Navigating borders and transgressing boundaries: A feminist autoethnography

by

Heidi Louis

B.S., Kansas State University, 1997
M.S., Mid America Nazarene University, 2008

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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College of Education

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

In this autoethnography, I explore the intersections of my lived experiences, systemic inequity, and educational practice through the lens of critical feminism. Grounded in my encounters with the carceral system and punitive school discipline, this study examines how those experiences shape my philosophy, leadership, and commitment to restorative justice in education. Guided by three questions—how my experiences with the carceral system and punitive discipline inform my educational practice, and how my understanding of discipline evolves across the intersectional spaces of my life—I use critical reflection and narrative inquiry to analyze the personal and political dimensions of schooling and justice.

Through this process, I position myself as both researcher and subject, interrogating the carceral logics embedded in educational systems and illuminating the transformative potential of restorative approaches. My analysis reveals that growth and understanding emerge through self-examination, resistance to oppressive structures, and the reclamation of voice and agency. This study contributes to the broader discourse on educational equity by centering lived experience as a site of knowledge production and by advocating for practices rooted in empathy, relational accountability, and systemic transformation.

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Epigraph

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
- Robert Frost, 1915

Chapter 1 - There's Got to be Another Way!

Illustrative Prelude- A Day at School

Friday afternoon before a long weekend, there was a call for assistance on the walkie-talkie: an assistant principal was needed in the office. One of the assistant principals, Mr. G, read his text identifying the escalated student. He looked at me, "Would you go? He's still not talking to me," referring to Charlie, the student with the most outwardly challenging behaviors in the school of nearly 700 students. I switched places with him, giving him my lunch duty post and heading to the main office. When I arrived, one of the assistant principals, Ms. K, is standing with an older, White male teacher, looking on as Charlie is shouting that he "should've punched that ole white dude for grabbing me."

Charlie is a 14-year-old black male who exhibits characteristics of PTSD as reported by well-known author Pete Walker in his book Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving: aversion to touch, emotional flashback, hair-triggered fight response, oversensitivity to stressful situations, radical mood vacillations, just to name a few (Walker, 2014). As the restorative justice practitioner in my diverse, inner city public school, I had been cultivating a relationship with Charlie for the past two weeks. He had been kicked out of schools beginning in elementary school, had been homeless and bounced around from various family members and schools, finally being forced to go virtual after being told he couldn't come back to school in person due to threatening the principal. One on one, Charlie was thoughtful, well-spoken, wise beyond his years, observant, and personable. When triggered, however, Charlie was loud, foul-mouthed, violent (he had punched a cinder-block wall two days prior) and quick to threaten bodily harm.

In my role as restorative justice practitioner, I try to bridge the gap between where students are both developmentally and academically and where the school system expects them

to be. Teachers frequently have upwards of thirty students in a classroom at our school, the majority of whom are English language learners and below grade level. Our school district has adopted the lofty yet laudable mission of "Striving to become one of the Top 10 School Districts in the Nation" but the truth of the matter is that where we are now as a school is woefully short of that mark. Many districts in the country can relate to our struggles: students coming to school without a basic command of the English language, without supplies, without families who are capable of supporting the level of schooling they are receiving, students with emotional and mental health challenges, transient and migrant students, unhoused students, and students with special education needs. Frequently there are students who have maladaptive learned behaviors that make it difficult for them to achieve success in a large classroom of diverse learners even when they are emotionally regulated. When they become agitated, angry or otherwise overwhelmed, these students often act out which leads to them being removed from the classroom, missing instruction, falling further behind both educationally and socially, and generally finding themselves on the outside of their legal right to a free, public education.

The restorative justice practitioner is in its third year in our district, introduced to help move towards less punitive and exclusionary disciplinary practices and in conjunction with a new student code of conduct that reserves suspension as an absolute last resort. That change is proving to be very difficult both in theory and practice due to the increased stress, challenge and pressure it puts on teachers and students. In the past, Charlie would have surely been suspended for at least three days due to his expletive-laced tirade against the teacher, and peripherally the Assistant Principal (AP). And that is where I come in. In this particular instance, I took Charlie into a nearby office, removing the audience of the AP, teacher, secretary and two students, gawking in disbelief. In the office, I let Charlie tell me why he was mad and how he felt. I didn't

*correct his foul language, I didn't interrupt, I didn't debate particulars. The office walls don't go all the way to the ceiling, so his entire diatribe could still be heard right outside the door. In describing the situation to me, he wanted to show me what had transpired. He opened the door and hung from the doorframe while his audience looked on, incredulous that Charlie was speaking the way he was, at the volume he was and hanging on the doorframe all while I quietly watched. The AP said something about this being "more of a situation that she should be handling and alluded to wanting an AP to handle it," but I continued the work of making Charlie my focus. In his rant he said things like "I'm gonna f*ck that ni**a up. You can't protect him after school! Where he live? What kind of car he drive?" He got to the root of the issue, "That ni**a shouldn't have grabbed me." One of Charlie's triggers is physical touch, especially when he is escalated and particularly from adult males, the background stemming from a story that he already entrusted to me. I agreed with Charlie, that he was right. He shouldn't have been touched.*

Typically, it takes only minutes for Charlie to calm down, making him one of the easier students that I have worked with in the third decade of my career. One of the things we had been working on was returning to learning when he was calm, and he proceeded to tell me "Ok, I'm ready to go back to class," as he headed for the door. But I wouldn't let him leave, not because I didn't think he was ready, but because I didn't think the adults were ready. I have found that often, it is the adults that exacerbate students' big emotions, rather than help to regulate them. I envisioned what would happen if I let Charlie head back to class: The AP would say something like "you really need to apologize to Mr. So and So for the way you spoke to him" or "You are so disrespectful, your mom should teach you some manners" and we would be right back to where we started. Inevitably adults take these kinds of exchanges as my allowance for disruptive

or hurtful behavior rather than what it is, seeking to regulate a dysregulated, traumatized child and getting him back to learning and continuing to build the skills that he has yet to develop. So I pivot, knowing that I will need some administrative backup, and call for Mr. G to come swap places with me. I explained to Charlie that he is going to need Mr. G in his corner, and that even though he was mad at him for having called his mother a week prior, he wants and needs second chances and it would be awesome and big of him to give Mr. G a second chance too. When Mr. G walks into the room, Charlie dabs Mr. G up then goes in for a side hug. There was a glimmer of a tear in Mr. G's eye, because he knew, like I did, what a huge win this was in Charlie's progress.

But I also knew that the majority of people in our school wouldn't know that, feel that or acknowledge that. And as I left that office, I had the anxious feeling that that male teacher was looking at me disapprovingly. When I saw him later in the day, talking to a coworker and they both stopped talking as I walked by, I assumed they were talking about how behavior such as Charlie's needed to have consequences. I was struck with the ever-present dichotomy of expecting educators to have universal positive regard for our students and embracing a social justice pedagogy and the societal need of swift and stern justice and punishment.

Illustrative Prelude- Teaching in Prison

Nothing prepared me for the first time I showed up to teach my first class in prison. That is not to say that there wasn't any preparation. There was. I spent an entire Saturday in the more than century old stone building of the old prison learning the ins and outs of what the Department of Corrections (DOC) thought I needed to know to become a volunteer within the walls. The collection of individuals preparing to volunteer were a varied sort; male and female, different educational and skill-based backgrounds, ranging in age from thirties to retired folks.

What we did have in common was a desire to give back in some way in this shuttered, secretive and foreign environment. The day is now a blur but the overwhelming feeling I was left with is that of othering. I left more afraid than I had started. We watched videos individuals who were portrayed as inmates or former inmates whose goal was to scare us into seeing danger and manipulation behind every encounter. We were told never to trust, never to get too close, never to touch; a handshake could be misconstrued, never to accept or give gifts, even feedback on assignments was cautioned. The videos contained cautionary tales about the myriad ways in which incarcerated individuals were plotting and scheming to take advantage of volunteers' kindness, money, time, reputation; we were to remain on guard always.

We learned prison slang; some of which was new to me and some of which I had heard. Inside refers to life in prison, outside refers to life out of prison, a shank was a homemade knife, a celly is who you share a cell with, a dime could be a 10- year sentence, the street on the inside is the sidewalks between buildings, the streets on the outside means life before or after prison, a bid is the amount of time sentenced, the hole or seg means restrictive housing, a DR is a disciplinary referral, CO is correctional officer, Blacksuits are the internal police, call-out is the prison programming individuals can participate in, stripout is when individuals have to get naked and squat and cough, money on books means having family or friends on the outside add funds to an individual's account that he can use on food or toiletries, contraband could be anything from a ballpoint pen to illicit drugs.

There were far more terms I learned that day that I don't remember anymore, and I remember that when I shared them with my now-husband he got a laugh as he said those terms weren't used. Likewise, in the years that have passed I've learned the vernacular so that it doesn't seem foreign to me except when I see others' reactions and remember that prison

requires a code switching that only those who have done time or their families have ever had to master.

The first time I finally went to the prison to teach my current events class; I had carefully chosen an outfit. It was July and the prison was then unairconditioned and the classrooms were in a windowless basement section of the prison. At the time, sandals were not permitted, so I had chosen slip-on canvas shoes, capri pants and a flowy top as nothing could be tight or revealing and I was nervous in Kansas July and sure to sweat profusely. I parked my car in the tiny parking lot; strange at first for a place that houses literally thousands of individuals, until you realize that none of them are going anywhere and the lot is only for the comparatively few employees charged with keeping the facility functioning. I left my phone, wallet, purse, ChapStick, gum; all the usual things that I always had on me, in the car. Upon entry, I had to show my DOC-issued identification and sign in. All bags had to pass through the X-ray machine and be hand-searched by the guard on the front door duty. I too had to pass through the X-ray machine. My bag contained all my photocopied packets of news articles and a spiral notebook in which I had carefully written out my lesson plans, a handful of pens, some post-it notes and my car keys. After passing through security, that guard was done with me and gave me no further direction. I had no idea where to go or what to do next. The only other time I had actually been inside the prison walls was when I observed a friend teach her class and she had been in the medium unit, and I was slated to be in maximum. I stood for a moment trying to get my bearings and see if there was any signage that would help me know what to do next. Not so. I had to ask the front door guard, who seemed annoyed that I didn't know and that he would have to leave his post. So, he just gave verbal directions that had about a dozen steps in them all of which I

promptly forgot save for the first one; "I'll buzz you through that door then head to the next guard."

The door clicked and allowed me to pull the handle and step inside a long corridor that had offices at one end and a mechanized airlock door at the other end. One side of the hallway had windows that showed me I was walking alongside the outside edge of the "big yard" which was full of men talking, walking, running, working out and generally just living their lives. My heart was in my throat as my legs carried me forward to the airlock door. It was made of heavy four-inch-thick steel and metal-reinforced plexiglass. I could see a man inside the guard station within the airlock. I stood there stupidly not knowing how to get to the next step of the detailed instructions that had immediately left my nervous brain. It was destabilizing. I didn't know the rules. I didn't know the procedures. I didn't know the moves. I had no frame of reference, no idea what came next. My body was in a highly activated state but I sure as hell didn't want to show it. The door had a button to the right, but I didn't have to push it, the guard opened it, so I stepped through and there he was behind his steel-plexiglass reinforced cubby looking at me expectantly. For what, I surely didn't know. "ID," he barked. I held it up for him to see but that clearly wasn't what he wanted. I needed to hold it up to a scanner that had some kind of black light on it that illuminated part of the ID. "Hand," he said, to which I responded with a blank stare. Irritated, he instructed "you need your stamp." I obediently and incorrectly volunteered my left hand to his exasperated shake of his head, then my right hand which he stamped with a kind of glow in the dark ink that also illuminated under the ID scanner. After successfully passing the requisite checks, the next steel door slid open. I paused and looked back, "But I don't know where to go?" I asked tentatively. "Past the yard then take the only stairs going

down on your right." I stepped ahead and the door behind me closed and for a moment I was trapped before the final steel door in front of me opened to the outside.

I stepped forward into the late-afternoon July sun. It couldn't have been true, but I immediately felt no less than a thousand eyes on me. The prison yard was set up in a valley between the surrounding cellhouses and administrative building that I had just exited. I had to walk down a ramp and then cross a football-field sized sidewalk with fence on the left side which enclosed the yard and fence on the right side which enclosed walkways to various cellhouses. I was completely alone. I immediately regretted the bright colors I had chosen to wear, as if that was the only thing making me stand out in a sea of men; some in jeans and t-shirts, some in sweats and t-shirts, some in sweat shorts and no shirts, but all some shade of gray, blue or white. I'm sure there were guards, but my eyes didn't see them and my mind didn't register them and anyway they were outnumbered at least a hundred to one. I wanted to disappear, melt, become invisible. So, the next best thing was just to carry on like this was no big deal. I've been a minority before, I told myself, remembering the two-plus years I lived and worked in the Philippines as a Peace Corps Volunteer. I walked with my eyes ahead, quickly but not too quickly, trying to register my surroundings but not to make eye contact. Desperately trying to ignore the "hey pretty lady," "hey girl," "hey mama," "hey, yo, you got a man?" and whistling and catcalls that amazingly I would come to not only not notice but to not find threatening.

When I finally reached the end of the impossibly long sidewalk that thankfully had provided me ample time to scope out the only set of stairs on my right that went down, I walked with what I hoped looked to be confidence and purpose down to the education building. In the dim basement light, I was greeted by an employee that I would come to know as the education specialist who again looked at my ID and took me back to the room where I was to teach. The

set-up was a small foyer area surrounded by 4-5 classrooms, mine was to be the middle one straight ahead. It was stiflingly hot, with fans but no windows with any fresh air. In our cramped room, we had three cinderblock walls, one wall of windows that opened to the foyer and had two long, rectangular tables, a handful of chairs. While I don't remember exactly how many students I had at the first class or exactly who they all were I was struck for the first time with the shocking polarity of prison experience. I had come into my first class with trepidation and wariness which is unlike me as I generally have a positive outlook and a trusting nature even more so when it comes to my role as an educator. I believe that learning is built on relationship, and relationship is built on mutual trust. My class was small and intimate and immediately comfortable. The guys were open, incredibly respectful and grateful to me and for the experience and immediately called me Miss Heidi, though I was older than many of them. They were eager and willing learners and quick to participate by reading aloud and offering insight through answering questions or opinions and ideas for future topics and reading in which they had interest. While I could tell that some of the guys weren't really friends with each other, they were cordial and respectful to each other. My first hour and a half class with them blew so many expectations and stereotypes away. Before becoming a volunteer teacher inside prison, I had never, that I know of, met anyone who had been in prison, maybe spent some time in jail, but not prison. Society, media, stereotypes and even the training I received had all combined to form this pariah that was ignorant, surly, uneducated, coarse and frankly beneath me. As my decades as an educator have taught me, relationship is key to learning and growing and while I certainly understand and now have lived some of the situations that the DOC was cautioning about and against, the othering, and vilifying serves to dehumanize, destabilize, stagnate and ultimately remind incarcerated individuals of their lowly place in institutionalized life.

Introduction

The first vignette illustrates my personal experience as a restorative-minded educator operating within systems with restorative claims and even policies yet staffed with individuals who practice from a punitive minded paradigm. Teaching is a challenging profession. That has arguably always been the case but teaching in recent years has educators leaving the profession in droves due to the changing landscape of student behaviors (Stevenson et al., 2020). More than ever students are exhibiting behaviors that a generation or two previously teachers would never have imagined being part of their day-to-day job as educators; lack of interest, cursing out teachers, threats of violence, drug use and sale at school, power struggles, chronic absences. In my first decade as an educator in Title I schools, I was cognizant and more focused on how challenging teaching was for me. I lost sleep over large class sizes, student behaviors that created a chaotic classroom, the number of below-grade-level readers I had and the daunting task of catching them up to grade level. I worried about negative peer interactions and how they would impact my classroom. While my focus was on the students in my classroom, I was still overly preoccupied with how the educational environment was affecting me; how student behaviors, attendance, test scores, reading abilities impacted my mood, my emotions, my day.

As I moved into my second and now third decade as an educator, perspective and lived experiences shifted my focus from myself and a myopic view of a student, classroom and school to a much broader view of how each individual learning experience in school shapes a student's view of themself as a learner and a person. I began to realize I had a deficit-view of students, mostly students who were challenging, and began to teach in more skill-building, child-centered ways which in turn decreased resistance and increased participation and buy-in which in turn

decreased challenging behaviors and helped build positive relationships (J. A. Smith & Quick, 2023).

The second vignette illustrates what was initially a harrowing frightening experience which ultimately served to broaden my worldview, educate me about a whole cross section of people and life I had never known and challenge me both personally in my humanity and view of people and professionally as an educator. Teaching in prison showed me a fast forward into what so many of my students' lives could or even have become and revealed to me how I had and have been a sometimes-complicit agent of that trajectory. Finally, my experiences as an educator in prison and later as the wife of an incarcerated individual broaden my understanding about the school to prison pipeline, the damaging impacts of punitive discipline and the sad comparisons and likenesses of the American educational and carceral systems.

Background

About a decade into my career, I began seeing what educators are finding; that traditional punitive methods of behavior management that they were accustomed to as students and even may have learned in teacher training programs are wholly ineffective and even may exacerbate behaviors making teaching and learning all but impossible (Stevenson et al., 2020). Punishment does not teach missing or lagging skills (Greene, 2008) and reinforces a failure identity and the more educators use it, the more children identify as someone who needs it thus seeing authority figures as responsible for making them behave rather than taking responsibility for their own behavior as a matter of choice (Markham, 2019). While myriad research exists about alternative discipline and restorative practices, the continued reality is that many of our educational system's most vulnerable students are pushed out of public education either through expulsion, dropout, or credit deficiency and lack of a path to graduation (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Skiba &

Losen, 2016; Sumner et al., 2010). In the last decade, I have taught a number of students who were actively forced out of public education. Administration sought to prove they lived out of district, amassed suspensions resulting in long term suspension, alternate placement or expulsion. The reality is that school systems use progressive rhetoric like 'trauma informed' and 'restorative practices' and though some teachers may operate with those frameworks in mind, the overall system runs as punitively as ever with little regard to the students harmed by the system itself and undermines the efforts of individuals seeking to operate in student-centered ways (Brummer, 2021; Hopkins, 2012).

Research shows that implementing restorative practices in lieu of more punitive and exclusionary discipline practices decreases subsequent suspensions (Mansfield et al., 2018) and even improves teacher attitudes on implementation of restorative practices. Studies have generalized the impact and positive effects of restorative practices on school discipline (Joseph et al., 2021), and district discipline and yet if not fully implemented school-wide these holistic and relationship-based ideals are moot and school systems will continue to criminalize student misbehavior in ways that mirror and prep students for the criminal justice system (Hirschfield, 2008)

As I began to focus less on what educating students was like for me and more on what it was like for them, I listened to students' stories, their pain, their challenges and their goals. I was inundated with the trauma that students bring to school. The impacts of trauma can alter brain development impacting attention, decision-making, learning and response to stress (Brummer, 2021; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; Middlebrooks & Audage, 2008). The original ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) study was initiated in the late 1990s and examined data from 17,337 adults who were asked a series of ten questions about adverse

childhood experiences (physical, psychological, and social) (Brummer, 2021; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). The Center for Disease Control in conjunction with Kaiser then published the study on ACES which ranges from an ACE score of 0 to a maximum of 10 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Although ACES are not uncommon; about 64% of U.S. adults reported they had experienced at least one type of ACE before age 18. Nearly one in six (17.3%) reported they had experienced four or more types of ACEs. For some students who struggle with trauma and toxic stress, the violence of punishment, exclusion and shame at school is yet another trauma (Brummer, 2021; Gorski, 2016).

The promise of a free and appropriate compulsory public education has long been the path to the proverbial American Dream (Opportunity, Responsibility and Security: A Consensus Plan for Reducing Poverty and Restoring the American Dream, 2015). The idea that education is the upward social mobility vehicle to propel oneself from the bottom is fraught with barriers that reveal a cruel reality that many experience: the school to prison pipeline. Research has addressed the link between suspensions and involvement in the juvenile and criminal justice system (Kim et al., 2010; Losen & Martinez, 2020; Losen & Whitaker, 2017; Novak, 2019). Students get a label as a 'troublemaker' and that follows them from school to school. This label becomes internalized and creates a self-fulfilling prophecy wherein both the prevalence and the severity of the misbehavior increases (Markham, 2019; Matsueda, 1992). Additionally, schools that favor exclusionary discipline begin to mirror the type of decline that families and communities experience with mass incarceration (Perry & Morris, 2014) and non-suspended students are negatively impacted in schools where exclusionary discipline is the norm. Current policies exacerbate the risk of students being suspended, expelled, and/or arrested at school and the school to prison pipeline is not random as it disproportionately impacts the poor, students with

disabilities, and youth of color (Heitzeg, 2009), all of which I have personally witnessed as an educator and propel me forward to progress and change.

I contend that with few exceptions, very few doctoral students and even fewer ensconced in the word of academia have anything more than a cursory knowledge of the prison world. That fact is tragic and privileged considering that nearly 1 out of every 100 Americans, some 1.2 million adults, is incarcerated which is a 2% increase from 2021 (Prison Policy Initiative, 2022) while over 5 million Americans are under some kind of supervision by the criminal legal system (Nellis, 2024). The average middle class American knowledge of prison is likely from sensationalized true-crime television, song lyrics and "locked-up" type shows. This was the extent of my knowledge until 2017, when I decided to become a volunteer educator within the Department of Corrections. Incarceration has broad impacts outside of the carceral institution itself. In the United States, one in twenty people can expect to be incarcerated (Prison Policy Initiative, 2022) at some point in their lifetime and incarceration impacts the families and communities of the incarcerated (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2016) the ripple effect on educational institutions that serve those families and communities is vast.

In 2018 I was teaching a current events course at a maximum-security unit in a state prison and had one of those amazing moments as an educator when I saw a student's face light up with pride and recognition.

> *Nine months ago, this individual wasn't confident to read more than a paragraph in class. He didn't know place value so couldn't read numbers. Tonight, he read a page and a half from the Atlantic. When he finished, I commented on how well he did- even on the word "aristocracy." He nods, smiling and proud. "Ya, but Miss Heidi, this is a long-ass mu-fuckin article." (Journal, 2018)*

The man who read the aforementioned Atlantic article was then 21-year-old "Ronald" who was one year into a 25-year minimum bid for robbery. Ronald, like most in the class, was kicked out of various schools at all levels and did not graduate. I expect for most academic readers, Ronald's statement is met with disbelief on numerous levels: lack of education, vernacular, unexpected sense of pride. Scenarios like this repeated themselves week after week in my class.

Rationale for this study

This study is deeply personal for me not only because I am passionate about my work, but also because my husband and his two brothers are incarcerated. They too were once students in public schools in the state of Kansas. I am uniquely qualified and situated to see what the future for some of my students may well be. My husband has an ACE score of 10. School should have been a haven for him and his brothers. Instead, it was a source of ridicule, judgment and further marginalization. There is a great amount of quantitative data (Abu-Jamal, 2014; González, 2012; Heitzeg, 2009; Hirschfield, 2008; Kim et al., 2010; Novak, 2019) on the school to prison pipeline, statistics, graduation rates, recidivism rates, causality and the like. There is also research on formerly incarcerated individuals and their general carceral experiences (Abu-Jamal, 2014; Davis et al., 2013; Heitzeg, 2009). There is a lack of research on current inmates and their past and present-day experiences with punitive discipline. Prison is structurally punitive overall as well as in daily practice where physical comfort, telephone calls with loved ones, even contact with other human beings become currency that can be stripped away in the name of discipline, safety, security. My experiences with the carceral system have shaped my practices as an educator and have valuable implications for educational practice.

What could my husband and his brothers' lives have been like if school had been different? If they had had a relationship with a caring adult? If nearly all their educators had not viewed them with a deficit ideology; labeling them as troubled, deviant, writing them off, suspending them, expelling them? I assumed my education was somewhat normal, maybe somewhat above average. I loved school, I worked hard, I didn't get in any major trouble, I knew that if I asked for help, I would get it, if I got in trouble, I could likely get out of it or mitigate it in some way. Hearing my husband and his brothers' stories of school I just couldn't believe it. Not only were the stories shocking and heart-breaking, but they were illegal. They had zero trust in or value of education. They questioned and feared educational authority, then authority in general from a very young age. I realized that my education was definitely above average but also that my privilege provided me with an additional benefit.

