense of purpose was also a powerful retention tool for students in testing regimes. Since high school is to prepare students for the workforce, I conclude that high-stakes testing—such as the FSA or ESSA—should be revised to complement the real-world needs of students and the surrounding workforce, thus mitigating the conflict surrounded the testing.

By conducting this study, I hope to shed light on how testing regimes fuel conflict in the school environment. I recommend the federal government denounce push-out tactics. Should the behavior be addressed in federal and state? Local? Or in the School setting? A grievance process should be created to capture and address this phenomenon. Since the administrator tactics can be covert, the grievance process should define characteristic behaviors used by administrators. The federal government should also create consequences for administrators who are found pushing out students. There is currently no way to address students who feel they have been pushed out of school by officials. Unfortunately, these invisible children were violated by the federal system, the local school system, school officials, and society.

Concluding Thoughts

Students who fail to thrive in the traditional testing regime academic setting have shared stories of being pushed out of schools to media outlets. From these stories, grassroots organizations began to reveal disciplinary records and statistics that showed a correlation between testing results and harmful behaviors towards struggling students in the school environment. The association piqued interest in the academic world, and researchers began to emerge studying this phenomenon.

McCargar (2011) coined the secret pipeline that described the hidden behavior behind pushing students out of school because of testing regimes. By placing a conflict analytic lens on the phenomena, this study allows the secret pipeline to be more than just behaviors and an indirect violent act towards students. My findings show that meeting a student's need to belong and feel fulfilled through meaningful relationships is key to their success in mitigating violence. A school environment that lacks opportunities for children to build meaningful relationships is violent and will bread violence until the mean for connection is met. I hope my research inspires educators and administrators to consider the violent aspect of testing regimes and make immediate changes to establish policies and violence prevention training, encouraging relationship-building with students.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Please state the county in which you teach?

2. What grade do you teach?

3. Tell me a bit about your school and classroom?

4. Based on your experience, why do you think some students leave school?

5. What's the best way to support struggling students?

6. Have you seen anything that works well to prevent students from leaving?

7. Do you feel as if you've had to change how you teach due to Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)? Goals and testing regimes?

8. Tell me how you feel AYP goals impacts teacher/administrative and student relationships?

9. Is there s question I did not asked you that I should have?