These stories of young boys pushed out of their education, now men in prison have value. They are not student numbers, Department of Corrections (DOC) numbers, statistics. They are humans who did not have access to a free appropriate public education that is often took taken for granted. When we can put names and faces to injustices in our midst, we acknowledge them, see the errors in policy and practice, we can change them. There is research on effective ways to change the future for these children and adolescents. It is possible to dismantle the school to prison pipeline without decreasing school or community safety. There are evidence-based practices and policy changes to move away from punitive toward rehabilitative paradigms in the schools (Muschert et al., 2014). In some states and jurisdictions there have been significant changes, modifications to policies, and consequently much improved outcomes for these disenfranchised children and adolescents (Davis et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Educators have a responsibility to work within these systems and practices

and to identify and become educated on problems in their local schools and communities, identify what needs to be changed, and lead the way to help turn the focus to inclusion, education and rehabilitation of these young people and not exclusion from their educational rights. We can do better.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study is how punitive discipline, particularly exclusionary discipline in American public schools, is damaging to individual students, families, schools and broader communities (Losen & Martinez, 2020; Losen & Whitaker, 2017; Markham, 2019; Perry & Morris, 2014; Skiba & Losen, 2016). This type of discipline not only is not effective in deterring unwanted behavior, but the negative effects also far outweigh any perception of its effectiveness (Losen & Martinez, 2020). Most troubling is that exclusionary discipline is most prevalent in urban schools composed of Black and Brown students who already face systemic inequities compounded by the over-punishing and over-policing in their fundamental right to a free and appropriate public education (Fadus et al., 2021).

The school-to-prison pipeline is a well-researched phenomenon in which students are tracked at an early age from school to incarceration and sometimes without even having finished schooling. Educators thus unwittingly find themselves as cogs in the wheel of the school-to-prison pipeline, unwittingly part of the very outcome they profess to educate their students away from. America's carceral systems are disproportionately full of individuals who had little success in school, experienced exclusionary discipline practices and entered the justice system, often straight from the school system. Once inside that carceral system these individuals' education often does not progress, even after having been stunted upon entry (Hirschfield, 2010; Nellis,

2024; Prison Policy Initiative, 2022). They are once again over-punished, under-educated, not rehabilitated and languishing behind the walls of a broken system.

Restorative practices moves society away from a system of retributive justice, an eye for an eye (Zehr, 2016) towards a system that views laws and rules as a means through which to serve individuals and society and encourage relationships and relational culture rather than protecting the status quo (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Restorative practices in education as intended to bring together stakeholders to resolve issues while at the same time building relationships rather than controlling student behavior through punitive and often exclusionary measures (González, 2012). This requires a paradigm switch from the traditional authoritative approach that seeks to remove students in both body and voice from the decision-making process and educational justice process which is rigid and reactive and "reinforces social control and education as compliance" (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012, p.145)

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this autoethnography is to explore my experience and sense making as an educator whose personal and professional lives intertwine with tensions associated with punitive and restorative discipline practices.

Research Questions

The research questions used to guide my study were:

1) How do my experiences with the carceral system inform my educational practice?
2) How do my experiences with punitive discipline in the school system inform my educational practice?

3) How does my understanding of punitive discipline change and grow as I move through the intersectional spaces of my life?

Theoretical Framework

Critical feminist theory was used as a lens through which to view and analyze my lived experiences. Feminist theorist and scholar bell hooks insists that feminism is a revolutionary movement in which education and is central to vital change in that it "increases that person's capacity to think for herself, to go against the norms of the culture, and to conceive of alternatives for society-all of which are fundamental to acting politically" (hooks, 1984, p.107). Critical feminist theory builds on this idea and implores us to examine and reconsider our current understandings of knowledge, power, and spaces of empowerment. It offers myriad ways to think about disrupting systems, question hegemonic understandings of oppression, while also evaluating methods and forms of resistance within societal structures (de Saxe, 2012). Further, critical feminist theory helps to scrutinize the varied and nuanced struggles faced by marginalized individuals in terms of material conditions, ideological constructs, power relations, and a transformative future (Zhu, 2023). As this study will show, those negatively impacted by either or both American educational and carceral systems are individuals who are intersectionally marginalized.

Research Design

Informed by critical feminist theory, I used an autoethnographic approach to tell my story as an educator in various settings and as the wife of an incarcerated individual. Ettorre (2017) discusses feelings as powerful assets that compel analysis and consciousness raising. That consciousness raising is a crucial revolutionary practice in which the personal becomes political.

Women's stories are not only political but also grounded in community (Johnson-Bailey, 2003). My lived experiences as an educator, as a woman and wife aligned with these feminist ideals and explained the increasing frustration and even rage, I felt as I realized my complicitness in this punitive educational paradigm.

Critical feminism pairs well with autoethnography. Critical feminists encourage unveiling and critiquing of the many elements of patriarchy: misogyny, racism, classism, heteronormativity and ablism to name a few (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Autoethnographers take the personal and make it political (Ellis et al., 2011) while taking "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (p. 273). Autoethnographers aim to "uncover, if not upset, the normative, hegemonic and prevailing ways we analyze human relationships as academics" (Ettorre, 2017) and so through my research, I share my experiences and my interactions with others along my journey in hopes of illuminating the damaging impacts that educators can inadvertently participate in by continuing to participate in and subscribe to punitive, exclusionary disciplinary practices.

In this study, the data were collected through a combination of personal documents, such as my beginning teaching philosophy, lesson plans, emails, Facebook posts, journals, and voice memos. The analysis involved exploring critical moments in my journey as an educator.

Significance of the Research

In my teacher preparation program and even in the 20+ subsequent years of professional development and individual reading that I did on classroom management and student discipline, the focus was always on the atmosphere of my classroom; how to make it run smoothly, how to minimize disruptions, and how to streamline procedures. While I considered myself a reflective

practitioner, my reflections were still self-focused on how I was growing and adapting as an educator. As my focus began to shift outward, seeing the impact of discipline and classroom management techniques on students, it completely upended the way I believed and later practiced. The value of this work is that other educators may consider discipline, classroom management and even pedagogy they believed as tried and true and view it through the lens of impact on the student's future. Articulating my experiences through autoethnography can be valuable to educators seeking to examine and understand the nuanced interpretations and applications as they grapple with the coexistence of their own lived experiences as they intersect with those of their students.

It is my hope that instead of being viewed as naval-gazing, this autoethnography in which I deconstruct and critically examine my own experiences, can add a unique and needed perspective into the ways that individual educators interpret and carry out student discipline, how continued punitive and exclusionary practices damage and further marginalize students and ultimately perpetuate the school to prison pipeline.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research

The limitations to my research include possible researcher bias and using the stories of and experiences based upon only individuals with whom I have come in contac.t. My lived experiences have led me to be very critical of both educational and carceral systems which could cloud the way that I interpret and retell my experiences about and within those systems. The students and incarcerated individuals I have worked with is certainly not representative as I have taught only in public schools in suburban and urban areas with higher-than-average concentrations of students receiving free and reduced lunch. I have no experience teaching in private, parochial or wealthy schools. I have only worked with and instructed within Kansas

prisons and more specifically only within the maximum-security unit. It is my intent to address these limitations by acknowledging them.

To generalize this autoethnography would be an unreasoned application of this research and furthermore is antithetical to my intent. To view the inability to generalize or categorize this work as a limitation is ignoring the power autoethnography has in opening spaces for *what* research is and *who* can do research. My hope, instead, is to engender a level of cognitive dissonance in readers that shatters the tendency to generalize and highlights contradictions, injustices and inequities in education and carceral systems.

Throughout my professional career, I have become aware of my various and often seemingly contradictory identities that exist in borderlands where I have found myself alone. I have yet to meet another middle class, White female educator working in restorative justice and pursuing a doctorate while married to a non-white incarcerated man. Therefore, this work should not be read as something to be generalized but rather an attempt to deconstruct those generalizations.

Operational Definitions

Adverse childhood experiences or ACEs- The potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021)

Exclusionary discipline- Discipline option that mandates a student be excluded from school (N. Heitzeg, 2014)

Expulsion- The permanent removal of a student from the learning setting (Heitzeg, 2014)

Punitive Discipline- The punishment that focuses on harm-doer, seeks to take desirable things away from an individual as a means to deter future misbehavior (Heitzeg, 2014)

Restorative Justice- A process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible (Zehr, 2016)

Restorative Practices- the processes of working with conflict that puts the focus on repairing the harm that has been done (Zehr, 2016)

School to Prison Pipeline- The school to prison pipeline refers to this growing pattern of tracking students out of educational institutions, primarily via ―zero tolerance policies, and , directly and/or indirectly, into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems (Heitzeg, 2009)

Suspension- The temporary removal of a student from the learning setting (N. Heitzeg, 2014)

Trauma Informed/Trauma Responsive- understanding, anticipating, and responding to issues, expectations, and special needs that are often present in survivors of trauma and adopting that response to all (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016)

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I problematized my experience with punitive discipline through a vignette that illustrates the disconnect between the intention and impact of discipline for some students in some schools. This negative impact can have various consequences on students in the future including becoming enmeshed in the school to prison pipeline. I identified the purpose of my research as an autoethnography in which I explore and make sense of my personal and professional experience with punitive and restorative discipline practices in educational and carceral settings to answer the questions: 1) How do my experiences with the carceral system inform my educational practice? 2) How do my experiences with the punitive discipline in the

school system inform my educational practice? 3) How does my understanding of punitive discipline change and grow as I move through the intersectional spaces of my life?

In the following chapters, I will review the data, examine and articulate qualitative inquiry, autoethnography and critical feminism as methods for answering my research questions.

Chapter 2 - And How are the Children?

"Jails and prisons are the complement of schools; so many less as you have of the latter, so many more you must have of the former."- Horace Mann

The American educational system and the American carceral system are two enormous bureaucracies at both the state and national level. The educational system is one in which nearly every American has contact with for the majority of his or her life. While the same cannot be said about the carceral system, due to the sheer size of the system and number of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals in the United States, it is still a system that most Americans will have some contact with during their lifetime. In addition to the scope of both systems, they are also inextricably linked not only by a phenomenon called The School to Prison Pipeline, but also by the pervasiveness of punitive disciplinary measures.

Organization of the Chapter

This review of literature consists of two main sections: the United States Prison system and the United States Educational system. Within the section on prisons, the educational attainment prior to incarceration and while incarcerated is examined. This is followed by a brief history of incarceration trends and models in the United States leading first from a rehabilitation paradigm then into a retributive paradigm which has shaped the current landscape of incarceration. The tough on crime policies of the mid to late 1900's led the country into an era of mass incarceration acting as a punishment for wrongdoing, but often the prison sentence itself is only part of the punishment that incarcerated individuals face inside the walls. Finally, incarceration impacts subsections of the United States in disparate ways but leaves broad, long-lasting impacts in its wake. The literature review then transitions into an analysis of the United

States educational system first by examining the school to prison pipeline as a phenomenon and the remarkable likeness that some schools share with prisons. This is followed by a brief history of legislation that impacted perception of threat and thereby increasingly punitive discipline in schools. Stemming from increased public fear in concert with new legislation mirroring much of what was happening in broader society and the criminal justice system, schools began to introduce the School Resource Officer (SRO) and adopt zero-tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline practices inside many schools. These policies and practices not only failed in making schools more academically productive or safe, but had disparate negative effects on subgroups of students, often pushing them into the juvenile justice system. Finally, the literature looks at restorative practices and other alternative discipline practices that are beginning to see some success within the school system and how this impacts educational leadership.

Education on the Inside

This section examines the below-average educational attainment of individuals as they enter the American carceral system. Once incarcerated, individuals can expect to remain undereducated when compared to the free population. This undereducation is the result of policies and programs that create barriers keeping incarcerated individuals from accessing educational programming.

Education Entering the Walls

The American education system has been inundated with high-stakes testing for the better part of the last two decades (Wise, 2010) and this high stakes testing places schools under intense pressure. This pressure often leads schools, particularly high schools to create conditions that make school an unlikely choice for failing students as Wise (2010) further contends:

High-stakes testing has also created incentives for schools to push lower-achieving students out, rather than keep them in schools, attempt to educate them and suffer the possible penalty if they fail, in terms of meeting testing requirements. In Chicago, for instance, schools have been expelling low achieving students even by the age of 16, under the pretense that their academic achievement or attendance records make it unlikely that they would graduate by the age of 21. Rather than resolve to educate such students- almost all of whom are students of color- the schools give up, remove the students and thus boost their test-score profile as a result, with blacks banished from the schools at three times the rates of Whites or Latinos (Wise, 2010).

For those pushed out of school, what kind of life is there for them *except* street life?

This not uncommon practice has created an educational desert as Mumia Abu-Jamal (2014) writes in Behind the Walls, of his conversation with an incarcerated individual who asked him who Martin Luther King was and if he was a rapper…. "for any veteran of these American gulags, anyone who has dwelled in places such as this for any significant period of time, s/he knows that conversations such as these are more common than seaweed on the seashore" (Abu-Jamal, 2014, p.109). Abu-Jamal contends that no one should be surprised at the lagging levels of education of incarcerated individuals within the carceral system given the abysmal state of American education, specifically in the nation's communities of color. He further wonders whether the United States education system was designed to be an informal "feeder system" to the vast United States prison system. Some would surely argue that that is too far a leap, but those who disagree likely don't experience the seedy underbelly of the dregs of the American education system (Abu-Jamal, 2014).

Education Behind the Walls

Each of the 50 states in the United States of America has a Department of Corrections, implying that inherent in incarceration, one could expect to be corrected. The sad fact is that is by far the exception rather than the rule. According to the US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics in 2014, almost three in five incarcerated adults (58 %) completed no further formal education beyond the level they had on their entry to prison, and about one in five (21 %) obtained a high school credential during their current period of incarceration (*Prisons Report Series*, 2024). Basic and remedial education is available in all United States in both state and federal prison systems through high school equivalency and special education courses. The reality is that, depending on the state, anywhere from 20% to 80% of incarcerated individuals (*Louisiana Department of Corrections*, 2019) do not have a high school diploma or its equivalency (Dewey et al., 2020). There is a glaring discrepancy in these two facts. The majority of incarcerated individuals do not complete further education while incarcerated despite the fact that education programs are provided in all state and federal carceral institutions. Additionally, assuming a conservative middle ground of 60% (halfway between 20 and 80%) of incarcerated individuals do not have a high school diploma, and then half again of those individuals never advance their education. Those statistics combined with the fact that 95% of incarcerated individuals will leave prison and rejoin society (Eisenberg, 2020) makes those individuals' futures bleak.

The research overwhelmingly shows that education, specifically higher education, is the ticket to upward mobility (Davis et al., 2013; Hobby et al., 2019) in that it reduces recidivism, increases chances for employment and even improves prison climate and culture. Dr. Bahiyyah Muhammad of Howard University, provides access to postsecondary coursework in the adult

system at the DC jail, the DC correctional treatment facility, and the District of Columbia (DC) correctional detention facility but states that incarcerated individuals have to "jump through the hoops of the ivory tower" to access the programming (Taylor et al., 2021, p.591). Jumping through hoops is particularly troublesome when data from the US Department of Education survey of incarcerated adults indicated that while only 21% of prisoners were studying for a formal degree or certificate, 70% of incarcerated adults reported that they wanted to enroll in an academic class or program (*Prisons Report Series*, 2024). The programs exist. The desire to access them exists, yet the actual enrollment in those educational programs does not.

In December 2020, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Simplification Act passed (*Federal Student Aid an Office of the Department of Education*, 2024), which included the restoration of Pell Grants for students incarcerated in federal or state penal institutions. This new legislation reversed the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act signed by former President Bill Clinton, which had banned incarcerated individuals from accessing Pell grants to obtain a college degree while in prison (Taylor et al., 2021). This is important and needed legislation making higher education a possibility for incarcerated individuals.

However, gatekeeping by various institutions, policies and prisons continues to create and maintain barriers making these programs only for a privileged few (Taylor et al., 2021). Colleges and universities have to first be a part of the grant initiative, help students fill out the FAFSA, partner with state or federal prisons, find staff to teach inside the prisons, navigate the many restrictions placed upon them by state Department of Corrections and Federal Bureau of Prisons (Taylor et al., 2021). Navigating the education of incarcerated individuals within a prison setting is challenging at best (Hobby et al., 2019; McBeath, 2023). Correctional facilities

themselves also place limits on who can enroll in higher education even if the individual has met university requirements (Bacon et al., 2020). For example, some facilities require that students have not had disciplinary infractions in the last 90 days, before starting the class. Facilities also assess students' sentence length and conviction- if an individual has a long sentence or a violent crime, he or she may be ineligible by facility standard (Taylor et al., 2021).

A History of Incarceration

This section provides a brief historical sketch of the U.S. prison system and the philosophical underpinnings that have shaped both legislative and prison policy. As the nation and its values and morality have changed and evolved, so has the meaning of 'pursuit of justice' and treatment of those convicted of crimes.

A Nation's First Prisons

Punishing wrong-doers has been a job of communities dating back to the colonies forming of the United States. The definition of crime was vague, broad reaching and variable depending on time and location (Ristroph, 2019). There were crimes of morality such as not attending church, regulatory offenses such as tax collection, but generally public order offenses such as drunkenness and vagrancy were the majority of crimes with violent crimes being quite rare (Ristroph, 2019). Carceral institutions of the time were jails generally used for housing individuals for short amounts of time during which governing bodies decided how to punish them, and held a wide variety of individuals: vagrants, orphans, debtors and prostitutes. Jail was more of a holding tank while the individual awaited the real punishment which was corporal or capital (Miller, 2022).

The first actual prison is the Massachusetts state prison that opened in 1785, just after the American Revolution. Then came Connecticut in 1790 and Pennsylvania in 1794. Those were

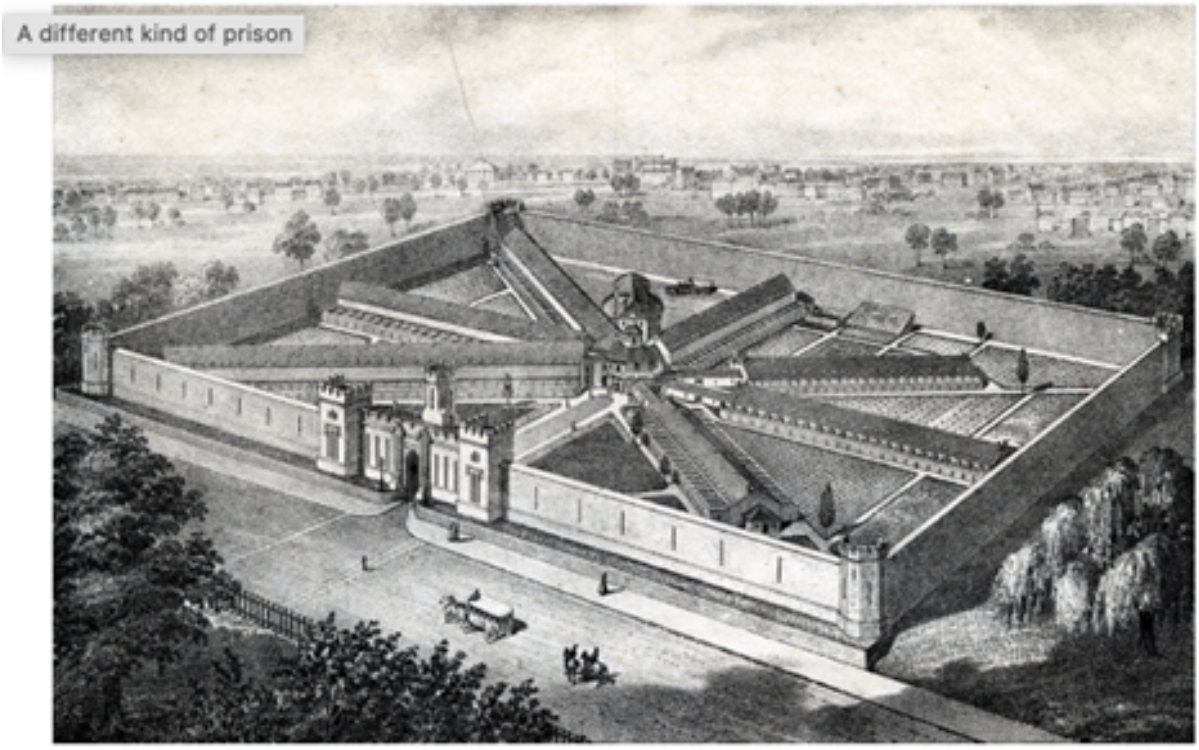
the first three state prisons in the "new world" (Miller, 2022). The prevailing thought at the time was that capital punishment and torture was inhumane and that perhaps incarceration would be a deterrent to crime. Furthermore, removing individuals from a crime-ridden environment was thought to be an improvement for both individuals and communities. The nation's first prisons all involved some kind of labor, but frequently involved education as well, typically religious-based (Miller, 2022). Reformers at the time believed in education while incarcerated and William Rogers, a reformer of his time and a religious man, believed there would be a significant benefit to teaching inmates to read. The beginning of any type of education while incarcerated can be traced back to Rogers in Pennsylvania (Teeters, 1994).

Competing Models

Immediately following the Revolutionary War, states began assuming responsibility for the punishment of felons, whose crimes were considered more serious, in contrast to the misdemeanors and lesser offenders whose correction was left to local governments (Rafter, 1985). As the American penal system became more codified, municipalities and states often lacked the resources to enforce the myriad codes due to policing apparatuses that largely consisted of volunteers, conscripts or constables (Rafter, 1985). There were wide-ranging beliefs, practices and even structure on the purpose of prisons, what they should look like and how they should function. Some were dormitory-style such as the Auburn State Prison in New York, others were solitary style, like the Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia in which prisoners had their own cell with a door that opened out into individual private yards. (Miller, 2022). Eastern State Penitentiary was influenced by Quakers and predicated on ideas about penitence as a basis for moral reformation (hence "penitentiaries") and it caught the attention of Reformers elsewhere (Tonry, 2022). Among many others, Alexis de Tocqueville, Charles Dickens, Frances

Trollope, and Hans Christian Anderson traveled to America to see the Penitentiary in person (Tonry, 2022). Figure 1 shows Eastern State Penitentiary, which was designed to hold only 300 individuals but before closing in the 1920s held over 2000 (Tonry, 2022). The reform-minded design fell from favor largely due to the amount of physical space it required for relatively few inmates and the lack of any lucrative product or service that was manufactured by inmates.

Figure 1Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia depicting a model based on solitary space intended for penitence and moral reflection.



Note: Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site https://www.easternstate.org/

Eventually the Auburn style won out due to being more cost efficient, space efficient, and more profitable with prisoners able to leave cells to work and manufacture products that could be sold for profit. Figure 2 depicts a workshop that allowed inmates to produce goods that provided

revenue. This type of design took up much less space and could accommodate far more inmates. By the 1850's, every state had adopted the Auburn style except Pennsylvania (Miller, 2022).

Figure 2 Image depicting workshop labor enabled by Auburn style prison model.

Note: https://www.correctionhistory.org/auburn&osborne/brochure6.htm

In 1870, the first national meeting of prison administrators and reformers convened, and it was decided prisons should treat rather than punish. Inmates ought to be offered educational, vocational, and recreational programs. Sentences should be indeterminate, so that prisoners would have an incentive for good behavior (Rafter, 1985). The sentencing guidelines of today that outline mandatory minimum sentences did not come about until well into the twentieth

century. In the early days, sentences were only a few years long. There were no long sentences and certainly no life sentences. The longest sentences averaged eight to 12 years (Miller, 2022). The rehabilitative prison, the reformatory, probation, parole, the juvenile court; individualization as a method and an aspiration—all evolved in the second half of the nineteenth century (Rothman, 1980) and most Western countries followed suit. Between the early 1930s and 1975, both state and the federal governments utilized an indeterminate sentencing system in which punishments were individualized and based upon offenders' circumstances and characteristics. Parole boards, rather than grid-systems or mandated systems, determined sentence lengths (Rothman, 1980).

From Rehabilitation to Retribution

In the 1970's rehabilitation fell from favor in the United States while get-tough mantras began to resonate with a more fearful public (Rothman, 1980). During this time few people questioned the desirability of indeterminate sentencing but within a few short years the case—and support—for indeterminate sentencing collapsed. University of Chicago law professor Albert Alschuler (1978) described what he saw "that I and many other academics adhered in large part to a reformative viewpoint only a decade or so ago seems almost incredible to most of us today" (p.552). Critics began to decry leniency, lawlessness, law without order, and there was even agreement between liberals and conservatives on harsher sentencing and abolition of parole for some crimes (Travis et al., 2014).

By the mid 1970s and early 1980s every state and the federal government developed sentencing guidelines systems, enacted entirely new sentencing laws, many jurisdictions abolished parole release, and some did all three (Tonry, 2022). During this time, sentencing guidelines were initially developed to reduce disparities in sentencing and make sentencing more

predictable and consistent. By the mid 1990's, however, this, too, fell from favor and was replaced by sentencing guidelines that emphasized certainty, severity, crime prevention, and symbolic denunciation of criminals (Travis et al., 2014). According to Travis (2014), this de-emphasis on rehabilitative measures coincided with decreased spending on services and personnel which provided services and programs inside prisons which in turn led to diminished quality of life of incarcerated individuals.

Simultaneously while rehabilitation and prison programs were being cut, incarceration rates skyrocketed like never before. Due to a socio-political climate that was increasingly fearful and punitive, municipal police forces and crime rates grew in the 1970's, though it is difficult to know which came first (Tonry, 2022). Additionally, police officials decided to emphasize street-level arrests of drug dealers as part of the "war on drugs" and there was a general prevailing attitude toward crime and criminals that led prosecutors, judges, and parole and other correctional officials to deal more harshly with individuals convicted of crimes (Travis et al., 2014).

Prison populations had been in a steady decline from 1961 until 1972 when the imprisonment rate was 93 per 100,000 people. The prison expansion that began in 1973 reached its highest numbers in 2009, a seven-fold increase over the intervening years. Between 1985 and 1995 alone, the United States' state prison population grew an average of 8% annually. Between 1990 and 1995, all states, except Maine, substantially increased their prison populations, from a low 13% in South Carolina to as high as 130% in Texas (Nellis, 2024). During this same five-year period, the Federal Bureau of Prisons capacity grew by 53%. Prison populations saw a decline beginning in 2010 which continued until 2020 in which there was a 14% decline, due to the COVID-19 pandemic in which there were accelerated releases and reduced admissions. As

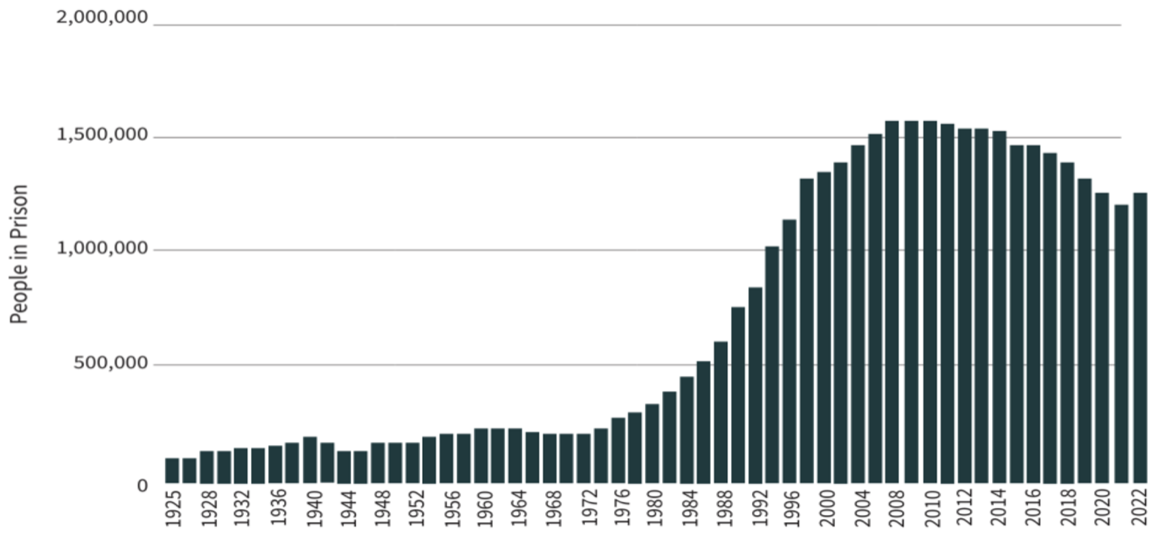
the country opened back up, however, 2022 marked the first year in over a decade where the national prison population rose again, by 2%, with increases in 36 states and those incarcerated with the Federal Bureau of Prisons (Nellis, 2024).

Tough on Crime and the Era of Mass Incarceration

Crime bills and legislation played a part in fueling the soaring incarceration rates. The increase of imprisonment as a response to crime reflects a clear policy choice (Miller, 2022). In the 1980s and 1990s, state and federal legislators passed and governors and presidents approved laws meant to guarantee that convicted individuals would be imprisoned and that prison terms for many offenses would be longer than ever before (Nellis, 2024). Being tough on crime meant long prison stays. No other inference can be drawn from the enactment of hundreds of laws mandating lengthier prison terms (Travis et al., 2014). Sentiments such those held by United States Attorney General William Barr, in a preface to a United States Department of Justice (1992) report titled The Case for More Incarceration, for example, argued that "prison works." He recommended that the number of prisoners be increased and proposed a major national program of prison construction to accommodate this goal. Barr's vision was realized in the federal Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 in which states could apply for funding to construct prisons. States were required to show that they: (a) increased the percentage of convicted violent offenders sentenced to prison; (b) increased the average prison time which will be served in prison by convicted violent offenders sentenced to prison; and (c) increased the percentage of sentence which will be served in prison by violent offenders sentenced to prison. In addition, mandatory minimum sentence laws required minimum prison terms for people convicted of particular crimes. Three strikes laws generally required minimum 25-year sentences for people convicted of a third felony. State truth-in-sentencing laws typically

required that people sentenced to imprisonment for affected crimes serve at least 85% of their nominal sentences (Travis et al., 2014). Figure 3 shows the impact of the tough on crime policies on prison population with a more than tripling of inmates from the early 1980s to the 2010s. This illustrates the fulfillment of Barr's goal.

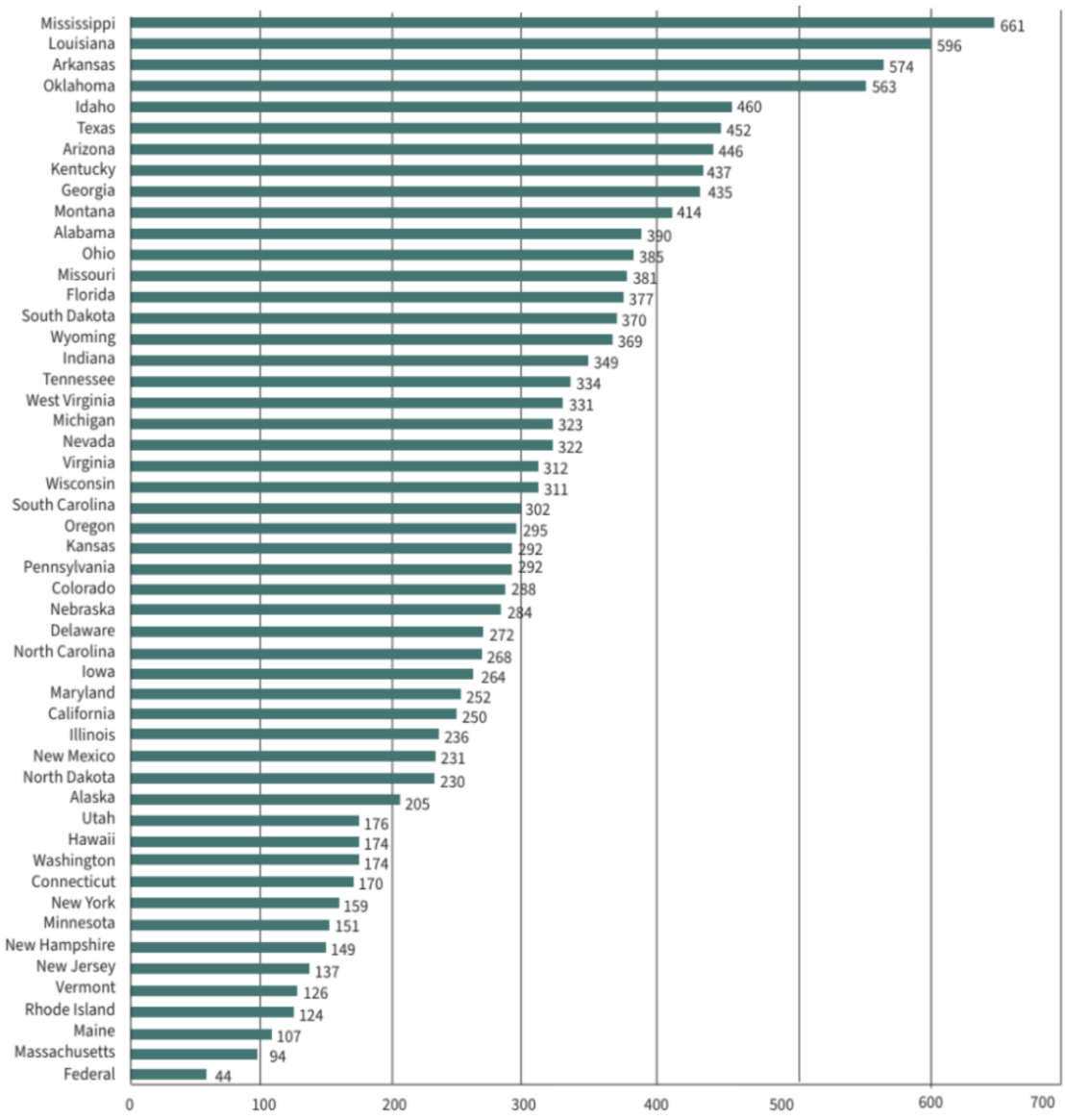
Figure 3 United States State and Federal Prison Population 1925-2022.



Note: Calahan, M.W. (1996). Historical corrections statistics in the United States, 1850-1984. Bureau of Justice Statistics; Carson, E.A. (2023) Prisoners in 2022-statistical tables. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

As previously mentioned, incarcerations rates vary widely from state to state and between the state and federal system as shown in Figure 4. State laws and sentencing guidelines also vary widely but in general, incarceration most heavily impacts minorities and the least educated subsections of society (Tonry, 2022; Travis et al., 2014). Incidentally, the states with the highest incarceration rates also correspond to the states with the lowest rated public education, lagging per-pupil funding on public education and educator salaries (ConsumerAffairs, 2024; National Education Association, 2024).

Figure 4 Ranked Imprisonment Rates (Per 100,000 People) in State & Federal Prison, 2022



Note: The Sentencing Project, 2022.

The devastating effects of mass incarceration have decimated individuals, families, communities, and in particular, communities of color, communities in poverty, or most likely, those people who find themselves members of both groups (Travis et al., 2014).

The rationale behind enactment of minimum and mandatory sentences, and much harsher parole guidelines was to deter crime. The truth, though, is that it has been ineffective. That theory rests on the idea that there is rehabilitation, programs and practices that seek to improve social bonds and capital (Cochran & Mears, 2016). Travis et al. (2014) conducted a study of incarcerated individuals in both state and federal prisons over a thirty-year period and noted that positive outcomes are "estimated effects are so small or contingent on particular circumstances as to have no practical relevance for policy making" (p.83). Suffice it to say, then, that we are in a time when rates of incarceration are creeping up again and there has been no significant efforts or policy changes to stem that tide since the pandemic-related efforts of 2021.

Punished While Incarcerated

When an individual is convicted of a crime and sentenced to prison, that is thought to be the punishment or the consequence. Reporting on life once inside prison is scant as prisons are remote, closed systems and are difficult to access (Olson, 2016) and even harder to generalize one to another, state to state and state to federal (Travis et al., 2014). First and foremost, as previously discussed, the 1970's marked the departure from the pursuit of the rehabilitative ideal (Lin, 2002) and the dominant rationale inside carceral institutions shifted to punishment (Travis et al., 2014). This time period is referred to by some scholars as the "penal harm" movement in which institutions searched for "creative strategies to make offenders suffer" (Cullen, 1995, p.340). Political rhetoric in the mid to late 1990s, as elucidated by Johnson et al. (1997), advocated bringing "fear back to prisons" through an "ethos of vindictiveness and retribution" that was clearly "counter to that of previous decades, which had emphasized humane treatment of prisoners and the rehabilitative ideal" (p. 24-25). The polarizing ethos of carceral systems become contradictory as Wright & Stern (2008) note "the requirements of control and security

develop an inhuman logic… which if not checked can ignore the very principles which the system is supposed to be upholding" (p. 51). In some locations this translated to the removal of seemingly small (but not insignificant on the inside) creature comforts such as air conditioning, coffee pots, banning long hair or beards, discontinuing intramural programming, musical instruments, good time (decreased sentencing time for accumulated good behavior) and the like (Johnson et al., 1997). These changes in ideology and thus policy set the stage for harsher punishment.

While there are local, state and federal guidelines that carceral systems must follow, Resnick et al. (2020) note that decision making about the contours of confinement come from those who run prisons, and they are given sweepingly wide latitude to do so by state and federal governments. As previously noted, generalizing prisons is difficult (Travis et al., 2014) and thus there will be variation of punishment and specific code by location, however structurally there is conformity. Some prison rules address infractions such as theft or battery that would warrant criminal charges against perpetrators, whether incarcerated or not (Resnik et al., 2020). In addition, there is also an internal criminal code, prison authorities then add hundreds of other regulations, some codified and others imposed by staff members as they see fit (Resnik et al., 2020). Incarcerated individuals are the literal definition of a captive clientele, with few advocates and few formal rights on the inside (Olson, 2016). Further, prison systems give staff authority to punish "conduct which disrupts or interferes with the security or orderly running of the institution" (Inmate Discipline Program/Special Housing Units: Subpart Revision and Clarification Prohibited Acts and Available Sanctions., 2010) which outside of these institutions would be considered so general if in a criminal code, to be unenforceable as unconstitutionally vague, and overbroad. (Inmate Discipline Program/Special Housing Units: Subpart Revision and

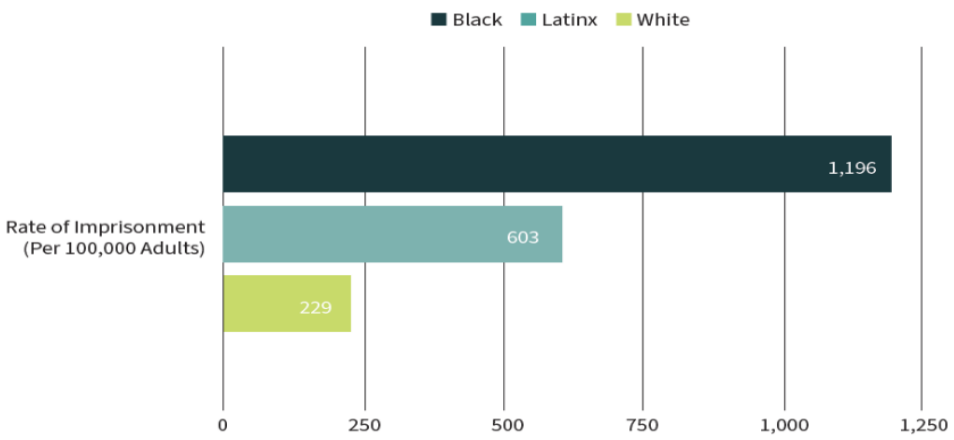
Clarification Prohibited Acts and Available Sanctions., 2010). These edicts can be as severe as an escape attempt to as menial as failure to address staff by proper title (Resnik et al., 2020). Punishments while incarcerated can include fines, additional prison time, restriction from privileges, confinement to one's cell, solitary confinement, denial of visitation, termination of phone privileges, strip search, cell search, physical and chemical restraint, 'dry cell' in which water is turned off to a cell, to name a few (Resnik et al., 2020). An inmate can appeal a punishment, but those appeals go through the prison bureaucracy and are rarely overturned (Olson, 2016). The large number of rules, regulations and written procedures, represent the appearance that prisons are full of law, and therefore lawful. Resnik et al (2020) note that in their research, prison officials often recounted detailed regulations and statistics about thousands of discipline hearings conducted. "Yet the records are also evidence of the lawlessness of prisons in that exercises of power by staff repeatedly resulted in stunningly substantial punishments for minor violations of any of the many rules each prison had" (p.111).

Disproportionate Impact of Incarceration

According to Nellis (2024), with the research group The Sentencing Project, people of color remain massively overrepresented in prisons, accounting for nearly 7 in 10 people in prison. In fact, one in five black men born in 2001 will be incarcerated in their lifetime (Robey et al., 2023). The statistics are higher among people identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native with a lifetime risk of imprisonment at nearly 50% for males and more than 14% for females (Roehrkasse & Wildeman, 2022). With broad reaching impacts, especially for individuals of color, entire communities of color are negatively impacted by incarceration (Drakulich et al., 2012) whereby they experience a dissolution of informal networks that once acted as barriers to crime. Furthermore, as communities lose more and more individuals to

incarceration, feelings of victimization rise and trust in law enforcement deteriorates further eroding the community (Drakulich et al., 2012). While prison rates had declined up until COVID (Nellis, 2024) imprisonment remains a pervasive and highly unequal life-course experience. Even as incarceration touches the lives of many Americans, Travis et al. (2014) noted, the distribution of incarceration across the population is highly uneven but regardless of race or ethnicity, incarcerated individuals are drawn mainly from the least educated segments of society. Figure 5 illustrates the racial disparity of incarcerated individuals, showing that people of color are still incarcerated at a rate of 9:1 for every White individual.

Figure 5 Racial and Ethnic Disparities in State and Federal Prisons 2022



Note: Carson, E.A. & Kluckow, R. (2023. Prisoners in 2022- Statistical Tables. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Life Outcomes for Incarcerated Individuals

The impacts of incarceration and outcomes for lives of the formerly incarcerated have more than a toll on human dignity. The ultimate impact of incarceration is the proliferation of life sentences, with one in seven incarcerated individuals serving life sentences (Seeds, 2022).

Moreover, mass incarceration correlates with numerous poor physical, psychological, and economic outcomes for the people who experience imprisonment, for their families, as well as for the broader community (Nellis, 2024). Formerly incarcerated individuals face declining prospects for employment and lower earnings over a lifetime (Apel & Sweeten, 2010) often leading to food insecurity, housing instability and a reliance on public assistance (Harding et al., 2013).

Schoolhouse as Jailhouse

The evolution of disciplinary policies and practices in American schools closely resembles the trajectory followed by the justice system. Reliance on punitive and exclusionary discipline practices increased due to a culture of fear even as schools were not made safer or more successful academically by the exclusion of these students (Brown, 2006; N. A. Heitzeg, 2014; Mallett, 2016).

The School to Prison Pipeline

There is a path that led incarcerated individuals to that place and for many, it began with entanglements in the School to Prison Pipeline. While the country and its justice system was evolving and becoming harsher and more punitive, the same was happening in schools across the United States. The School to Prison Pipeline as defined by (Owens, 2017) is a "social phenomenon where students become formally involved with the criminal justice system as a result of school policies that use law enforcement, rather than discipline, to address behavioral problems" (p.2). The definitions of School to Prison pipeline vary, but the gist is an overreliance on punitive discipline rather than instructional interventions which often includes detentions, suspensions, expulsions and referrals to the juvenile justice system.

The educational system and the juvenile justice system similarly followed the trajectory of the country's justice system in the last half a century. These child- and adolescent-caring systems—schools and juvenile courts— shifted from rehabilitative to punitive paradigms. While there was crossover impact between these systems, the paradigm switch was both independent and interdependent. Within schools, and particularly those that are overburdened and underfunded, many students have been increasingly suspended and expelled due to criminalizing both typical adolescent developmental behaviors as well as low-level type misdemeanors: acting out in class, truancy, fighting, and other similar offenses (Mallett, 2016). The causes of this paradigm switch are vast: state and federal legislation, introduction of School Resource Officers (SROs) in schools and a changing political and social fear-based landscape (Mallett, 2016).

Tough on Crime Policies in American Schools

In 1969 then President Nixon introduced a new term: the War on Drugs based on public fear of drugs infiltrating the nation's borders (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017). What followed was a significant point of entry for police presence in the nation's public schools:

Posing as high school students, young police recruits were sent into schools in California, Virginia, and the District of Columbia to find and arrest students with drugs, most often minimal amounts of marijuana. In Los Angeles, 176 students were arrested from just six high schools as part of a tactical raid—the overwhelming majority for marijuana possession. These tactics were not an essential function of public safety, but rather a means to survey, catalog, monitor, and control youth of color (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017).

These types of interventions and criminalization of what could generally be categorized as youthful indiscretion were typically concentrated in urban areas with populations where people of color were the vast majority. The War on Drugs grew to include a fear of crime

and a general fear that juvenile crime rates, in particular, were on the rise (N. A. Heitzeg, 2014). The Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, offered grants through the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration to jurisdictions to engage in programming that encourage youth to have "respect for law and order" (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017, p.5). This was followed by the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, which provided the law enforcement with the authority to engage youth based on assumptions of future behavior. This assumption-based policing was now fully incorporated under federal law despite any kind of specific definition of delinquency or pre-delinquency (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017). As early as 1975, the superintendent of the Washington D.C. school district warned that DCPS and districts like it were beginning to resemble more of a "police state atmosphere" than a learning environment (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017, p.5). Teachers, educational personnel and police now had the ability and authority to label and track students into tracks that would determine more than educational outcomes (N. A. Heitzeg, 2014).

Just as reform fell from favor in the justice system to be replaced by a "tough on crime" mindset, the same was happening in the education system. The 1970's and 1980's were a time of fear of increased crime rates, particularly violent crimes, and increased media coverage on school disorder (Brown, 2006), which led to schools enacting zero-tolerance discipline policies (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Many of these such policies mandated increased suspension and expulsion for less serious offenses such as school disruption, smoking, and dress code violations, although later research showed no significant rise in school violence during this time. The 1980s spawned fears and media reports of young people, often minorities, committing horrific crimes, ''wilding'' events, gang violence, and concern for the emergence of the ''juvenile super-

predator'' which were wholly disproportionate to the reality of youth violence (Mallett, 2016, p.7).

"Broken Window" policing strategy emerged in 1982 as an idea that in targeting minor crime, such as loitering, vandalism and public intoxication in neighborhoods, police and city administration could help foster a sense of lawfulness and order (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017, p.7). This policing strategy was primarily aimed at rowdy youth in low-income brown and black neighborhoods (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017). As sociologist Christian Parenti pointed out about New York City, by the 1980s, students living in segregated poverty had gotten "an unofficial, unacknowledged curriculum on how to be searched, scanned, ID'd, detained, interrogated, and expelled" (Parenti, 2000, p.7).

The 1990s brought a flurry of legislation aimed at promoting public safety through policing and surveillance. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 allocated $9 billion to increase the numbers of police officers on streets and encourage crime prevention through what was referred to as community policing (N. A. Heitzeg, 2014). The increased punitive environment within the juvenile courts, perceptions of growing school violence, the crack cocaine epidemic that had a devastating impact on many poor communities, and worries about adolescent gangs (N. A. Heitzeg, 2014; Hirschfield, 2008) were all factors that led Congress to enact the Gun-Free Schools Act in 1994 (20 U.S.C. § 8921(b)), which mandated that students who brought firearms to school be expelled (Brady, 2002). This legislation acted as a stamp of approval and even a model for a broadly punitive approach to handling youth behavior in schools mirroring the justice system with a kind of three strikes and you're out student code of conduct (Brady, 2002). These zero tolerance policies generally meant a response to an infraction that was predefined, mandatory and applied to a violation of school rules without

regard to the seriousness of behavior, mitigating circumstances or situational context (American Psychological Association, 2006). These responses varied widely from school district to school district and from state to state and warranted suspensions or expulsions for drugs, anything deemed gang-related, fighting or even educational disturbance or talking back (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017).

Surely, then the school climate is improved for students who aren't disruptive. Not so, according to research out of one of Charlotte, North Carolina's largest school districts in which students in middle schools that are one standard deviation stricter are 1.7 percentage points more likely to drop out of school (a 15 %increase) and 2.4 percentage points less likely to attend a 4-year college (an 11 % decrease) (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019).

Policing American Schools- The SRO

The preponderance of anti-violence policies throughout American schools in an effort to maintain safety created a more prison-like environment based on social control and fear is a dominant paradigm in lower socioeconomic and black and brown neighborhoods (Hirschfield, 2008). Despite these tough on crime policies and legislation both in the courts and in schools, the devastating rise of school shootings in the 1990s stunned the nation and its schools and brought about tougher discipline policies, increased surveillance and an exponential rise in school policing (Brown, 2006). While the school shooting in 1999 at Columbine High School was not the first school shooting of this era, it was the deadliest and the media coverage was unprecedented, serving to reinforce not only the presence of the security within the school movement, but the need for it as well (Brady, 2002). In the decade before the Columbine tragedy there were other school shooting incidents with far less media coverage. These included Bethel Regional High School in Alaska, Pearl High School in Mississippi, Heath High School in

Kentucky, Frontier Middle School in Washington, and Thurston High School in Oregon (Muschert et al., 2014).

The 2021 Sandy Hook Tragedy and many that followed were often in what parents and neighbors thought of as “safe”- largely White, suburban upper-middle class communities and shattering that perception increased fear that tragedy could happen anywhere. A new brand of youth violence and super-predator was feared to be at hand (Hirschfield, 2008) prompting schools to update and enhance security measures by way of metal detectors, increased police presence and security-friendly architecture (Hirschfield, 2010).

A major shift in the landscape of the American school system was the introduction and then later marked proliferation of police in schools. Among the first city to have police presence in their schools was Indianapolis, Indiana which employed “special investigators” as early as 1939. Los Angeles followed in 1948 and Flint, Michigan in the early 1950s (Gowri, 2003; Hirschfield, 2010). It is unclear how widespread the practice of implementing police within the school system was, but prior to the 1990’s it was relatively isolated. With the increase of School Resource Officers (SROs), the National Association for School Resource Officers began in 1991 defining a broad role for these individuals (Gowri, 2003; Hirschfield, 2010). Safe School Act of 1994 and 1998 Amendment, both Amendments to the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, promoted and funded SROs nationwide (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017). Following the Westside Middle School shooting in Arkansas, this legislation was enacted by the Clinton Administration and had two policy objectives: to help build school and police force collaborations, and to improve school and student safety (Strategies for Youth, 2019). Prior to this legislation, it was unlikely this scenario would have occurred:

A student was asked (by a school staff member) to remove his ‘‘do-rag’’ upon

> arriving at school prior to the start of the day. He resisted at first but then removed it (unhappily). He then cussed out the assistant principal, who wrote him a referral for doing so. Then he was sent to the office, and he wanted to leave, but Mr. Majors (another assistant principal) stood in his way and wouldn't let him leave. The student tried to push Mr. Majors aside, and as a result he was handcuffed by the school resource office and arrested for pushing a staff member (Kupchik, 2010, p. 79).

Police presence in schools, particularly secondary schools, is now the norm rather than the exception (Mallett, 2016). Despite this fact, 26 states have no legislation regarding SRO training, only eight states require SRO training in de-escalation, only four states require training in Restorative Justices practices (Strategies for Youth, 2019). In general police are not trained in educational or developmental psychology, pedagogy or educational theory or practice and may make decisions based on a security framework rather than an educational one (Brown, 2006).

Punitive Discipline Under the Guise of Law

Stuart discusses the common law doctrine in loco parentis, meaning in place of parent, and that originally this doctrine, when applied to schools, was meant to be understood in the light of supporting and protecting children while in an educator's care. However, "in loco parentis has experienced an inexplicable resurgence that seems designed to protect school districts from the responsibility for unwise and otherwise questionable search and seizure policies disguised as disciplinary decisions" (Stuart, 2010, p. 970). Stuart further argues that this application of the doctrine in the school setting focuses almost entirely on discipline, often harsh, absent of care and concern. Schools use the in loco parentis doctrine as justification to call law enforcement or refer students to juvenile justice in scenarios where parents certainly would not have done so (Losen & Martinez, 2020). There is a long history of educators in some districts embracing harsh

discipline, in fact, a steady increase in its use between 1973 and 2010. However, there is no established body of research that supports the implementation of harsh discipline policies to create effective learning environments (Losen & Martinez, 2020; Skiba & Losen, 2016).

The Impact of Exclusionary Discipline

The effects of exclusionary discipline are myriad and overwhelmingly negative with both short term and long-term negative effects. In the short term, schools with high rates of suspensions have lower individual and school level academic achievement (Losen & Martinez, 2020; Skiba & Losen, 2016) and further findings are concerning, as detentions and suspensions are ineffective, impair typical childhood development, facilitate academic failure and dropout, and lead to significant emotional and psychological distress (Fadus et al., 2021). These negative impacts are not localized to the suspended student as Fadus et al. (2021) state. Exclusionary discipline practices are disruptive for the parents or caregivers as well as they have to take off work to care for children. In the United States, while the length of out-of-school suspensions varies, it is typical for students to be suspended for two to five days, and in some areas for up to 10 days or more. Suspensions disproportionately affect children of lower socioeconomic status and are even worse for single parent homes. In this way, exclusionary discipline practices can limit a family's sole source of income and perpetuate a cycle of poverty and poor academic achievement (Fadus et al., 2021).

In the 2017-2018 school year, suspensions amounted to 11 million days of education lost (Losen & Whitaker, 2017) and those lost hours and days have a ripple effect that creates a host of negative consequences that are more long term. Despite assumptions to the contrary, suspension and expulsion increases risks of negative behavior over time (Skiba & Losen, 2016) and Fadus et al. (2021) find disparities in disciplinary practices that occur as early as age 9 or 10

years, an age that substantially predates drop-out from school and juvenile justice involvement for most children. There is evidence that during formative years, youth develop negative attitudes toward school and lack prosocial behaviors (Fadus et al., 2021). Suspensions had large impacts on adult crime outcomes. Students assigned to middle schools that are one standard deviation stricter are 3.2 percentage points more likely to have ever been arrested (a 17 % increase), 2.5 percentage points more likely to have ever been incarcerated (a 20 % increase), have 0.14 more adult arrests (a 25 % increase) and 0.11 more distinct incarceration spells (a 29 % increase) (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019). Students who are suspended and expelled obviously lose instruction but additionally they increase their likelihood of repeating a grade or dropping out altogether (Losen & Martinez, 2020). In contrast to the belief that suspension of troublemakers would benefit higher performing students, Bacher-Hicks et al (2019) posit that it is unlikely that the gains from removing disruptive peers would outweigh the substantial long-term costs to students who are suspended. By their very nature, exclusionary discipline does not provide guidance or instruction and breeds distrust in students towards adults and nurtures an adversarial, confrontational attitude (The Civil Rights Project, 2000).

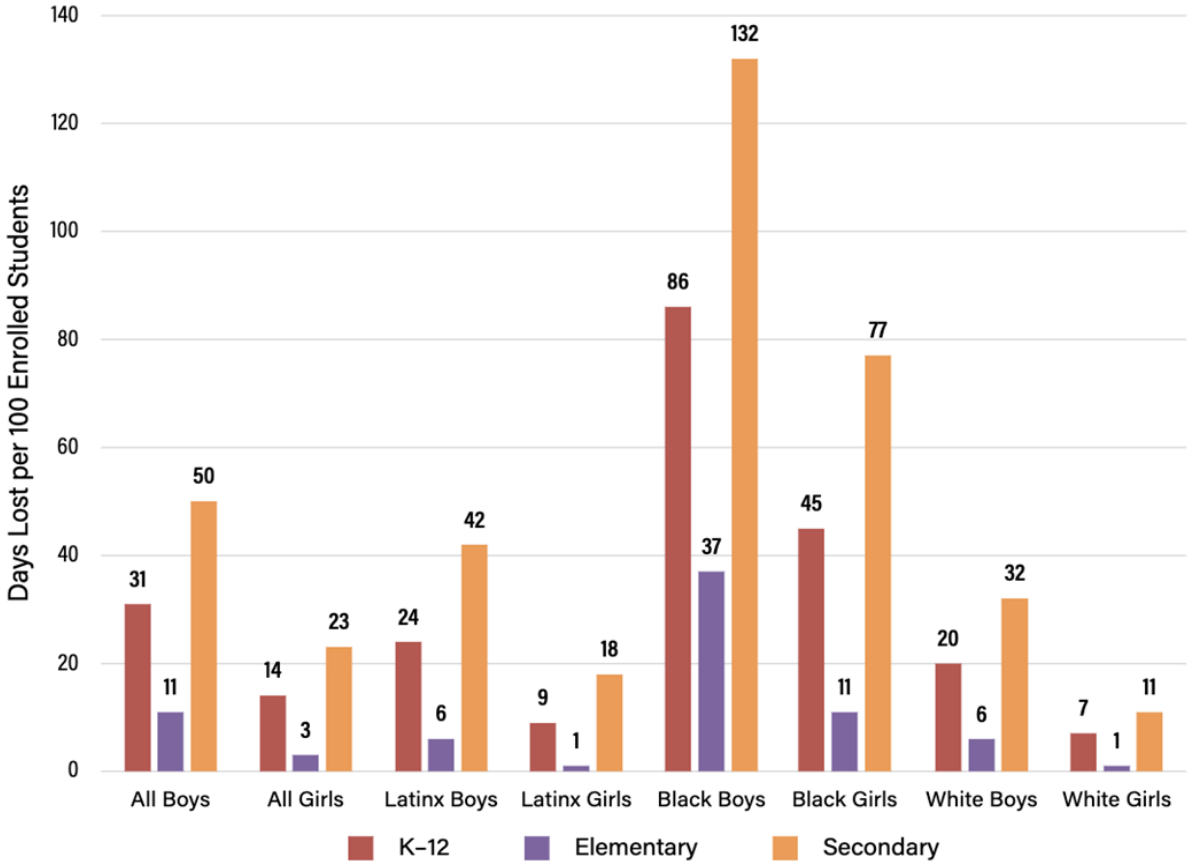
The Disproportionate Impact of Exclusionary Discipline

As previously stated, the impact of exclusionary discipline disproportionately impacts students and families from lower socioeconomic status, single parent homes, students with IEPs (Fadus et al., 2021) as well as students of color (Sawyer III & White Hodge, 2014). Not only is exclusionary discipline ineffective (Skiba & Losen, 2016) it increases negative behavioral and educational outcomes especially for historically disadvantaged groups and particularly for students with identities in multiple of these categories (Losen & Martinez, 2020). Research shows higher suspension rates, especially for Black and Latinx males, in the schools that had

invested more in security measures, including random student searches, drug sweeps, a greater police presence, metal detectors, and security cameras (N. A. Heitzeg, 2014; Losen & Martinez, 2020; Olson, 2016). Learning environments that function from a fear-based, control-seeking mindset actually don't prioritize learning first as Sawyer & White Hodge (2014) note "urban pedagogies work through adolescents of color, making them less competitive economically by subjecting them to an education that emphasizes discipline and control rather than gaining meaningful skills" (p.230) and this creates a devastating life trajectory disproportionately impacting urban students of color (Heitzeg, 2009).

The negative effects of exclusionary discipline were so prevalent that the Obama administration urged schools to limit the practices in 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The federal government began seeing the disproportionality in suspension data and in 2015–16 for the first time ever, the United States Department of Education (DoED) required, as part of its Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), that every school and district in the nation report the data on days lost due to out-of-school suspensions. DoED made this data public in 2018. The data provides the public with the most direct measure of the impact of school discipline on educational opportunity. Using the tallies of days of lost instruction collected and reported by DoED, the Center for Civil Rights Remedies (CCRR) co-authored a national brief with the ACLU of Southern California, called 11 Million Days Lost: Race, Discipline, and Safety at United States Public Schools (Losen & Martinez, 2020). Figure 6 shows the data of instructional days lost disaggregated by race and also by gender, showing that first boys are most negatively impacted; black males lose the most instruction but also that black females lost the next highest amount, even more than all boys combined, then followed by Latinx boys depicting again that boys and children of color are most harmed by exclusionary discipline.

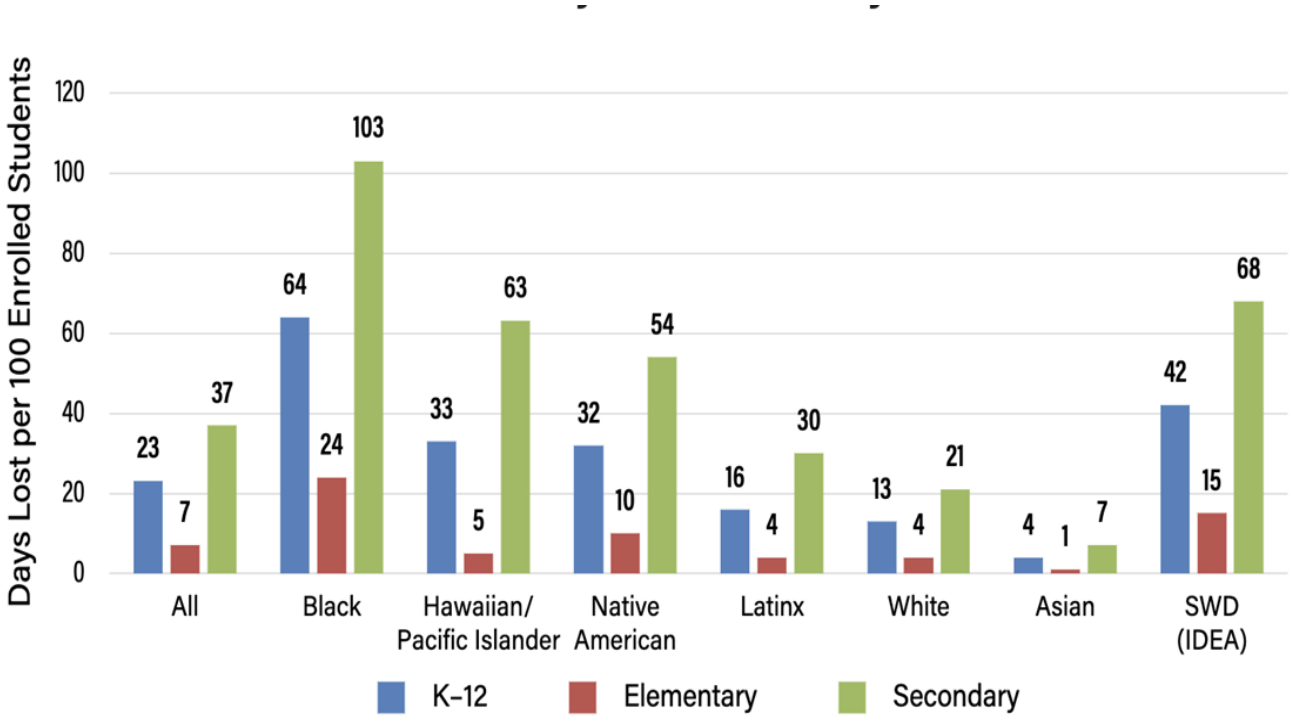
Figure 6 Impact of Lost Instruction in K-12., Elementary and Secondary Levels for Latinx, Black and White by Gender in the United States



Note: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015-2016

Students with disabilities are also disproportionately suspended when compared to their peers without disabilities (Losen & Martinez, 2020). Figure 7 shows data disaggregated by race but also compared SWD (Students with Disabilities) and shows that students of color and those with disabilities are most heavily impacted by suspensions and that impact is compounded for those same students in secondary schools.

Figure 7 National Overview: Impact on Instruction Due to Out of School Suspensions by Race and, Separately, for Students With Disabilities for K-12, Elementary and Secondary Levels

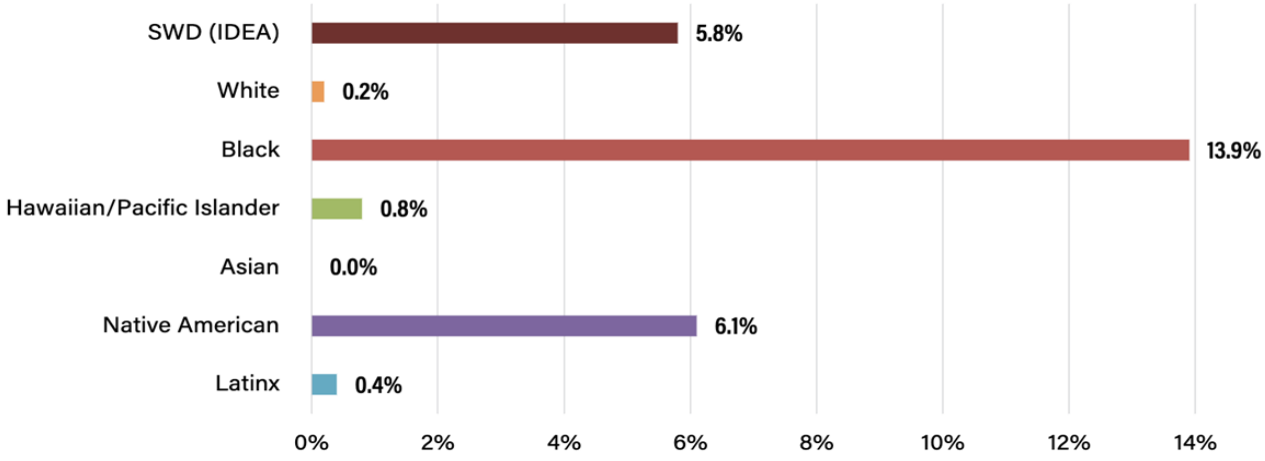


Note: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015-2016 Students with Disabilities (SWD) refers to those students who are eligible pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

As the previously mentioned research (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019) indicated, exclusionary discipline negatively impacts all students from schools with high numbers of suspensions. Figure 8 shows percentages of Latinx, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Asian American, and White secondary students attending school in a district where their racial/ethnic groups lost a year or more of instruction due to out-of-school suspensions. The disparities are evident. While Figure 8 shows the disparities, the raw enrollment numbers are also telling. For example, of the more than 3.5 million Black secondary students, 492,755 were enrolled in a district where

students were losing at least a year's worth of instruction for every 100 students. In contrast, this was the experience of only approximately 1 in 500 White students and 2 in 500 Latinx students (Losen & Martinez, 2020).

Figure 8 Percentage of Students Enrolled in Districts With at Least 1 Academic Year of Lost Instruction per 100 Enrolled



Note: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015-2016

Furthermore, these data are required in an annual report card data point pursuant to the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) public reporting requirements. Currently, Losen & Martinez (2020) report widespread noncompliance with both the ESSA and the CRDC requirements. Those failing to report their school-related arrest data failed to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As of July 20, 2020, not one state had fully complied with ESSA, which mandates that the collected data be included in every state and every district's report card (Losen & Martinez, 2020). While the overall numbers of suspensions and expulsions have improved each year according to the United States Department of Education Office for

Civil Rights (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). The lack of accurate and timely publicly reported data makes comparisons to more recent data impossible (Losen & Martinez, 2020) and in fact the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) responsible for overseeing and funding the CRDC requirements, is understaffed and underfunded (The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, 2024) further complicating the issue of underreporting and therefore comparison of more updated data.

Another Way: Restorative Practices

No one benefits if the response to student misbehavior is the educationally unsound decision for said students to miss instruction given the myriad ways that these responses have been shown to be ineffective (*Brown v. Board of Education at 65: A Promise Unfulfilled: Hearing before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor, 116th Cong.*, 2019; Fadus et al., 2021; Heitzeg, 2009; Losen & Martinez, 2020). While Kim et al. (2010) admits that there is no quick fix or single policy change that could reduce the harm of harsh punitive and exclusionary discipline, there are agreed upon practices that make a positive impact. According to Skiba & Losen (2016) universal school wide initiatives that work have three components: relationship building, social emotional learning, structural interventions such as student code of conduct.

In order to minimize disparities, Fadus et al. (2021) suggest that students, families, mental health professionals, and other members of the community should become familiar with alternative educational philosophies such as restorative practice, which emphasizes belonging, social engagement, and accountability rather than control and punishment. Implementing restorative practices in lieu of more punitive and exclusionary discipline practices decreases subsequent suspensions (Mansfield et al., 2018), and even improves teacher attitudes on

implementation of restorative practices (Crowe, 2018). Schools have adopted restorative practices as a comprehensive way to address racial, ethnic, gender and ability disparities in exclusionary discipline, particularly suspensions and expulsions (D. Smith et al., 2022).

The terms restorative justice or restorative practices are sometimes used interchangeably but the underlying philosophy is promoting conflict resolution by allowing space for people to remedy the harm they have caused (Zehr, 2016). The concept of being restorative places the community at the center of well-being, an ideology embraced by Indigenous peoples (Brummer, 2021). Restorative Justice can be described as a growing social movement designed to establish non-punitive methods for avoiding and addressing harm (Fronius et al., 2019). These practices have been found to create a more positive school climate by redefining the manner in which children and adults interact (Joseph et al., 2021) and additionally these practices help students to build relationships with others and to develop their own problem-solving skills, and foster an understanding of collaboration and emotional expression. The foundation of restorative practices centers upon fostering an inclusive and restorative culture predicated on the wisdom and humility that acknowledges that everyone at some point in life is a victim and offender (D. Smith et al., 2022). Restorative practices have gained traction in United States schools due to the increased awareness of the detrimental impacts of zero-tolerance discipline policies (Fronius et al., 2019). More empathetic discipline practices that comprise the aforementioned practices and strategies cut suspension rates in half (Losen & Whitaker, 2017) however, if not fully implemented school-wide these holistic and relationship-based ideals are moot and school systems will continue to criminalize student misbehavior in ways that mirror and prep students for the criminal justice system (Hirschfield, 2008).

Restorative Practices in the educational realm can be challenging as it is an ideological shift from asking "who did it? And how should we punish them?" To asking "who was harmed and what are their needs?" (Brummer, 2021)

Restorative Practices are more preventative in nature and work to address and dismantle systems that create harm in the first place, especially systems which leave some people with less power than others (Davis, 2019). Fania Davis (2019) founder of Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth states:

> Contemporary Restorative Justice arises alongside the historical backdrop of heightened international awareness that indigenous knowledges, grounded in an ecological ethos of interrelatedness and collaboration, have much to offer today's fractured world. The corollary is the growing recognition that for more than five hundred years, Western knowledge systems, based on an ethos of separateness competition, and subordination, have contributed to pervasive crises that today imperil our future. The scale of devastation is unprecedented- whether of our bodies, families, and communities, or plants, animals, waters and earth. The unfathomable magnitude of destruction has fueled a quest for alternative worldviews that bring healing to our world. It is in this historical context that we witness the rapid global rise and spread of Restorative Justice. (p.21).

Implementing Restorative Practices isn't just about classroom or behavior management or harm repair, though those are certainly important aspects. Using the foundations of Restorative Practices can itself become a pedagogy, or method of teaching. Restorative Pedagogies fall in line with a restorative justice framework in which 'restorative' refers to nurturing and honoring a group's dignity, worth, and interconnectedness so that they can fully contribute to society both as youth and as adults in the future. Justice refers to honoring people

by accepting them for who they are in the context of their communities (McMahon et al., 2024). A restorative pedagogy invites learners to seek knowledge in their own education and learn deeply from course material and each other.

Restorative Practices in Educational Leadership

Changes in policies at district level, as Skiba and Losen (2016) argue, are a key step in developing a more positive school climate and at the classroom level, ensuring academic rigor and culturally responsive teaching is key to reducing conflict and keeping kids in class. Changes in policy at district level are a key step in developing a more positive school climate (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Schools must develop a growth mindset and cultivate buy-in school wide while relentlessly focusing on examining long-held practices (Maynard & Weinstein, 2021; D. Smith et al., 2015). This relentless focus must include looking at every interaction, policy and procedure through a restorative lens.

Implementation of restorative practices must be a coordinated effort that is both top down and bottom up (Brummer, 2021). District Administration and Leadership set both the tone and practice of this work through policy change, funding, student code of conduct writing and implementation. Many school districts and schools have mission and vision statements that reference educating the whole learner (McMahon et al., 2024) but those statements are merely lip service to one-size-fits-all pedagogies and curriculums. The work should also be led by the individuals on the inside; teachers, students and even parents (Brummer, 2021; D. Smith et al., 2022). “We also need the effort to be teacher-ed, student-driven, and parent-approved. We need as much of the work as we can to be an inside job. No one knows this school and its community better than the people in it” (Brummer, 2021, p.217). A successful and holistic plan of change toward a more restorative system will focus on four main elements: systems changes, physical

changes to the building, procedural changes about how policy is enacted and training/professional development plans (Brummer, 2021; D. Smith et al., 2022).

Building level educational leaders can create a restorative culture by making restorative practices the heart of the school building. The front office is the first point of contact for parents, students and community members and should exude a welcoming, positive environment and a building leader needs to appropriately onboard new staff members, regardless of their job title or responsibility (D. Smith et al., 2015, 2022). While security measures such as metal detectors and surveillance cameras are necessary in some schools, the sterile and institutional feeling of these measures can be counteracted when school resource officers and other school personnel are there to greet students warmly and are trained in and practice positive relationship building (Morgan et al., 2014; D. Smith et al., 2015). School leaders must adhere to a data mindset looking at both quantitative and qualitative data to make decisions about attendance, grades, discipline and student perception (D. Smith et al., 2015, 2022) and throughout this data analysis leaders should seek both student input as well as teacher input in looking for improvement and solutions.

Principals and school leaders an cultivate a stronger sense of belonging in their schools by learning from teachers about how they foster belonging and agency in their classrooms and highlighting those findings with the staff (D. Smith et al., 2022). Restorative school leaders should develop skills in staff that build agency in handling conflict rather than always outsourcing that to administration. Finally, building leaders must encourage a preventative mindset within the school that focuses on staff professional development teaching conflict resolution and pro-social communication skills early and often (Brummer, 2021; Maynard & Weinstein, 2021) while simultaneously assuring they are proactive in evaluating data that may indicate that students are struggling or heading for trouble (D. Smith et al., 2015, 2022). Indeed,

policy makers recognized the enormous pressure and demands placed upon educators and passed the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) building-level standards in 2018 (National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), 2018). In today's world, there is a need for educational leaders to be "accountable for the academic success and personal well-being of every student. It is no longer enough to manage school finances, maintain a spotless and safe building, and keep the buses running on time" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), 2018, p.7). Central to this goal, NELP Standard 3 articulates the building-level leaders' role in ensuring equitable access to educational resources and opportunities. Educational leaders are called to possess the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to develop and maintain a supportive, equitable, culturally responsive, and inclusive school culture.

The majority of school leadership preparation programs, however, fail to provide training for school leaders that is transformative and dynamic but rather outdated and static (DeMatthews et al., 2017) and do not do enough to address issues of inequity. Undergirding educational leadership programs needs to begin with learning and consideration of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and school leaders in social justice (DeMatthews, 2016). Principals are central to either maintaining or dismantling inequities in discipline gaps because they make decisions about suspensions, alternative school placements, and expulsions. Principals also influence school culture and serve as intermediaries between district leadership and classrooms (DeMatthews, 2016; DeMatthews et al., 2017). Updated school leader preparation courses coupled with critical examination of school and district policy and a willingness to challenge the status quo of traditional American schooling and toward an emancipatory leadership orientation creates

critical spaces and discourses, empowers communities, and enables the adoption of social and restorative justice practices in all aspects of the educational landscape.

Chapter Summary

The aim of this literature review was to explore the history and impacts of punitive discipline both in the American public school system and how they manifest in the carceral system. The American incarceration rate is the highest per capita in the world with lengthy sentences. By and large incarcerated individuals are less educated both before entering jails and prisons and continue to remain so throughout incarceration. Additionally, incarcerated individuals face a wide range of punitive discipline for misbehaviors while incarcerated. The findings consistently indicated that beginning in elementary school punitive and exclusionary discipline is disproportionately applied to male students of color in poorer schools while failing to prevent or curb perceived misbehavior and negatively impacting schools as a whole. Findings further indicated that punitive and exclusionary discipline increases the likelihood of students' involvement in the justice system. Restorative practices help establish a learning environment that focuses on pro-social behaviors based on strong relationships and a commitment to the well-being of others. Creating school systems that utilize restorative practices focus on social emotional learning that focuses on harm repair and growth.

Chapter 3 - Critical Autoethnography: Foundations, Methods and Considerations

The purpose of this autoethnography is to explore my experience and sense making as an educator whose personal and professional lives intertwine with tensions associated with punitive and restorative discipline practices. I explore my experience and sense making as an educator whose personal and professional lives intertwine with tensions associated with punitive and restorative discipline practices. I first and foremost shine a light into the dark boundary spaces where the entanglements of education, discipline, incarceration and human experience meet. Secondly, I impassion educators and policymakers to continue the transition away from harmful punitive practices through the exploration of my experiences and sense-making as an educator whose personal and professional life intertwined with tensions associated with punitive and restorative discipline practices. Finally, by giving vulnerable and personal accounts of my experiences in relationships with those harmed by punitive and exclusionary discipline practices I endeavor to cultivate empathy and amplify voices and space to perspectives generally underrepresented.

Research Questions

1) How do my experiences with the carceral system inform my educational practice?
2) How do my experiences with punitive discipline in the school system inform my educational practice?
3) How does my understanding of punitive discipline change and grow as I move through the intersectional spaces of my life?

Subjectivity Statement

I carry the power and privilege of being a White, middle-class woman. As a member of the default race, my whiteness allows me to move through life with ease without worrying if a store, restaurant, neighborhood, or social gathering will question my presence. I have largely operated on the assumption that systems are fair and if I am wronged and speak up then someone will right that wrong. Should first attempts at resolutions prove unsuccessful for some reason, I will keep moving up the chain of command until I find a person that will right the perceived wrong against me. I have faith and comfort in my education that I can reason, write, and persuade policies and systems to my advantage. And while I knew that was a privilege on some level, I was never forced to examine how much I actually benefited from it, how different life was for those who didn't have it or was in a position that even my White middle class woman status couldn't help me.

I now know I carried implicit biases and superiorities. I had the deep-down belief, both personally and professionally, that if people really tried, truly educated and advocated for themselves, fought for what was right and what they believed in, then things would go their way. Parents who settled for less-than-stellar teachers? Poorly written educational goals? Inequitable parenting time or court-decided living situations? While I cognitively knew systems and society were rigged in favor of the White, the educated, the powerful, the connected, I also held the belief that hard work could overcome any lack in the aforementioned privileges. Hiding behind that belief was the inkling that maybe those people didn't try hard enough or want it enough. I judged and found others lacking; attributed their undesirable station in life to a character flaw or lack of good, old-fashioned hard work.

Only recently, by witnessing what others without privileges have to endure and how it shapes their interactions with people and institutions of power have I been able to reflect on what those privileges afforded me. I see how repeated loss in a David and Goliath dichotomy tends to wear a person down. I see how people slowly internalize this power dynamic and accept whatever personal or systemic injustice comes at them because truly, what can they do? Empirically has it ever worked, when the deck is so stacked against them.

As an educator, I see this power dynamic at school. Parents know the education their children are receiving is sub-par. They know there is not a certified teacher in the room. They know that their child is reading far below grade level. They know discipline practices are unfair and biased. When their child gets in trouble, they expect and accept the exclusionary discipline because it's what they know from their own experiences and it's the only solution given. These are the scenarios I see played out again and again with some of our most vulnerable students.

On a more personal level as a mother and prison wife, (a term that is problematic for me, which I will further examine in subsequent chapters) I have witnessed these dynamics. Although I did not personally live through them as they were not my or my children's educational experiences, I have experienced them from the periphery in my professional life and now personally and through the stories my husband and his brothers tell of their experiences with public education. I now have a clearer and more in-depth picture of what makes the entire school experience so challenging for some students and their families. This newfound understanding and positionality give me a unique perspective to know what is ideally possible for students as well as an understanding of both the systemic and internalized barriers that make seeing those possibilities almost impossible.

My experiences with students and families for whom public education has fallen far short of the mark gives me insight into the kinds of questions to ask to ascertain as much of a student's experience as possible. In working with students who struggle to follow behavioral expectations, I have come to realize that many of their problematic behaviors stem from a feeling of disrespect, disregard or even fear. These students inherently don't trust their teachers, the adults in leadership or the education system to have their best interest at heart. They often don't feel heard or valued to begin with and when situations leave them feeling further devalued or disrespected, they behave in ways that are contrary to traditional values of educational settings. They lash out verbally or physically; they retreat or elope all together. I have seen the value in giving students space to explore their feelings and consider the reasons why they do the things they do, many of whom have never thought, or been taught, to do so. Moreover, I have seen the value and worth students feel when an adult asks and then listens to their response and then asks what they need and how the situation can be made right. Often students don't have the language to articulate the why behind their actions without breaking down questions into smaller ancillary parts. I believe my positionality will help me ask the right questions and analyze data that I find.

I am a veteran educator of over 20 years with instructional experience in public, private, prison, urban, rural and suburban educational systems, teaching students in two global regions, spanning all grades from 1 through adult. I have always been drawn to the proverbial underdog and had a heart for those for whom I perceived society had cast aside, those who had what I considered to be insurmountable challenges. This personal characteristic has always drawn me to educational settings that are on the fringes: Title I schools, GED tutoring classes for formerly incarcerated individuals, far-flung barangay schools in provincial Philippine countryside, maximum security prisons, struggling urban high schools.

In these settings I have seen that traditional one-size-fits all approaches to education do not work for individuals deemed other: those who learn differently than the majority, those who struggle to conform to societal norms. As I worked in various settings and met more and more students of all ages, I became further committed to my role as an educator yet more frustrated with the educational system, particularly how its driving quest to churn out graduates often pushed out the individual student who derailed the efficiency and progress of the system. Those individuals, though few, were the collateral damage of the public school system, which marched on in spite of them, or maybe because of excluding them. But what became of those individuals, those children ironically left behind as the system openly touted "No Child Left Behind?" They fell farther and farther behind academically, often because their behaviors, or the perception of those behaviors got in the way of their learning and led to exclusionary discipline practices exacerbating their below-grade level academics as well as their behaviors. I got angrier and angrier watching this cycle. After I began as a volunteer educator in a prison setting, I got a glimpse into what the future holds for those pushed out of public education. I witnessed the full scope of the school to prison pipeline and inadvertently, my role in it.

I knew I could no longer continue my career as if I hadn't lived and learned what I now knew to be true. I began to learn another way, a way to restore and repair harm while encouraging student growth and accountability. I took courses in Restorative Justice and began trying some practices in my own classroom, but I wanted more. I wanted more buy-in, more change, more knowledge. I wanted to make changes in more than my classroom. I began a Master's degree to become a principal to do just that. I took a new career path out of the classroom to practice restorative justice full time, but I still want more. I am learning the impacts and importance of restorative practices on students in two ways; as an in-depth way in real time

in my professional capacity but then also secondarily, reflecting on the stories of my husband and his brothers. So much of education is taking data to generalize a particular practice, a curriculum, a trend and in so doing, we miss the impact on the individual. Restorative practices are slow, painstaking, and iterative. They are not quick fixes and require not only a paradigm shift, but a schoolwide culture change. The alternative is to continue to use exclusionary discipline practices which not only do not correct behavior but irreparably damage the individual.

The increasing dissonance I felt between my worldview and what I saw transpiring in practice in my role as an educator increased dramatically as I navigated the challenges of having an incarcerated husband. The crystallization of the school to prison pipeline, cobbled along the way with every damaging punitive and exclusionary discipline practice was really nothing short of life-altering. Figure 9 shows the sometimes-contradictory roles I play within the intersecting boundary spaces in my life. These experiences coupled with the newfound knowledge I was gaining through my doctoral studies reading about theoretical frameworks and critical theory helped me to situate myself, and my experiences in a way to critically analyze them.

Figure 9 The roles I play in the intersecting boundary spaces of my life

Why Qualitative Research?

In my research, I strive to uncover and articulate my own experiences with punitive discipline in my personal and professional life and while some of the narratives and themes may be applicable to a larger audience, I do not intend nor wish to generalize any of my experiences. Jeong-Hee Kim (2016) says "being in the qualitative research field is like walking swampy lowland that is full of dilemmas, challenges, complexities, and puzzles; hence qualitative researchers inevitably engage in philosophy because they have to challenge what they have already know as truth" (Kim, 2016, p.31). A swampy lowland certainly gives a visual to the often confusing, contradictory and intersecting experiences I have encountered. In my academic journey, I have cycled through countless iterations of thinking and constructed and reconstructed my research questions but throughout it all, my overarching goal of examining and articulating the dissonance between socially professed goals of education and my experiences has never wavered.

In my introductory classes in academia, I was immediately drawn to qualitative research. Before I had the language to articulate my leanings, I would have said it's because I am drawn to words, feelings, gut reactions. When looked at negatively, I could be and have been criticized for being rash, fanciful, overly emotional. However, as I learned, I came to realize and appreciate that qualitative research is very much an entity in its own right, established, respected, and valid. I wholly identify as being a constructivist in that I shape my truths and my knowledge around my own understanding. Thus, my reality is not absolute but relative, situated and subjective. I reject the concept that there is one absolute truth (Bhattacharya, 2017). Qualitative research manages to embrace two strata at the same time. On the one hand, it is broad, interpretive, postexperimental, postmodern, feminist, and critical. While on the other hand, it is positivist, postpositivist,

humanistic, and naturalistic, valuing human experience (Nelson et al., 1992). This idea of "both and" kept recurring as a theme both in my research and reading but in my interpretation of my experiences and data. The idea that these two seemingly opposite strata can be combined in the same project, both critical and humanistic, appealed to me.

Rationale for Research Design

Qualitative research defined at its most basic level is a process of naturalistic inquiry that seeks an in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Understanding the complex intertwinings of education and incarceration is my aim and as Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) note, "Qualitative researchers are interested not in prediction and control but in understanding" (p. 4). Erickson (2018) describes qualitative inquiry aptly saying it "seeks to discover and to describe narratively what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them." (p.26) It articulates meaning-relevant kinds of things in our world- kinds of people, kinds of thoughts, kinds of actions, kinds of interests.

This type of research inquiry was born out of a time when scholars began to question, how was knowledge created? Who was it created for? And who got to say what knowledge was? (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Research had its beginnings in anthropology and sociology in which White researchers generally from the West would travel to study the often dark-skinned Other and report back about their culture from an Outsider perspective. The colonialist and oppressive nature of this type of research rightly drew criticism and led to further evolution in qualitative methods (Bhattacharya, 2017). After World War II, the accuracy of ethnographies began to draw criticism from the "natives." (Christians, 2018). The strictly generalizable and absolute idea of knowledge in which absolute truths could be found slowly gave rise to a more critical and interpretive approach which employed an interconnected family of terms, concepts, and

assumptions including the traditions associated with foundationalism, positivism, postfoundationalism, postpositivism, poststructuralism. The community of qualitative researchers is made up of groups of varied and globally scattered individuals using critical theory, constructivist, feminist, queer, cultural studies models to aid in their sense making of daily life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) and as Clandinin and Connelly point out, we are fortunate, now, to be working in a post- modernist climate, when various ways of knowing and telling can coexist and need not be mutually exclusive.

The growth and development of qualitative research was born from a triple crisis of representation, legitimation, and praxis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). While the terms may vary, the overarching sentiment is a critical one that confronted qualitative researchers in the human disciplines. The crisis of representation posits that researchers are inherently unable to capture lived experiences through text as text is in and of itself interpretive. Crisis of legitimation problematizes the challenge with evaluating qualitative studies as it necessitates a rethinking of ideas of "generalizability" "reliability" and "validity", metrics for evaluating more traditional and/or quantitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Finally, the crisis of praxis is concerned with how researchers move their discourse from paper and academia to action and life. These crises moved qualitative inquiries into new and critical areas of research.

This idea that qualitative research can transcend positivism and still be valid and worthwhile not only resonates and aligns with my research questions, but as Christians (2018) argues, makes qualitative research uniquely aligned with social justice. Qualitative research ought to base its mission on alternative understandings that human voice devoid of intervention of authority is humanity's distinctiveness. In contrast to the traditional Western belief of justice as understood as right order, restorative justice is the conception of intrinsic worthiness of all

human beings and that worthiness is non-negotiable. Thereby making qualitative research centered around the fundamental issue of social justice seeking its advance grounded in hope (Christians, 2018).

Narrative Inquiry: An Overview

These increasingly critical theories as well as the triple crisis moved on to what Denzin and Lincoln (2018) refer to as the narrative turn. Post-modern and post-experimental moments propelled a move towards storytelling and ethnographies. Narrative has long been a tradition in the humanities used to explore "humanness" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) but began the transition from concept to legitimate and theoretically rich method. As Thomas (2012) recalls criticism from a colleague, "I think it's academic suicide. This fad will never last" (p. 206) and that was the view of some in the academy. Thankfully, narrative inquiry was not and is not academic suicide in fact, it is quite the opposite and as Chase (2018) notes "I was not surprised to find that narrative inquiry is still flourishing" and also notes a "growing maturity in the field" (p. 546) denoted by discussions on boundaries of the field of narrative inquiry in an ever-expanding field.

Autoethnography

The previously described worthiness of human beings and their storied lives is valuable. "Narrative inquiry begins with an ontology of experience. From this conception of reality as relational, temporal, and continuous, it arrives at the conception of how that reality can be known" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p.44) and thus this method not only spoke to me but aligned with my affinity for qualitative inquiry. Furthermore, one of narrative inquiry's strengths has been exploring lived experiences through focusing on personal narratives and in so doing revealing aspects of lives previously hidden or even suppressed by social science (Chase, 2018).

Writing and studying self- narratives developed as a broader trend of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). As the third millennium began, so too did the growing body of self-narratives in the areas of humanities and social sciences and Chang (2016) singles out autoethnography from that body in that it shares the storytelling feature with other genres of self-narrative but transcends other disciplines in the field by incorporating cultural analysis and interpretation.

Early on in my doctoral program, I had a vague sense of what I wanted to explore with my dissertation, but it seemed too "out there" and bordered on the outside boundaries of avant garde. I have come to realize that I am very uniquely situated with my roles in education in addition to my role as the wife of an incarcerated individual. Autoethnography is defined by Ellis et al., (2011) as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (p. 273). Furthermore, they explain how autoethnography is "both process and product" (p. 273). I venture to describe and analyze my personal and professional experiences around discipline and through this microanalysis better understand the larger implications of discipline practices in a broader sense. While autoethnography is perhaps less used and non-traditional, I believe it fits the research questions I seek to answer. Much of educational research is on trends, macro-level quantitative data that inherently seeks to generalize. My own educational experience as a student was full of the value and need for punitive discipline lest schools devolve into lawless places. I distinctly remember "standing on the wall," "losing recess," seeing names on the board with checks (a type of three strikes and you're out theology) in my elementary years. In high school I remember detentions, Saturday Schools, the ISS room. My brother was punished through a number of practices including various suspensions, endured person and locker searches, and the

ability to walk the stage for graduation was even on the line. Even as an adult in my teacher education practices, while a trend was slowly moving from taking recess away, writing "I will not talk" sentences on the board and the like, the knowledge was hierarchical as far as what adults and researchers believed to be good practice for discipline and classroom management.

Carolyn Ellis, seminal scholar in autoethnography puts it this way: She sees her work, this work, as a calling, a mission. She seeks to let the audience feel the emotion of autoethnography; bring life to research and bring research to life (Ellis, 1997). Simultaneously Ellis also acknowledges there will be those who criticize autoethnography as self-absorbed. I contend that it is anything but.

Autoethnography was born out of a postmodernist time in the 1980s sometimes called a "crisis of confidence" where researchers in the social sciences felt that traditional methodologies were limiting not only in their product but in their ontological and epistemological underpinnings (Ellis et al., 2011). Autoethnographers do research while uniquely positioned within that that they study; the process and the product are inextricably linked. These researchers write about epiphanies and life-changing moments through stories in hindsight. While other researchers may look for gaps in the knowledge, autoethnographers see that their own story fills the gaps in the knowledge and choose this method to document narratives which may be otherwise absent from mainstream media (Bhattacharya, 2017). Ethnographers, by contrast, become participant observers in order to study cultures through observations, artifacts with the goal of helping both insiders and outsiders to better understand the studied culture (Ellis et al., 2011). Scholars began to realize that traditional research was often narrow, parochial and limited which served to exclude different ways of knowing, believing, valuing. These limitations created a body of research that was largely from a White, male, upper-middle class, heterosexual, Christian, able-

bodied perspective. “For the most part, those who advocate and insist on canonical forms of doing and writing research are advocating a White, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-classed, Christian, able-bodied perspective” (Ellis et al., 2011). Ettorre aptly describes it this way “Autoethnography supports radical performance, which disturbs established ‘norms of intelligibility.’ Autoethnographers aim to uncover, if not upset, the normative, hegemonic and prevailing ways we analyze human relationships as academics” (Ettorre, 2017, p.11). Autoethnography as a method widens the aperture to include and diversify *what* is knowledge and *who* gets a say.

The field of autoethnography is sometimes divided between those who believe it should be analytic and objective and those who believe it should be self-reflexive and subjective. Anderson's (2006) views represent the more objective camp of scholars. The autoethnography he advocates for should satisfy the following criteria: “the autoethnographer (1) is “a complete member on the social world under study” (p.379); (2) engages reflexivity to analyze data on self; (3) is visibility and activities present in the text; (4) includes other informants in similar situations in data collection; and (5) is committed to theoretical analysis. The opposing side is represented by Ellis and Bochner (2000) as they argue for more evocative, emotionally engaging and subjective autoethnography.

Autoethnography has been linked to either autobiography or ethnography (Ellis, 2004; Reed-Danahay, 1997) but Chang (2016) argues that autoethnography “should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretative orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation” (p. 48). Autoethnography is a method that allows for and invites personal and cultural critique. Myriad labels and characterizations exist within autoethnography: performative autoethnography, queer autoethnography, evocative autoethnography, but as Ellis

& Bochner (2000) point out, those are descriptions but not prescriptions as autoethnographers are not either/or, they are both/and. Autoethnographies can be critical and evocative, performative and reflexive and political and cultural (Boylorn & Orbe, 2021).

Research can be more grounded in personal experiences and value-centered work. In research I can use my experiences and stories and situate them within the broader society of human development, education, politics, poverty, interpersonal relationships, power dynamics, incarceration. I can embrace and even espouse my own emotionality, subjectivity, and influence on research. In autoethnography, I found a method that bucked the status quo, pushed boundaries of what is "good research," how we arrive at knowledge and challenge assumptions about the world. For me, all these what ifs were answered when I began to understand autoethnography.

Autoethnography is both process and product in which autoethnographers use methodological tools, salient research and personal vignettes to not only highlight personal experiences but compare and contrast those experiences with literature and cultural topography. Autoethnographers are reflexive as they write and writing becomes therapeutic for the researcher (Ellis et al., 2011). By using personal stories, the product of an autoethnography aims witness to the reader and to reach a broader audience than traditional research. The writing itself is both a way of knowing and a method of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). This idea is antithetical to the way that many, myself included, were taught to write. The autoethnographer does not need to nor claim absolute truth but indeed can know something without knowing everything. Ettorre contends that rather than thinking about autoethnography as making truth claims, it is doing the following 1) breaking down boundaries between the academic and the creative 2) putting the researcher in the middle of the discussion of what it means for language to

be an active agent of change 3) how to write situated knowledges of oneself and the Other in text (2017).

Critical Autoethnography

Within the realm of autoethnography lies critical autoethnography which highlights personal experiences on the margins with an emphasis on social injustice (Adams, 2017). Critical autoethnography is concerned with culture and power dynamics, constructions of cultural identities, intersectionality and social inequalities (Boylorn & Orbe, 2021). Through critical autoethnography, lived experiences are shared allowing for critical self-reflexivity and cultural commentary which allows examination of relational and intercultural challenges. Critical autoethnography, as Holman Jones (2018) contends, places personal narrative in a light to represent and challenge culture by "bringing attention to the ways cultures are created and compromised through institutional, political, social and interpersonal relations of power" (p.5).

The concept of intersectionality- concurrent present aspects of identity simultaneously manifested within interactions with others- has been a growing topic of study in the last two decades when Kimberle Crenshaw, a critical race scholar, coined the term. Autoethnographers have used the concept of intersectionality and multiple standpoints to situate their stories in ways that reveal positions of privilege and moments of vulnerability (Adams, 2017; Boylorn & Orbe, 2021; Johnson-Bailey, 2003). There are three goals of critical autoethnography that Holman Jones (2018) identifies: 1) examine systems and institutions that privilege some people while marginalizing others; 2) put theory to action through storytelling; and 3) build new knowledge about the social world to stimulate new practice.

Through my work, I aim to make sense of how identity, culture and relationships are interconnected within educational and carceral institutions and in sharing my lived experiences,

turn the gaze toward the social constructs, social circumstances and oppressive inequalities nurtured and perpetuated within these systems.

Autoethnography as a Feminist Method

In describing feminist qualitative research, there are multiple disciplines and varied approaches but notes the shared theme that feminists should not only describe women's situations, but evaluate how race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and socio-economic status in multiple contexts render the taken for granted problematic in ways that move society toward social justice (Olesen, 2007). Further, these writings transformed ideas about women as research participants as well as perspectives on feminist researchers themselves as both implicated and participatory in the production of data (Olesen, 2005). Subsequently, the divide between researcher and participant became seen as penetrable and fluid, and the long-held goal of objectivity fell away, opening a new area with implications for research relationships, ethical considerations and representation issues.

I place my autoethnography within the tradition of feminist narrative and the literary turn within ethnography. Sharing my autoethnography is an embodiment of the feminist ideal that the personal is political. While my stories are certainly personal and vulnerable they are also pointed, written with intent to reveal my experiences within oppressive power structures and as such, intended to create change thus making them both personal and political. In her writing, feminist scholar Ruth Behar (1996) discusses breaking down barriers between participant and observer, occurring in tandem with shifts in the feminist movement's notion that the personal is political, implying that vulnerability and research writing need not be mutually exclusive.

In my autoethnography it is my intent to embrace my feelings, communicate them at length, and situate them within the broader societal and structural frameworks that I inhabit. I

intend to lean into what Ettorre (2017) refers to as her "embodied affectivity" and reject the conventional binary between thoughts and feelings, rationality and emotions. Like Ettorre, I contend feelings are my greatest asset which situates me in a position to raise consciousness and this consciousness raising is a crucial revolutionary practice. As Sarachild (1969) wrote:

> Our feelings are telling us something from which we can learn…our feelings mean something worth analyzing…our feelings are saying something political, something reflecting fear that something bad will happen to us or hope, desire, knowledge that something good will happen to us. Let's share our feelings…our feelings will lead us to ideas and then to actions (p.202).

In later writings, Sarachild (1975) reflects that women tend to think their own problems and sorrows are private yet often are shared by everyone in a group, consequently asking "If all women share the same problem, how can it be personal? Women's pain is not personal, it's political" (p.21). This viewpoint resonates with me as I have been told by so many authority figures, coworkers, even family members "It's not personal." That sentiment enrages me. It dismisses my feelings and experience with the implications of irrationality. And yet viewed another way, it is my strength, it propels me to action, and even more importantly, let's me know that I am not alone or as Juanita Johnson-Berry (2003) puts it, "As keepers of the cultures in which they exist, women tend to speak with an awareness of the community and their surroundings, seldom advancing an individual or isolationist perspective in the ordering of their lives" (p.125). Women's stories are not only political, they are also grounded in community.

Autoethnographers veer toward the political when they tell stories of precarity. Ettorre (2017) hopes to become part of the precariat when she notes that "since the beginning of the millennium, academic studies on the links between vulnerability, precarity, social justice and

human rights have grown" (p.11). Precarity as it is defined by feminist scholars denotes social positionings of insecurity and hierarchization which accompanies Othering. In my experiences both within and outside the educational system, I am drawn to individuals situated in the lower rungs of hierarchies with higher insecurities: food, housing, health, education, etc. These individuals have been cast as Others in broader society, an assignment that generally continues inside the schooling system and definitely within the carceral system. Furthermore, I see my profession, my job as an educator, as a calling and teaching as a political act. Another facet of precarity that Ettorre (2017) further elaborates is that of governmental precaritization in which individuals and groups are designated by working and living conditions and subjugation, embodiment and agency. It is very much in these ways of othering and subjugating that I often see in my students and in incarcerated individuals that sparks my outrage, sadness and anger.

When feminists engage in autoethnography, we purposefully and willfully use a method that allows for the "formation of critical, interpretative space. Doing autoethnography, we give way to an intimate, intermediate space, which includes ambiguity, uncertainty and equivocality" (Ettorre, 2017. p.4). Autoethnography challenges the academy and Ruth Behar envisages that through these challenges we create "a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life" (1996, p.174). Gloria Anzaldua builds upon this idea of borderlands in her text Borderlands La Frontera: The new mestiza (2022) in which she discusses growing up and living her life walking in two cultures at once. She depicts being in a state of beyond binary, not either-or, but rather a state of being both and- La mestiza is an insider and at the same time an outsider perpetually at a crossroads, a borderland.

This positioning of personal and cultural creates a space for autoethnographic engagement to interact with the various standpoints that exist within one person and to situate

them culturally. Reed-Danahay's (1997) discussion of autoethnography discusses a borderland of sorts when she argues “the postmodern/postcolonial conception of self and society is one of a multiplicity of identities and of cultural displacement” (p.2). By acknowledging and analyzing the differences that influence how we experience the world, autoethnography resists the normative perspectives that don’t account for diversity of race, age, class, gender, education, religion (Boylorn & Orbe, 2021; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

As a feminist, I understand and hope to articulate that how I view myself and my views as a woman working within hierarchies and institutions is not necessarily the same way those in my stories center themselves and their lives. I want to highlight a both/and with feminism where, for myself it centers on gender, and for others it may center on gender and other parts of a person’s life (race, class, SES). I also want to acknowledge that Anzaldua writes of her life in multifaceted ways, the center of which is her cultural heritage situated in an often tense, violent and subjugated borderland. I do not intend to appropriate her metaphors or diminish her experiences. I do, however, see many of the same parallels with her commentary and experience on borderland spaces as they relate to vast power differentials and actions by those who feel they have nothing left to lose due to their precarity. Anzaldua (2022) beautifully describes borderlands:

> Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (p.17)

I also need to attend to the issue of impact versus intent and while I cannot know about impact beforehand, I feel it necessary to articulate that it is my intent to use my autoethnography as a disrupter. But even still, I recognize what Johnson-Bailey cautions against lest I reproduce, rather intentionally or not, the status quo when members of the norm group write about those who are members of a less powerful group? Are the calls of the marginalized best responded to by a group member? (Johnson-Bailey, 2003) My answer to that question is a resounding no. Because of positionality and relationships, it is my belief that it is my responsibility to use my voice to amplify, not in place of or as better than any group member I write about.

As a feminist autoethnographer, it is my hope and goal to honor not only my own stories but even more so, the stories of those who find themselves entwined in my life. I make interpretations of another's behaviors without asking if I can but have done so reflexively, and with the goal of producing reliable knowledge (Ettorre, 2017). If I use easily identifiable persons in my stories, I will inform them, otherwise anonymity will be protected by way of changing names or place names. I endeavor to consistently employ autoethnography as a feminist method in which I uphold the feminist concerns of ethic and care as not only a central theme but in my treatment of those I place in my stories. I do not make universal or concrete truth claims in my stories, rather I represent "my truth."

Data Sources

My data sources are various experiences that begin with the first teaching job I had in 2002 and span the rest of my career up to 2025. Beginning in 2017 my data sources are comprised of experiences that I had while first volunteering as an educator inside the Department of Corrections and later experiences I had as the wife of an incarcerated individual. Table 1 is a four-column table organized by date beginning with the oldest data. The second column is the location where the data was collected, the third column is the data type and finally the fourth column is the individual(s) who are part of the data.

Table 1 Data Sources and Timeline

Date	Location	Type of Data	Specific
1/5/2002-5/25/2002	Elementary, Kansas	Memories (reflexive vignettes)	Ryan, Heather
7/2002-8/2004	Philippines	Memories, photos, journals, emails to family printed out and amassed into a scrapbook	
9/2004-5/2005	Middle School, Kansas	Memories (reflexive vignettes)	McKinley, Taylor
8/2005-6/2016	Elementary, Kansas	Memories (reflexive vignettes)	Cody
8/2016-9/2022	Middle School, Kansas	Memories (reflexive vignettes)	Junior
7/2017-1/2019	KDOC, Kansas	Memories, letters, emails, Facebook posts (12/12/17, 12/19/18), (12/13/18), (5/9/18), (4/11/18), 8/22/18), (11/17/18), (9/25/18), (3/21/18), (4/18/18), (9/12/18)	Husband, Raymond, class participants
9/2022-present	Middle and High School, Kansas	photos, videos, emails, memories (reflexive vignettes)	John, Eddie, Antoine, Charlie, Diamond, Sky,
7/2017- present	Kansas	Memories (reflexive vignettes), phone calls, letters, emails, Facebook, journals, photographs	Husband, guards and individuals in person during visit

Data Collection

I contend that I occupy many ethnographic spaces and the boundary zones between them, which can be represented by individual ethnographic ribbons; when these ethnographies are cut, folded, and stitched together in various ways, they create new patterns that accommodate inbetweenness, liminality, and intersectionality--all in one complete package. While autoethnographies need not be concerned with an obsession with objectivity Chang (2016) argues, as broad-based data from internal and external sources provides bases for triangulation and enhances autoethnographic writing. I will use remembered experience, letters, journals, email correspondence, phone calls and historical artifacts as my ribbons of data. It is through these stories as ribbons that I intend to fulfill my research purpose and answer my research questions.

Personal memory as data is a building block of autoethnography. My memories are my primary source of information in my research. I also recognize what Chang (2016) notes that memory is not always a friend to the autoethnographer as it can be unreliable and unpredictable. I utilized visualization strategies and collages when collecting my personal memory data. Despite its precariousness, memory provided a wealth of information to unravel. Self-observational data is data recorded about actual behaviors, thoughts and emotions as they occur in natural contexts and self-reflective data results from introspection and self-analysis of said data (Chang, 2016). This self-observational and self-reflective data includes personal journal entries, memos, past social media posts, and reflections upon memory data as well as externally sourced data as subsequently described.

My final ribbon of data consists of data from external sources that provide additional and de-centered perspectives and contextual information (Chang, 2016). Textual artifacts in an autoethnography provide additional evidence to enhance and deepen understanding and comprise some of my external data such as text messages, emails and handwritten letters to and from my husband. Other external artifacts include photographs.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in an autoethnography is an interactive and murky process because the process of writing as inquiry is messy and tangled. I began with my research questions as a starting point. These questions elicited memories and answers from a two-decades long career as I am simultaneously working as a restorative justice facilitator and daily adding more data and experience to my repertoire of answers to my research questions. As I began to write both for course work and for this dissertation itself, I exhumed and examined and critiqued my memories and stories all the while balancing them and triangulating them with research as part of this project and as part of my professional development. My data took the form of journals, emails, texts, conversations, phone calls, photographs, security video footage, that I began sorting and categorizing into digital folders. For older experiences prior to 2020, I have relied on my memory for data. For experiences post 2020 I began creating digital folders within Google Drive. I have a digital folder for all data about and communication with and about my husband. I have a digital folder for experiences with students that I have further subdivided into folders based on the school in which I was working.

Analytic codes helped me to not only create but analyze and sort my data as well. Analytic codes are “somewhat comparable to research journal entries or blogs- a place to dump your brain about participants, phenomenon or process under investigation” (Saldaña, 2021, p.58).

Coding and analytic code writing are concurrent in that there is a relationship between developing a coding system and the evolution of understanding a phenomenon. While "dumping my brain" was generally enough, I asked myself the following reflection questions when writing about students and individuals in my data source table: 1) What did the individual/student do? 2) What did I do? 3) How did I feel?

I employed various data interpretation and analysis techniques. Data analysis and interpretation are often used interchangeably but Chang (2016) offers a distinction between interpretation as making sense of the data in meaning and context whereas data analysis is identifying essential features and descriptions of interrelationships among them. While often used synonymously, they are not the same though not independent of one another either. Through narrative and motif analysis, I was able to identify recurring phenomena and issues that continually resurfaced in my stories and vignettes (Saldaña, 2021). Chang (2016) names 10 strategies for data analysis and interpretation: 1) search for recurring themes; 2) look for cultural themes; 3) identify exceptional occurrences; 4) analyze inclusion and omission; 5) connect the present with the past; 6) analyze relationships between self and others; 7) compare yourself with other people's cases; 8) contextualize broadly; 9) compare with social science constructs; and 10) frame with theories and I found myself using all techniques throughout my writing. "Analyzing relationships between self and others" was central to my work I did but also extended that idea to search for relationships that I saw between school systems and carceral systems.

Figure 10 is a visual representation of my data analysis that formed the structure of the narrative in chapter four. Through analysis of my analytic codes, the recurring motifs surfaced and are denoted in teal: compliance and control, fear of incompetence, silence as protection,

differential treatment, escalation of minor noncompliance, order over relationship, police in schools, threat of being detained/handcuffs, poverty and discipline, isolation as punishment, punishing disability and school-prison parallels. I organized those recurring motifs into four themes which are denoted in purple: Theme 1: Early Experiences that Link Power to Shame, Theme 2: Institutional Power Enforces and Sustains Racialized Discipline, Theme 3: Contradictions of Control in Carceral & School Systems, Theme 4: Systems Reinforce Socioeconomic Disparities and Criminalize Poverty. Figure 10 shows the alignment and relationship of motifs to themes and research questions.

Figure 10 Visual Map

Figure 11 shows a visual representation of the relationship between analytic codes to recurring motifs and finally to the four themes. On the right-hand side in blue are the analytic codes that I assigned to my data were: obedience expected, top-down authority, punishment over reflection, new teacher anxiety, compliance to avoid criticism, deference to authority, non-intervention, racialized punishment, fear of retaliation, cultural bias, self-censorship, small defiance= harsh response, unequal consequences, power struggles, institutional loyalty, zero tolerance logic, control prioritized over care, policy adherence over empathy, normalization of surveillance, law enforcement presence, fear-based compliance, criminalizing behavior, physical restraint threat, exclusion from learning, loss of dignity, timeout as control, misunderstanding behavior, emotional alienation, failure to accommodate, criminalizing poverty, lack of access to advocacy, carceral logic, punishment for instability, dehumanization and institutional power mirrored. I then refined my analytic codes into motif codes that are represented in teal in Figure 11. These motifs are compliance and control, fear of incompetence, silence as protection, differential treatment, escalation of minor noncompliance, order over relationship, police in schools, threat of being detained/handcuffs, poverty and discipline, isolation as punishment, punishing disability and school-prison parallels. Finally, I further categorized these motifs into the four major themes of my data Theme 1: Early Experiences that Link Power to Shame, Theme 2: Institutional Power Enforces and Sustains Racialized Discipline, Theme 3: Contradictions of Control in Carceral & School Systems, Theme 4: Systems Reinforce Socioeconomic Disparities and Criminalize Poverty and these are denoted in purple.

Figure 11 Visual Map

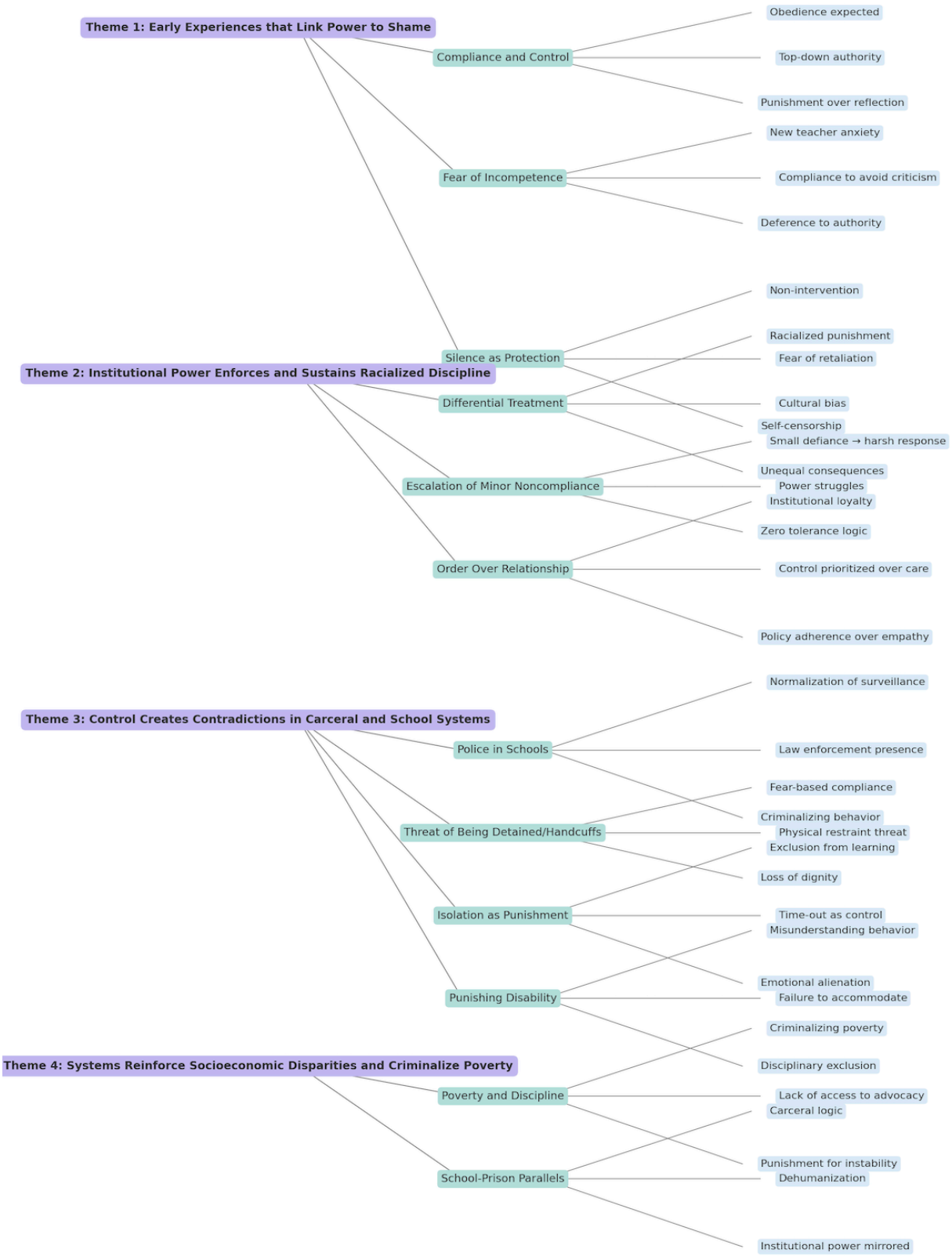


Table 2 presents the four themes with examples of narrative analysis and supporting vignettes. Theme One: Early Experiences that Link Power to Shame chronicles my first few years of teaching through the data ribbons of Ryan's behavior and Heather's apology in scene one and Cody's classroom outburst in scene two. Theme Two: Institutional Power Enforces and Sustains Racialized Discipline is a compilation of my experiences as a classroom teacher highlighting the data ribbons in scene one of Eddie, a student in a school later in my career as Restorative Justice Facilitator and scene two of my own experiences in court as the wife of an incarcerated individual.

Table 2 Theme Alignment to Data Ribbons

Theme	Key Data Ribbons / Vignettes
Theme 1: Early Experiences that Link Power to Shame	-First years of teaching: fear of being seen as poor classroom manager, complicit in removal of students without questioning -Ryan's behavior and my reaction -Heather public apology -Cody's classroom outburst - Pressure to conform to compliance-based norms
Theme 2: Institutional power enforces and sustains racialized discipline	- Observation of discipline data showing racial disparity - Black boys disciplined for non-compliance, tone, posture -Eddie being tackled at morning metals -My experience and feelings in court
Theme 3: Control creates contradictions in Carceral and School Systems	- McKinley (OCD, ODD, LD) punished with isolation when unmedicated - Taylor (autism) sent to isolation room when dysregulated - Charlie bathroom incident and teacher double standards -My experience at visit in DOC - Parallels to DOC hypocrisy and punishment for minor infractions
Theme 4: Socioeconomic Disparities and the Criminalization of Poverty	- Antoine's threat of handcuffs by SROs in urban high school - Junior's hood incident (White student) as contrast to disproportionate discipline for Black boys - Peace Corps experience in the Philippines: education as privilege, barriers to attendance - Contrast between affluent and low-income U.S. school parents' ability to advocate for children

Just as the process of writing as inquiry is both process and product; a constant interactive process, my data analysis was the same way. Continually growing, changing, taking on new facets as I used the ten previously mentioned strategies in my analysis.

Protection of Human Subjects

Although my stories are told from my viewpoint, the question that Clandinin and Connelly (2000) pose to writers frames the ethical considerations within my study.: "Do they own the story because they tell it?" While my work is autoethnographic, I portray other individuals throughout; sometimes as only minor characters in passing and sometimes as main characters in entire vignettes. Protecting the privacy of others in ethnographic research is much more difficult than in other studies with human subjects as my identity is already disclosed thus making the identities of those connected to me transparent to the broader readership (Chang, 2016). For those easily identifiable individuals, I have obtained consent as well as input. I sought input and others' memories of shared experiences as a check of my remembrances but also to add voice and depth to my narratives.

I use Ettorre's (2017) concept of *emotional encompassing,* meaning I use my embodied emotions to guide me in composing my stories in *relation to others*. Emotional compassing holds that I go through difficult feelings or emotions as I recall and reflect upon my experiences before and as I write them. As an autoethnographer, I am not making absolute truth claims, rather, I am representing my truths which others may or may not see as their truths in my stories. My goal is to use autoethnography as a feminist method whereby I embody the feminist concern of ethics and care in my stories.

Trustworthiness

Feminist qualitative researchers address issues of validity in research by framing it as "trustworthiness" as outlined by Olesen (2007). According to Tracy (2010) good qualitative research is: relevant, timely, significant, interesting, or evocative. She also contends that worthy topics often emerge from timely societal or personal events. A person's educational experiences shape who they become in life thus making teaching and the reflection on teaching practices relevant, timeless, significant, interesting and evocative.

Furthermore, the "goodness" of qualitative research, according to Tracy (2010) can be assessed through such criteria as: sincerity, credibility, resonance and significant contribution. Here again, the sincerity with which I reflect and write about my lived experience is whole-hearted and completely authentic. Because the experiences are my own, I am open with my biases and missteps and seek to be transparent and reflexive about them. As I have been immersed in many facets of the education field for more than two decades, I have seen myriad sides of discipline; from the teacher, administration, parent and student side. I have been in the business enough time to longitudinally see the effects of punishment in various forms. I believe this research will resonate not only with educators, but with parents, criminal justice advocates and policy makers. Further, it is my goal to provide multivocality in my inquiry so as to give not only credence but depth to the overall narrative.

Lather's (1993) transgressive validity can blur genres, explore lived experience, and break down dualism and offers a feminist lens with which to examine trustworthiness, calling for a subversive move in what doing research means. According to Richardson (1993) authority in research is garnered through engagement and reflexivity. Her feminist emancipatory stance on validity encompasses much of this research project:

> Postmodernist culture permits us- indeed, encourages us- to doubt that any method of knowing or telling can claim authoritative truth. We have an historical opportunity to create space for different kinds of science practice. As one possible practice, I have modeled here a feminist-postmodernist practice. In that practice, one's relationship to one's work is displayed. There is a sense of immediacy, of an author's presence and pleasure in doing the work. Lived-experience is not "talked about," it is demonstrated; science is created as a lived-experience. Dualisms- "mind-body," "intellect-emotion," "self-other," "researcher-researched," "literary writing-science writing"- are collapsed. The researcher is embodied, reflexive, self-consciously partial. A female imaginary, an unremarked gynocentric world, centers and grounds the practice. Space is left for others to speak, for tension and differences to be acknowledged, celebrated, rather than buried alive (Richardson, p. 706).

Autoethnography is an intervention into traditional Western epistemology and as Ettorre (2017) suggests the goals are of visceral response and emotional empathy. In judging my work, I ask that the reader decide. Have I evoked a visceral response? Emotional empathy? As Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) suggest, has my work provided substantive contribution? Aesthetic merit? Have I been reflexive and held myself accountable to the standards of knowing and telling? And most importantly, have I moved anyone to action?

Chapter Summary

Narrative inquiry has long been employed to explore our humanness and as a means knowledge construction. Within narrative inquiry rests autoethnography. Autoethnographers see that their own story fills the gaps in the knowledge and choose this method to document narratives which may be otherwise absent from mainstream media. Using my own stories and

critical feminism as a lens, I analyze my experiences with punitive and restorative discipline within broader social constructs in educational and carceral settings. Employing the feminist ethic of care, and emotional encompassing, I endeavor to use my unique positionality in borderlands that often do not intersect to highlight and amplify stories of precarity that weave through the school to prison pipeline.

Chapter 4 - A Journey Through Power, Discipline, and Transformation

Introduction

The purpose of this autoethnography was to explore my experience and sense making as an educator whose personal and professional lives intertwine with tensions associated with punitive and restorative discipline practices. What follows are a collection vignettes presented as scenes cataloguing my personal and professional experiences within the educational and carceral systems. These scenes are not necessarily chronologically presented but presented as their relevance and connection to each theme. My primary data for this autoethnography is memories in the form of reflexive vignettes supplemented and strengthened by external data sources such as journal entries, memos, past social media posts, emails, texts, conversations, phone calls, photographs and security video footage. Through analytic codes and motif coding I stitched my ribbons of data together into the following four themes: Early Experiences that Link Power to Shame, Institutional power enforces and sustains racialized discipline, Control Creates Contradictions in Carceral and School Systems and Systems Reinforce Socioeconomic Disparities and Criminalize Poverty. Each theme contains scenes from different points in my life that illustrates my experiences and growth during that time. Each theme concludes with my current viewpoints presented as revelations on my experience surrounding the theme. The final revelation is the stitched together ribbons of data woven into a tapestry of themes that illustrates the undeniable parallels between two would-be opposite systemic entities: education and carceral.

To further clarify how the findings in this chapter emerged, I engaged in multiple rounds of coding—analytic codes, motif coding, and theme identification. Through this process systematically connect lived experiences to broader patterns of meaning while keeping sight of how narratives addressed my research questions. Table 3 synthesizes these results, presenting each theme alongside its description, recurring motifs, and key revelations. This structure highlights both the depth of reflection within individual stories and the coherence of the broader patterns across my experiences.

Table 3 Motif Coding and Theme Identification

	Theme 1: Early Experiences that Link Power to Shame	Theme 2: Institutional Power Enforces and Sustains Racialized Discipline	Theme 3: Control Creates Contradictions in Carceral and School Systems	Theme 4: Systems Reinforce Socioeconomic Disparities and Criminalize Poverty
Theme Description	This theme reveals the intersection of lived experience and systemic forces, showing how symbols manifest in policy and practice	This theme illustrates how racialized interpretations of behavior shape institutional disciplinary responses	This theme highlights the parallels between school-based discipline and carceral practices	This theme explores how poverty and race intersect with institutional control
Recurring Motifs	Compliance & Control, Fear of Incompetence, Silencing as Protection,	Differential Treatment, Escalation of Minor Noncompliance, Order Prioritized over Relationship	Control & Police in Schools, Threat of being Detained/Handcuffs, Institutional Justification	Isolation as Punishment, Punishing Disability/ Poverty, Fear as Compliance Tool, School/Prison Parallels
Revelations	My perspective evolved from passive compliance to active critical reflection revealing a gradual development of critical consciousness. These symbols suggest that systemic inequities are reinforced through routine actions, both in schools and parallel institutions.	Control appears in policies that demand immediate compliance and punish deviation from unspoken cultural norms. The examples demonstrate how institutional enforcement normalizes inequity, particularly for Black boys and other marginalized peoples.	Institutional authority uses containment and humiliation as tools of order. The vignettes underscore the structural similarities between educational and correctional settings, directly linking my school experiences with my understanding of carceral logic.	Low-income students, particularly students of color, face a heightened risk of punitive discipline. I demonstrate how the criminalization of poverty is embedded in school practices, and how fear-based compliance strategies erode trust between families and schools.

Opening Reflection: Entering the Profession with Blind Spots

I turned 23 years old in November 2001, graduated college with my undergrad in Elementary Education in December, and was unexpectedly offered a 5th grade teaching position

a few weeks later. I had gone to a job fair just for some networking and interview experience and then got the call and a job offer a few days later. Right out of the gate I secured a position with health insurance and a salary that was in the 20-thousands! I didn't know too much about the district as it was about 30 miles to the north, about the school, or position other than it was 5th grade. The explanation I was given for the job opening mid-year was that the teacher had previously been a gifted teacher and decided to transition into regular general education teaching and realized it wasn't for her.

I set about designing my bulletin boards, enlisted my mom's help in covering all the old laminate counter surfaces with bright yellow contact paper and making my new room as cheery as possible before the students arrived after winter break. I was given a paper grade book, a desk, and that was about it. These were pre-computer days and even pre-air conditioning days! I had no idea of the state standards, curriculum, pacing, and certainly no idea about who the twenty-two pre-teens were that I was about to teach for the rest of the year. Reflecting back, the sheer volume of what I didn't know is astounding.

Theme 1: Early Experiences that Link Power to Shame

Scene One: First Teaching Job, 2002

I began my teaching career not fully understanding the systems I was entering or the power dynamics I would both encounter, and eventually, question. The early 2000s were still a time when traditional classroom management approaches were considered best practice. Compliance was prioritized, and discipline was synonymous with control. I didn't know any differently, and I certainly hadn't begun to think critically about the intersection of race, class, behavior, and institutional response.

The city and school that I was assigned to was an interesting microcosm of humanity. Home to three different prisons, the shadow of the carceral system loomed. I would later find out that some of my students had parents who worked in those facilities, and others who were housed in those facilities. The city was also home to an army base which added an interesting demographic of students and families with ties to the military. While I had done my student teaching in a sheltered English 1st grade classroom in Kansas City, Kansas, I was accustomed to a certain level of what I had thought was diversity but was entirely non-white, non-native English-speaking children from low-income families. They were only diverse with respect to me.

My first few days and weeks were rough. Like any first job there are things that nothing can prepare you for except for experience itself. I quickly learned that the previous teacher had tried to run the classroom like she had run small groups with gifted students; that is with very loose structure and far too much student choice for a general education classroom. As I tried to assert some authority and take charge, kids pushed back, and I was at a total loss for what to do. There hadn't been any behavior problems in my student teaching. After all, the kids were five and six years old, many brand new to the country and non-English speaking. However now, looking back more than twenty years later with the experience I have gained, it was not a challenging class - "behavior problems" were garden variety; talking back, not doing work, talking too much. Except for Ryan.

Ryan was a petite blond boy with an impish smile and a lot of energy. When he was happy everyone would know it and when he was angry everyone would know as well. He received a lot of special services, so he was often outside of the classroom. He struggled academically, but with my lack of knowledge about district and state standards and even less knowledge about standardized testing, I am now embarrassed to admit how little this troubled

me at the time. I also had very limited knowledge about trauma and stress and their impacts on learning and behavior. I knew that Ryan had quite a few children living at his home with his single mom. I knew that Ryan often got dark and moody and would lash out at others indiscriminately. One of those times is etched in my memory. Ryan was angry, about what I no longer recall, but he was yelling and crying, and I was right in front of him. He punched forward closed-fisted and hit the wall near my head. I was dumbfounded and scared. It was like time stood still. I know that neither Ryan nor I were hurt, but I have no idea what the other twenty or so kids were doing and no memory of what happened next.

I don't even remember if or how he was punished. What I do remember is what I thought; I was unequipped to handle a student like Ryan, and I felt like he shouldn't be in my class or with other kids. I gave little to no thought about why Ryan acted the way he did, where I thought he belonged if not in my class or how, I, as his classroom teacher could and had a duty to meet his needs, however intensive they may be. I don't remember giving much thought to how his behavior impacted the other students in the class either.

The opposite end of the spectrum from Ryan was Heather. She was a precocious and thoughtful girl from a military family full of daughters who moved around a lot due to her father's job. She was an overachiever and clearly derived satisfaction and value from her accomplishments in the classroom. She could be bossy and demanding, often impatient with her peers but she was not a behavior problem and was generally a classroom leader.

Heather's infraction is fuzzy, but I remember having to contact her parents about a misdeed, something like cheating or dishonesty about academics. I don't remember giving the incident much more thought than or thinking that it warranted any other disciplinary response than parent contact. Her father had other ideas. He made Heather write an apology note to me

and to the class. He then came to school to have her read it in front of himself, me and her classmates. She was mortified. She teared up and he sternly told her to go on, showing no tenderness or compassion. The other students shifted in their seats uncomfortably and looked to me for cues on how to react. I was at a loss. I felt that I should jump in and protect Heather from what I felt was unnecessary and frankly abusive public embarrassment and shame. But instead, I did nothing.

I let another adult, a non-educator, come into my classroom, take charge and publicly shame and humiliate a child in the name of punishment and penance. Now, more than two dozen years later, the feelings of this encounter still haunt me but for more nuanced reasons.

Scene Two: Second Teaching Job, 2005

Five years later, in a different school in another school district I had a little more experience and confidence in my teaching practice. It wasn't enough, however, to trust my gut and speak up when I felt a disciplinary mistake was made to the detriment of a child. I was again teaching 5th grade and was extremely lucky to only have 14 students in my class! Even so, the students were a varied and diverse bunch: two Russian speakers, two Spanish speakers, and a revolving latecomer or two owing to the small motel next door that rented by the week and required no downpayment.

As part of the 5th grade curriculum, students worked all of the third quarter on projects relating to their culminating field trip to Exchange City. This field trip was interdisciplinary and combined skills in math, reading and civics. Students learned about applying for and interviewing for jobs, getting and depositing a paycheck, writing checks (it was 2006) and having a discretionary income to purchase things in the city. It was generally something that

students looked forward to about being in the 5th grade and something even I remember about my 5th grade experience many years ago.

Cody was one of the students in my class. He was a typical 5th grade boy and was sometimes squirrely and had a quick trigger when angry. Even still, he was average academically and usually even-tempered and didn't get in trouble. One day, however, something made him angry. I don't remember what it was but something else must have been going on because he had a very big, emotional reaction. He was yelling and screaming and kicking and throwing things. The protocol at the time was to remove a student from the classroom when they became this escalated. I didn't feel like I could do that, and with such a small class it was easier to call for help from a counselor to stay with Cody while I took the other students to another room. When the principal got involved, it was determined that Cody's punishment would be losing the Exchange City field trip. How was this fair? That behavior for Cody was out of the norm and was a disproportionate reaction that should have warranted counseling and social work services instead of such a punishment that removed a curricular requirement and academic field trip.

Punishing a student for an emotional reaction such as Cody's is not in line with educating a child. Clearly in this case, Cody demonstrated that he lacked the skills to handle big emotions. These are skills that must be taught and modeled for young people. Punishing Cody did not teach him emotional regulation, in fact it cultivated anger and resentment which are counterintuitive to emotional regulation and growth. As the educator, I was afraid to voice my opinion and opposition to the punishment because I was afraid that I would seem like I was condoning students shouting, kicking and throwing things. I was unable to see or articulate that there were more than just the two extremes of condoning or punishing behavior. I didn't recognize or

advocate for the middle ground that doesn't judge as right or wrong but rather sees room for skill-building and growth and repair.

Revelations

The first few years of my career as an educator were marked by my own passive compliance that I passed down as an expectation to my students. This later evolved into active critical reflection revealing a gradual development of critical consciousness. In my current position as a restorative justice facilitator, I am no longer passively compliant to systems or expectations particularly those which cause harm. The tenants of restorative practices, as I have come to learn, revolve around repair and healing and seeking to right wrongs for everyone involved and above all to do no further harm. Shame, humiliation and fear are counterintuitive to repair and restoration. As an adult, I can say that shame, humiliation and fear are counter to growing and developing for anyone, particularly young people, and cause trauma that is not healthy and antithetical to sound educational pedagogy. Even still I hear adults and even educators say things like "they need to be embarrassed" or "they should feel guilty" about their meting out punishments and handling of student misdeeds. If that is the goal of the punisher than the punishment is about further meting out harm as a response to harm thereby increasing the pain and harm. My goal when students cause harm is to help them understand the harm that they caused and then encourage them to take on the emotional and cognitive load of problem-solving how to right or mitigate that wrong. If a student feels shame or embarrassment in the process, I will contend that it is a natural consequence of recognition by the student and a byproduct of the process, not the intention or goal of the punishment.

My early classroom experiences were shaped by my desire to do right by students but also by my fear of being perceived as a poor classroom manager. I remember the awkwardness

of calling home, the pressure to keep students in line, and the tension I felt when things got loud or unpredictable. I can recall students being removed for infractions I didn't fully understand, but I was too new, too unsure, to speak up. The way discipline was handled often didn't sit right with me, but I hadn't yet found the language or confidence to push back and advocate for my students and for what I felt was morally and pedologically correct.

That uncertainty—combined with an internalized pressure to conform—left me complicit in systems I would only later begin to question. These early years planted the seeds for reflection that would deepen over time, especially as I witnessed how power was enforced unevenly and punitively across different student populations.

Theme 2: Institutional Power Enforces and Sustains Racialized Discipline

Throughout my career, I've taught in schools where the student body was predominantly Black and Brown and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. I noticed trends. Students who were louder, who expressed frustration differently, who didn't defer immediately to adult authority—these students were often labeled as "problems."

Scene 1: First Year as Restorative Justice Facilitator, 2022

In one school, the use of discipline data revealed what I was seeing with my own eyes: a disproportionate number of Black students, particularly boys, were being sent out of class, suspended, or labeled as defiant. Meanwhile, similar behaviors from White or more affluent students were met with more curiosity, more redirection, and more grace.

When punishment and discipline are done in the spirit of retribution or assertion of power and harm with a goal of dehumanization, embarrassment or shame, the result is either immediate

or compounded anger, self-preservation and defense mode. These actions translate into the primitive human response to fear and danger: fight flight or freeze. One of the troubling facts about this is that each person will manifest that anger, defense and self-preservation differently. Sometimes immediate and sometimes the feelings simmer and roil for years before erupting in a seemingly innocuous situation.

Part of my job as the restorative justice facilitator was to supervise the metal detectors at morning arrival. Not only was this listed in my job description as a required duty, but it was also truly the highlight of my day. At first it may seem an antithetical task given my title, but I chose to look at it differently. I aimed to be the first point of adult contact for students as they entered the building. The presence of two metal detectors and two x-ray machines, while arguably a necessary evil, creates a police-state environment of control, surveillance and can be an intrusive part of a student's school day and educational experience. This post again confirmed for me what I had already learned through experience; my approach to any conflict could determine and almost guarantee how the conflict would resolve.

As students entered the building, they formed two lines coming up the stairs toward the two doorframe metal detectors which each had a bag scanning metal detector staffed by district Safety and Security Associates (SSAs). As students walked through the doorframe metal detectors, they needed to be able to "clear" without beeping within three tries or they had to go up to the front office to wait for a building administrator who would search them. As the kids walked in the building, the PE teacher and I gave our daily reminders about taking off belts, putting cellphones and Air pods in backpacks to try to ensure that kids would pass through the detectors expediently. These interactions were prime opportunities to anger students for myriad reasons. First, it was 6:45 in the morning and most were groggy and grouchy anyway. Second,

humans and specifically teens don't like being singled out for any reason, even valid ones. Finally, if they are trying to get unallowed items in school (usually vape pens), then they know their plan didn't work, and they will either have to leave school or give up whatever item they must to be admitted. Whatever the case, I always tried to approach the situation with a kind and even tone, addressing the student by name and always giving them the benefit of the doubt even if I was fairly sure it wasn't warranted

Eddie was a light-skinned African American high school junior, rarely attended school and was a known troublemaker. Although he was a quiet kid, he wore a house arrest ankle bracelet on at one point during the school year and that alone carried a warning label. The following situation escalated quickly—not because Eddie was being aggressive, but because he didn't comply fast enough. It struck me that the adult's need for control overrode any attempt at connection or understanding. Eddie came to school and chose to come through my line, as many "troublemakers" did. Eddie came through and he beeped. The doorway metal detectors have the beeping sound to alert the individual and also have flashing lights at the head, chest, waist, knees and feet to indicate to the operator where on the individual the metal may be. I gave Eddie the routine, more personalized reminders about what to remove from his person and asked him to try again. He beeped again. At this point, Eddie had beeped twice, and this usually drew attention from the two SSAs as well as students or any bystanders. This morning, one of those bystanders was SRO Grant, a large Black and Asian man who took his job very seriously and though he hadn't been on the job long, he hadn't made efforts trying to get to know the kids or socialize with them to build relationship and rapport. Eddie went through a third time and seeing as how he had changed nothing, beeped a third time. His backpack had made it through the scanners fine and he grabbed it and put it on. While he was irritated, he was not irate. I

approached him calmly and asked if we could step aside. Legally I wasn't allowed to search students but often if I pulled them aside and told them that was the next step, being searched by administration, they would often hand me the vape, remember they had a belt on, show me the forgotten AirPods in their pocket, remember their steel-toed boots. I asked if he had on another pair of shorts or pants with zippers. He said no. He pulled his pocket out so that I could see it was empty. Looking closely, however, I could see that what was beeping was up higher where the small pocket was. I saw something in the pocket and recognized condoms. I told him it was the small pocket and asked if it was condoms. He said yes. He was going to grab his bag. I asked him to just take the condoms out so I could see them and then wand again.

Officer Grant, however, happened to be standing around and told me he'd "take care of it." I immediately knew that this wouldn't go well but due to my own fear of and deference to uniformed law enforcement, I consented to let him take over. "I'm not playing with you," Officer Grant yelled. His tone to Eddie was louder than necessary, his body positioning too close, and he touched Eddie, while only in an attempt guide him to a nearby recessed doorway, it was a touch nonetheless which was obviously triggering and Eddie yanked away, moving into fight or flee reaction. His yanking away only served to bolster Officer Grant's position of authority, and he positioned Eddie with his back to a closed door and his front to Officer Grant, meaning that effectively Eddie was detained. It was at this time that Eddie started getting loud saying things like "Get offa me, man. Move. Let me leave" and Officer Grant responded with loud directives to hand over whatever it was that beeped in the metal detector. At some point, Eddie Facetimed his mom and was yelling to her that a cop was harassing him and he couldn't move or leave. This incensed Officer Grant as I don't believe that this was truly his intention, but it was certainly his impact. By this time, the scene was drawing attention from everyone nearby. Eddie

was triggered, yelling and cussing and trying to get by Officer Grant without putting his hands on him. Finally, Eddie slipped past him and was trying to run away but Officer Grant grabbed his backpack which Eddie shrugged off, so Officer Grant grabbed Eddie's arm, yanking him off balance so he fell, with Officer Grant on top of him. Eddie's phone clattered down the hall, his mother still on FaceTime screaming "What are you doing to my baby? Help! Get off my baby!"

It seemed like Officer Grant was shocked that he had ended up on top of the student. When he got up, Eddie grabbed his bag, grabbed his phone and left the building. He never came back to school. Not that year or the next. I have no idea what happened to him. I was in shock as well. I couldn't believe what I had just witnessed with my own eyes. Furthermore, I was disgusted and ashamed of myself. Why did I not intervene? Why did I even let Officer Grant take charge in the first place? I was in a daze the rest of the morning intake of students and as soon as I could, I made a formal complaint with administration about Officer Grant's actions but even doing that provided me with no comfort.

Imagining how Eddie felt that day is heart shattering. Thinking about the impact that that experience left on him haunts me. I can only imagine the fear, anger, embarrassment, and powerlessness he must have felt. Then when I think of his mother in those moments, I can't even imagine the fear she must have endured. A fear for her child that I have never had to face and likely never will, with the added injustice of that fear being for her child while he was at his school; her fears of raising a non-white male in our society that I will never personally have to endure. I imagined this type of scenario playing out in a suburban school with more affluent clientele knowing that the political and collateral damage would swiftly be remedied with job loss, policy change and media coverage. None of those things happened in this case. To some extent, poor and unjustified treatment is commonplace and even expected. This is not to say that

it's tolerated, but I have learned that whereas I feel compelled and even entitled to fight against it, that is a privilege and an expectation I have that is not shared by many of my students and their families. They expect some level and variation of over-controlling, unfair and biased treatment from those individuals, entities and institutions more powerful than themselves. They teach their children how to prepare for and mitigate situations like Eddie did; he FaceTimed his mom when he felt things were going sideways.

Personally, I reflect on this day and wonder why I behaved the way I did? Why did I let my own fear and deference of uniformed law enforcement overshadow the duties of my positions and moreover my moral duty to protect and educate children? Thankfully, Officer Grant was not on the job much longer, and I vowed to use that experience as a constant reminder of who I am and what I believe in. I had allowed my own self-doubt and fear to supersede, even when I was older, a trained educator, restorative facilitator and conflict mediator and knew in my gut that Officer Grant possessed none of that experience or skills. I have replayed the scenario in my head a thousand times, wondering if I had stepped in and stepped up, asserting to Officer Grant that I was in control and I would take care of the situation, how would things have been different? If I had intervened when I saw Eddie getting agitated, could I have avoided the whole scene AND given Officer Grant an on-the-job lesson of how-to better handle conflict? Could I have modeled to surrounding staff and students how to remain calm but firm and assertive while helping Eddie protect his rights and his dignity? But most of all, what could I have done to mitigate the situation so that Eddie may have perceived me and even school as a safe place, a place where he would want to attend?

Scene Two: Kansas District County Courthouse, 2023

As the wife of an incarcerated individual, I was thrust into the justice and carceral system suddenly. None of my college degrees or life experience prepared me and I have not the background, familial or cultural knowledge of these systems from which to draw on to shape meaning. In the professional and social spheres of life I inhabit, I understand and operate by spoken and unspoken rules and trust that I can adapt to cues from my environment to continue to do so. Finding myself in a courtroom for the first time as a forty-something put me in a place where I felt othered in every way.

The courtroom was smaller than I imagined a courtroom would be. I entered with my husband's attorney and sat in the gallery as the rest of his family arrived. The district attorney and her assistant were already there and ready to begin. As I looked around the room, I felt oddly out of place. The attorneys were white. The bailiffs were white. The stenographer was white. I was the only white person in the gallery. The judge entered the room, a large and imposing man in a robe, and everyone immediately stood. I had the feeling that they were reading from a script that I did not have, as I was likely also the only person in the gallery who hadn't been to court. I approached the bailiffs to ask if I could sit behind my husband, if I could hug him or kiss him when he entered. The men looked at each other and then looked at me as if a more absurd question had never been asked. "No," one of them said, "He can't even turn around to look at you. Judge will have everyone in the gallery leave." My husband entered the courtroom in an orange smock and orange scrubs with plastic sandals. His wrists were cuffed to each other in front of him and attached to a waist chain. His ankles were bound with leg cuffs which required him to shuffle slowly to his seat and as he did so, he stole a glance back at me and his family as he surely already knew the rules of no contact.

The district attorney spoke first, outlining all the reasons that the judge should dismiss the motion before him and highlighting the reasons my husband's attorney was wrong, shouldn't be considered, was out of time to raise concerns, which were not even valid concerns. Her tone was patronizing as if she and the judge shared a special knowledge about rules we were in violation of, her pace hurried and her demeanor condescending. I was seething. Surely, she knew that we had spent thousands and waited over four years for these mere hours in front of a judge! How dare this woman act as though she was inconvenienced by my husband exercising his constitutional rights? My husband was trying to whisper to his attorney and trying to take notes with a marker they had given him. He was struggling mightily as they had not seen fit to uncuff his hands from each other or from his waist. I was absolutely appalled at the unfairness and injustice of the entire spectacle and was gripping my mother-in-law's arm tightly and muttering to my sister-in law. My reactions were not at all subtle and the judge stopped and addressed the gallery, specifically me, "I will not tolerate disruption of any kind in my courtroom. I will have all of you leave and wait outside. Sir, (now addressing my husband) you will not speak in this courtroom. That is why you have a lawyer." As my husband's lawyer began to speak, the district attorney seemed not be held to the same standards of decorum as throughout she mumbled things, shook her head and seemed to disagree with the facts of the case even she only read about events in question whereas my husband had lived them.

This hearing was only oral arguments for a civil case. My husband was already found guilty and in custody of the state. The prison orange and myriad chains and restraints seemed like unnecessary overkill. Their purpose seemed to serve as a reminder, as if one is needed, that the state and the system is in charge and he cannot even so much as avert his eyes in an unauthorized direction. The expectation of him seemed to be that he was to sit like a child;

immobile and mute in the chair while the adults talked about him and his case and determined what would become of him. Everything about that courtroom was to remind the players in it of their place. The judge wears a robe and sits on a throne looking out over his subjects. The attorneys sit on padded chairs at tables. The onlookers in the gallery sit on wooden benches. My husband sits chained. The flag hanging in the courtroom promising "Liberty and Justice for all" seemed to mock those of us in the courtroom seeking just that. I did not feel like a citizen in that courtroom, I felt like an intruder, an outsider and even the judge referred to it as "my courtroom." It was as if he was the Wizard of Oz and we were Dorothy, just there seeking a way home.

That experience in the courtroom gave me a personal experience of the justice system that I had always assumed was fair, just, unbiased, even compassionate. I got none of those impressions that day. I felt secondhandedly punished and disciplined and done so in the spirit of retribution and assertion of power with a byproduct of harm, dehumanization, embarrassment and shame. I recognized the primitive human response to fear and danger within myself: fight flight or freeze. And I wanted to fight. I wanted to fight for protection from and for the system I assumed was meant to be fair. I wanted to fight against the judge and district attorney and speak up for the way that they had spoken to and about us in the courtroom. I felt what I can imagine that my students have felt like and what Eddie felt like: powerless, stripped of rights and dignity.

Revelations

Looking back, I now understand these moments through a different lens—one shaped by critical feminism, which pushes me to question the power structures that uphold domination, control, and silence within institutions like schools and the justice system. Critical feminism demands that we not only name the injustices we witness but also interrogate how they are

embedded in systemic practices that often go unquestioned. In the classroom, I witnessed—and at times participated in—disciplinary actions that mirrored the logics of patriarchy: asserting dominance, punishing through shame, and controlling through fear. Officer Grant's treatment of Eddie was not just a poor decision by an individual; it reflected a system that values authority and order over care and dignity. What I didn't recognize at the time—but now see clearly—is how my silence and inaction served to reinforce these systems. Drawing from what feminist thinkers have long argued, I now recognize that true discipline must center healing, equity, and relationship—not compliance. My evolving practice of restorative justice is not just a set of strategies but a feminist intervention: one that seeks to dismantle the carceral logic embedded in school discipline and reimagine what it means to teach, protect, and nurture young people.

That interaction reminded me of others I'd witnessed: moments when Black students were disciplined not for disruption, but for perceived non-compliance, for their posture, their tone, or their lack of visible remorse. I began to see how the institutional need for order was racialized, how White educators and administrators (including myself) were often quicker to punish behavior that didn't match our unspoken cultural expectations.

This realization came slowly, yet persistently. I started to question not only individual decisions but the policies and systems that made those decisions seem normal, even necessary. What kind of culture demands immediate obedience from some children while allowing flexibility for others? What values are being protected—and at whose expense?

My experiences in the courtroom gave me a glimpse into how a vast number of the population views and has experienced the justice system; not as one seeking to extend justice for all but one seeking to preserve power and privilege for some, necessitating others be relegated to the gallery, be content to silently listen to and accept others' views of events and determinations

of their futures. I did not know the rules or expectations of the courtroom and am unaccustomed to being treated rudely, as less-than and as an imposition by those who obviously consider themselves to be my superiors. There were unspoken rules and expectations of the courtroom that I had no way of innately knowing and about which no one in authority had communicated. Those feelings were so destabilizing and made me question when, as an educator, I have sat in judgement or determination of a student's narrative and future. And when have I acted upon that judgement in ways that have stripped away agency and dignity?

These questions deepened my understanding of institutional power and how it is deployed unevenly. They also fueled my resolve to move from passive participation to active questioning and, eventually, to change-making.

Theme 3: Control Creates Contradictions in Carceral and School Systems

Scene One: Prison Visitation, 2022

Seeing these types of interactions where punitive discipline is meted out in a show of force and control was something I observed many times over my decades in public education and saw magnified and multiplied exponentially in the carceral system. I had never really been forced to identify or reflect upon my deference and fear of uniformed law enforcement as much as I would have to during my times spent volunteering and visiting inside prison walls. Something about a uniform, jangling keys, vests, walkie-talkies, combat boots and a pervasive sense of control I do not possess immediately sends me into a state of heightened awareness which I'm sure is absolutely intended even though I am not a ward of the Department of Corrections. That feeling combined with the fact that I have to be approved to be there, enter through doorway metal detectors, turn my pockets inside out and be watched by uniformed guards and a dozen security cameras with audio create in me a destabilizing state of mind even

though I know that I am not guilty of anything, have zero criminal record save a speeding ticket from high school. Even still I always spend the entire time inside the prison walls afraid that I have, am or will do something wrong at any moment. It's a continual state of fight flight or freeze.

To visit my husband, I had to apply for visitation privileges which took a couple of months and a KBI background check. Upon approval, I am required to download an app on which I sign up for visitation at least 72 hours in advance. As I arrive at the prison each time, I am required to leave my phone and Apple watch locked in my car, must sign in, show my driver's license, have my outfit scrutinized for various and written and unwritten and always subjective violations, pass through the metal detector and then turn my pockets inside out for the guards. To visit me, my husband must be dressed in his finest, state-issued jeans and a white T-shirt, be given his visit slip from his cell and unit to travel to the visitation area and then be pat down upon entrance. If he must use the restroom during visit and when visit is over and he returns to his cell and unit he must be strip-searched. We are allowed a "brief embrace and kiss" at the beginning and end of visit.

During these three weekly hours of visitation, we share an entire week's worth of happenings, we play games and just enjoy being in each other's presence, while also in the presence of the dozens of other incarcerated individuals and their families; girlfriends, wives, mothers, siblings, friends, children. We have come to a certain level of predictability with where we sit, what guards work visitation and what other families we see while there. It's a throwback in some ways as there are no distractions of phones, notifications, TVs on the wall or the other detritus that occupy quality time with loved ones on the outside. Time and familiarity have normalized the experience for me to some extent, but the undercurrent of fight flight or freeze is

always present even in times of calm but especially during incidents that rip us out of our time together and remind us of where we are: a dark and menacing place filled with threats, violence, mental illness and pain.

Visitation in prison is a strange mix between being on guard and aware of your surroundings but trying to appear nonchalant in an attempt to give each family and group their own semblance of space and privacy. For a time, there was a married couple, David and his wife, who sat to our right in the visitation room. They often argued somewhat loudly during visitation, and it was usually about money; him having debts and asking her to pay them. On this day, she had gotten up to go to the restroom, an ordeal in itself. Even as a visitor to use the restroom, one must ask permission from the guard at the desk like so many students in a class. Once permission is granted, one walks to the control booth and waits for the guard inside to see that there is a person waiting. The guard must press a button to release the door wherein the visitor enters what is known as a sally port- one of two 10 square foot airlocks between the visitation room and the stairs to the main entrance and the restrooms. After using the restroom, one must go back through the metal detectors again and inside out all pockets then reenter the sally ports to the visitation room. David's wife returned and they resumed their visit for five or ten minutes before the door from the inside of the facility to the visitation room opened and half a dozen "blacksuits" marched in. Blacksuits is the name given to the unit of guards who are deployed when there is an altercation, a cell extraction, cell search or any kind of violence. They earned the name given to their entirely black uniforms which resemble SWAT team uniforms. As they marched in, they headed straight for us, and I was immediately terrified. The entire room got silent, and a palpable tension could be felt. Thankfully they stopped just short of our chairs and announced to David and his wife that their visit was over, and David needed to stand up and

cuff up. Neither one said anything to each other or the blacksuits as David stood up, put his hands behind his back to be cuffed and his wife left the visit room. That was the last time I saw either one of those individuals.

Neither my husband nor I know what happened that day to end that couple's visit but suffice it to say there was a credible suspicion or maybe even a confirmed violation of any one of the literally hundreds of rules at the Department of Corrections. There are unwritten rules and there are consequences, and certainly within the Department of Corrections there are rules and there are punishments. Once incarcerated, the legal standard changes from "beyond a reasonable doubt" to the much more subjective "more likely than not" standard for determining wrongdoing and guilt and likewise any type of due process is severely minimized while punishments are maximized. What I find upsetting and contradictory is the handling of this issue during visitation. There are disciplinary referrals (DRs) that are specific to and more severe while in visitation. For example, my husband once argued with a guard in visitation. If he had argued with that guard while anywhere else in the facility, he could have received a DR for "disobeying orders", "insubordination and disrespect", "obscenity", or any number of similar offenses. If the violation happened during visitation there is an additional DR "conduct regarding visitors/public" that is always added. This adds not only another DR but additional consequences which could be piecemealed or cumulative such as a fine, lowering of incentive level, confinement to cell, loss of a job, and worst of all loss of visitation privileges. The reason for this, according to the DOC is to avoid disrupting others' visits and "protect the sanctity of visit" which are the actual words used by the warden to me as I protested one such punishment. Of this I am certain: sending in half a dozen blacksuits does not protect the sanctity of visit. Since that day, when I sit in the visit

room, I am acutely aware of where all the guards are and attuned to the sound of walkie-talkies and keys and remain on edge, afraid that something like that will happen again.

As I reflect on the blacksuits' disruption of visitation and the imbalanced punishments doled out for minor infractions, I recognize again how deeply punitive systems rely on fear and the performance of power—not on restoration or understanding.

Scene Two: Third Year as Restorative Justice Facilitator, 2024

Fear and performance of power used in carceral settings to leverage control over adults are themes I have witnessed in educational settings used to leverage control over students. Sky's history with law enforcement and courts made her immediately distrustful and combative toward anyone in uniform. Sky was an 8th grade student with significant behavioral and academic needs as documented in her Individualized Education Plan (IEP). In the mere months that I knew Sky, she had no less than a dozen interactions with municipal law enforcement. She had bounced around to various schools and ended up with me because of suspensions and a transfer. Sky craved love and attention from both students and adults alike and would get it any way she could, but her biggest motivator was the high she got from drama; gossip, online threats, fighting, serial dating to name a few.

An inappropriate video of a student was circulating, and the rumor was that it had been taken and sent from Sky's phone. The usual SRO was outstanding and had built a rapport with Sky, but she had another SRO with her to investigate this issue, and two uniforms put Sky more on edge than ever. Sky refused to meet with the officers unless I was there, so we sat around the table in my office, and they asked what she knew about the video. While Sky had significant academic challenges, she was calm and measured with the officers and didn't appear nervous and certainly wasn't about to give up any information that wasn't explicitly request. I was

shocked by her reasoning and poise. She said she had not taken any such video and the student in question was her cousin anyway which was "gross." The officers said that it was a screen recording of a FaceTime video. Sky astutely told them that it couldn't have been her because she didn't have an iPhone and FaceTime is only on iPhones. This wasn't enough for the officers and the said they wanted to take her phone and search through it. Sky became more agitated and started cussing and refused to hand over her phone. To which the additional officer informed her "well, now I have probable cause so I can just confiscate phone anyway. And if you don't give me the passcode then I will have to get a warrant, and you'll be without it even longer." The situation had immediately turned to one in which Sky felt in control and calm to which Sky had no control and was enraged.

The officers took the phone up to their Sergent who was waiting at the front office of the school. As I tried to calm her, I asked Sky what she was worried about if she didn't have that video. She said that she had other things on her phone that she didn't want the officer to see or know and didn't want to get in trouble. I asked her if we could go to the officers and tell them they could go through the videos and photos to look for the video in question but be honest and say what she was worried about and get their advice. She was dubious at first, but I told her I would be right there with her. We also called her mom who gave permission and that seemed to give Sky the confidence she needed. We knocked on the SRO's office and entered the tiny room: three uniformed officers, Sky and me. They were surprised to see us and even more surprised when Sky said she would give them the passcode, and they could look through everything. But she wanted me to explain her nervousness. Our school SRO assured Sky that they were only looking for the indicated video and nothing else. They handed her a form to sign. She looked at me imploringly and I was struck with how young and powerless she really was. She was being

asked to sign a legal form that she didn't understand. Sky quietly took my work cell phone from my hand and pressed record, creating an audio recording of what happened next. I read and paraphrased each sentence to her. She wrote her name in print. After going through the phone and finding nothing, the officers handed the phone back to her. She pressed stop on the recording on my cell phone.

Sky was so proud of herself. She had managed to keep herself safe, follow directions from uniformed officers and prove herself to have been telling the truth all while getting her phone back. To make sure she understood how big of a deal this was, I broke it down for her, highlighting how she had remained calm, protected her rights, made a recording and told the truth.

I was struck too that Sky had used a self-protection technique her mother likely taught her, similar to what Eddie's mother taught him; create a record when dealing with law enforcement. What had started out as unnecessarily threatening and punitive had ended in a learning experience. Using threats in school borrowed from the legal realm "search" "warrant" "confiscate" create an over-policed and surveilled environment not conducive to children or learning.

Scene Three: Special Education Teacher, 2005

A paralleled tactic often used in both schools and in carceral settings is isolation. Isolation in schools shows up as time out, being excluded from activities, being excluded from peers, or in extreme cases being excluded from school. McKinley was one such student who was often excluded from everything while remaining in school. McKinley was an 8th grade boy with multiple diagnoses: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Oppositional Defiance Disorder and a learning disability to name a few, which classified him as a Special Education student, and he

spent a few hours of his day with me in the resource room. Taylor was an 8th grade girl with autism spectrum disorder, and she also spent time daily in the resource room. The resource room had a small closet-like room in it that was used for "time out" that I now know is illegal but maybe in 2005 it was still legal, I do not know. The room was maybe two feet by three feet with nothing but a chair inside. It had a small window where the student could see out and anyone in the classroom could see in and a door which locked from the outside. I don't recall any other student being sent to the room except McKinley and Taylor.

My experiences at this school with McKinley and Taylor happened almost twenty years ago and while I cannot remember the exact reasons why the students were sent to the isolation room, I remember the general circumstances and how I felt. Both McKinley and Taylor were students with significant and diagnosed special needs, hence their reason for being in the resource room in the first place. McKinley was able to control his urges and behaviors fairly well when he was on his medication, but it was the days where he didn't take it, which was obvious to all, when he struggled. McKinley fidgeted with things constantly either with his fingers or with his mouth but when unmedicated McKinley would bite on pens until they would explode ink in his mouth and all over his hands. He would chew wooden pencils to pieces, eat paper, bite on metal paperclips, even his own fingernails until they bled. He blurted out, would become argumentative and loud. These were the times when he was sent to the isolation room. Times when he was completely dysregulated and his behaviors were out of his control. Surprisingly, his behaviors didn't worsen when put in the isolation room, but they certainly didn't abate. I was the newbie in the resource room, still working on my master's degree in special education, with only a couple of years of teaching experience. I deferred to the senior staff who punished McKinley for dysregulation with the isolation room. We were the adults in charge of students who were not

only missing valuable behavioral skills but had those deficits compounded with disabilities. Rather than teach these students in our care, we punished them for the very deficiencies we were charged with teaching.

Taylor spent time in the isolation room as well. As a student with autism spectrum disorder, she often perseverated on things to the detriment of her and others' learning. Her behaviors often annoyed the other students and then they would act out towards her, and she would perseverate on that. The more dysregulated she became, the louder she got and the more she hyper focused. These are the times she would be sent to the isolation room presumably to calm down, which is next to impossible for even adults in a dysregulated state let alone a child with autism spectrum disorder. Again, we were punishing a child for lacking the skills that we were there to teach.

Scene Four: Third Year as Restorative Justice Facilitator, 2024

Two of the problematic issues underlying much of punitive discipline is the blatant double standards and hypocrisy. Many rules at school are purported to minimize disruption thereby enhancing learning. Consider Charlie from my earlier story.

Charlie raised his hand to ask permission to use the restroom. The teacher told him no. Claudia raises her hand a few minutes later with the same request, which was granted. Charlie was irate, "But Miss, I asked and how you gonna say no to me and yes to her?" Surely the teacher had reasons, and maybe they were even valid reasons for her responses, but she had chosen to say out loud in front of the class, "Charlie, quit shouting out and being disruptive. You used the bathroom yesterday in class." Charlie found this reasoning ridiculous and told her so, "Miss that's some bullshit" and was promptly sent out of class for being disruptive and using profanity. And he then got to use the bathroom.

Revelations

Looking back, I find it impossible to believe that these things happened. But they did. While isolating a child with special needs is almost always illegal except in very rare instances and only by trained personnel and documented in a child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), lesser versions of isolation in our education system abound. Sending students to the corner, whether it's called a glorified and prettied up name or not, is a form of isolation if the child is placed away from his or her peers in a choice made by a person of authority where he or she has no choice. Isolation is only restraint in a different form. If the child truly cannot leave or perceives they cannot leave, it is restraint and is illegal in American education systems. Yet it happens, most often when students are dysregulated and in a heightened state of fight flight or freeze, in situations when students' needs for a trusted educator to teach calming and soothing skills to navigate the challenges of the environment. What they are met with however, is discipline, attempts to control and subdue, and threats. A school's job is to meet students where they are and educate the whole child, not punish the child for deficits in the very skills that they have not yet mastered.

There is no doubt that Charlie was disruptive, but the predicating factors must be considered. It wasn't only Charlie disrupting the learning of the classroom but the teacher as well and Charlie saw that fact plain as day. Likewise, the DOC is quick to enforce policies for the supposed sake of "sanctity" but behave in ways that bely any semblance of sanctity.

I find it curious and troubling that the general response to my concern of the punitive, harmful and controlling nature of those who handled Eddie's, David's, and Charlie's situations lack situational awareness and nuance and come from a place of fear. The responding sentiment amounts to "Yes, well, Eddie, David and Charlie were breaking the rules and they were in the

wrong so if you don't want to be punished then don't break the rules," or "We have to send a message to others that those kinds of infractions will not be tolerated," or "We can't just let people do whatever they want or things will be out of control." The sentiments are nothing more than justifications used to retain power, law and order at the expense of nuance, and not invest time required to understand the entire situation at hand to yield a response that is least restrictive in nature. The concern is for the institution rather than the individual. The effect is threefold; indignation, anger and a feeling of worthlessness and powerlessness on the part of the punished, a bolstered sense of control and maybe even vindication on the part of the punisher, and a growing mentality of us versus them that poisons the institution.

Theme 4: Systems Reinforce Socioeconomic Disparities and Criminalize Poverty

Scene One: Second Year as Middle School Teacher, 2017

One year while teaching middle school, we were a couple of months into first semester and things were humming along smoothly. As a seasoned teacher of well over a decade, I had established a strong community in my classroom as well as clear expectations of my students. As such, I often got students that moved in after the school year had already begun. Educators know that often these "new" students are challenging. Moving into a new school, especially those where I have taught, mid-year is challenging in and of itself, but often the students themselves are used to moving frequently and have developed maladaptive coping behaviors. Such was the case with Junior. Junior was an eighth-grade White male who immediately stood out as at this point in my career I was teaching at a more suburban school. Junior already had tattoos, something that was unheard of in this middle school in 2017. He came from a much more urban, neighboring district and had an urban vernacular which made him stand out. He sagged his pants

lower than anyone else at the school, which helped to hide the house arrest anklet he wore, and he wore only a blue hoodie, often making mention of his gang affiliation.

The first day Junior entered my classroom, I knew he was the toughest student I had worked with to date. He was in my class that occurred over the lunch hour and was already fairly challenging with academic needs and behaviors. He came in with his hood up, a violation of a school rule. I knew that what I did next would be pivotal. If I let the hood slide, the other students would see weakness on my part and begin to test the boundary. If I immediately confronted him about the hood, I could invite a power struggle which neither of us would want to lose and could get ugly quickly. I chose a compromise of sorts and decided to make a few deposits into a relationship that I would undoubtedly have to pour into, before I needed to make withdrawals.

I greeted Junior warmly, invited him to sit near the window next to another student who I knew was quiet and kind. I handed him the assignment and told him to write his name on it and read the directions and I would come by in a few minutes to catch him up. The rest of the class continued along on the assignment as I taught. While I could see Junior sizing me and the class up, he seemed relaxed and did write his name on the paper. As promised, in a few moments I came and pulled a chair up to him. I introduced myself again, asked where he had been in school and if his seat would be acceptable. He told me where he had been at school previously and that that he had been in the Juvenile Detention Center, which I was careful to react neutrally to, and that his seat was fine. I saw this as the moment to let him know that the school rule was that we don't wear hoods up and asked if he could remove it. I braced myself for overt defiance or even a meltdown, but he shrugged and said sure. I knew we were going to be ok.

As Junior adjusted to our school, he immediately had problems. He defied teacher requests, often cussed teachers out when corrected, and used school-inappropriate language. Academically he had problems as well. His writing was almost illegible, even some of his letters had reversals and he was reading far below grade level. He had a very low tolerance for frustration or disrespect and would blow up when he felt either. For these reasons, he was often put in the in-school suspension (ISS) room. The procedure for this space is supposed to look like this: all teachers send work to the ISS room for the student and then visit the student during their planning period come to see if the student and if any instruction is needed. In the interim, the ISS room monitor is circulating the room working with students individually. What actually happens is this: maybe one or two teachers send work, usually no one comes during their planning period to check on the student and the ISS monitor, a high school assistant football coach, listens to sports radio at his desk while students fall asleep and he reminds them to get up and work.

During these days when Junior was often in the ISS room, I would come and spend my entire planning period with him. At first, I gave him a survey about himself with 100 get-to-know-you questions, and we discussed those. Then I transitioned into helping him with his work. As we got to know each other I learned that Junior was the oldest of five boys, all of which had been removed from the care of his mother because of her drug problem and incarceration and were living with various relatives. He was living with his dad, his grandma and his dad's girlfriend. Junior had bounced around schools in the city, had an IEP and didn't see much value in school. He didn't have structure at home and had turned to running the streets for comradery. As I gained Junior's trust, I became the classroom that Junior came to when he was asked to leave other classes for misbehavior, which was almost every hour of every day.

When in my room we never had an issue. He was respectful and sat at the designated seat in the front of the classroom and would attempt whatever assignment I gave him, but I was concerned about him missing instruction in all his other classes. I proposed to the principal that each teacher give me his classwork, and we would start him just being in my room and then as he had success, we would transition him back into his regular schedule. I was told no. Instead, the administration was working to prove that he didn't live in our district. Somehow, they had learned that he often stayed with an aunt, who lived in Missouri. They were concerned that we were spending too much time and too many resources on him, especially if he was out of district. He continued getting in trouble multiple times a day, now escalating to cussing and threatening to fight students.

He had finally gotten in trouble enough that the school was recommending an out of school suspension (OSS). To long-term suspend a student with an IEP, schools are required to hold what is known as a manifestation determination meeting to determine whether the behavior is due to a student's disability and whether the school has followed the IEP. I had not been informed of the meeting but was told by the counselor and arranged my own classroom coverage so that I could attend. The principal, 8th grade assistant principal, Special Education case manager, a district hearing officer and I were present from the school. Junior's father and his father's girlfriend attended. Junior's father had never been the custodial parent and was completely new to school meetings, jargon, an IEP, etc. He sat at the end of the table with a large soda and a bag of Sourpatch kids, which he ate throughout the meeting. At the end of the meeting, after all information is provided, everyone voted on whether or not 1) Junior's behavior was a manifestation of his disability and 2) if the school implemented the IEP with fidelity. Due to his diagnosis, it was determined that his behavior infraction was indeed a manifestation of his

disability and that the school had not implemented his IEP. This was the best case for Junior and an embarrassing worst case for the school.

After this meeting, Junior's behavior did not improve, and the administration amped up their efforts to prove Junior lived outside of district boundaries. The principal and assistant principal went to Dad's house and Junior was not there. They verified that Junior was living with the aunt out of district, as when she dropped him off, they saw Missouri tags on her car. They served the family with papers saying that he needed to transfer to a school in the district in which he was residing. His aunt called me, frantic, as she felt like keeping him at our school and avoiding another transition was in his best interest. After some questioning, I found that she was only living in Missouri because she had been staying with her brother, Junior's dad, but couldn't contribute enough financially and began staying with someone else across the state line. I recognized this as the definition of an unhoused student meaning that Junior should qualify for protections under the federal McKinney Vento Act. I shared all the information with her and how to file the paperwork. Within a few days, I received a verbal reprimand from my principal for my communication with Junior's family as going against what the school was communicating. Junior had to leave our school.

I have remained in contact with Junior and his family. His mom came home, got all her children back and began rebuilding their lives. She finished her high school diploma and is even working on a college degree! Junior, though, continues to struggle, spending time in state prison off and on, though he has managed to get his GED.

Scene Two: Third Year as Restorative Justice Facilitator, 2024

Years after my experiences with Junior, a similar situation played out in a different school district with, Diamond, another 8th grade student. Diamond was an above average and

academically capable student. She had a witty sense of humor and plenty of streetwise knowledge that made her a natural leader with her peers. She also liked to fight. As I got to know her, I learned that she was the only girl in a family of boys and fighting was a way of life for her. She lived by a code that if someone disrespected her, she was going to teach them a lesson so they wouldn't make that mistake again. She had such a reputation that she was often used as a bargaining chip by her friends and cousins as a deterrent of any would-be disrespect.

While that kind of background and upbringing is not the way I was raised nor the way I raised my own children, I had come to realize that it wasn't entirely problematic; it is a code that plenty of people live by, but at the same time are able to hone and utilize only in certain situations which allow them to still be successful students and society members. I began to see it as my job to help students to know the rules in the school system, both written and unwritten, in the school system so that they could make informed decisions and do a kind of code-switching between what many called their "street life" and their "school life." Just as my lack of knowledge or experience living in my students' lives would hinder me in their environments, their lack of knowledge and inexperience in school systems was hindering them at school.

One Monday morning the school was abuzz with video of an after-school, off-campus fight that had occurred between Diamond and another 8th grade girl. Diamond and I were talking about it one-on-one and about the importance of keeping that drama out of school to the best of her ability so that it didn't become an educational nuisance that would get her in trouble. Behind the scenes, however, one of the assistant principals had seen the video and put in a behavior referral for fighting and decided to suspend Diamond for 3-5 days as well as keep her from attending the basketball game as the president of the pep club. Diamond was furious. I read and re-read the student code of conduct which clearly outlined that fighting at school-sponsored

events or on school property was indeed grounds for suspension, but this wasn't the case. After verifying with the District Office, I confirmed that Diamond should not be suspended for the fight. Now the assistant principal was furious. She spent the better part of the remainder of the day scouring school security camera footage to find something that Diamond had done so that she could continue at least with removing her from pep club, which is exactly what she did.

Diamond's involvement in pep club gave her a leadership position within the school and sent a message to the student body that it was cool to get involved. It was cool to have school spirit. It was possible to excel and buy-in to school and simultaneously have a street life. In my position, Diamond was exactly the kind of student that I needed to succeed; a student with immense social capital, a student leader that with support and education could help to turn a struggling school around. Taking that position away from Diamond sent her spiraling. Her grades dropped, her fighting intensified culminating in an alternative after-school placement of which she was ultimately kicked out.

Scene Three: Second Year as Restorative Justice Facilitator, 2023

The overarching school goal of safety is both necessary and pedagogically sound. Individuals are better able to learn when they are safe. Sometimes, however, the word safety is used when the underlying concept that is really meant is control. One form of restraint used to control and subdue is the act of handcuffing students. Never in all my years as a student, did I ever see a student handcuffed at school or hear adults threaten to handcuff a student at school. For the first 15 years of my career, I also never saw it. I first observed the practice when I moved further into the urban core to schools of lower socioeconomic status with a predominantly Black and Brown student body. I moved from a middle school in a more suburban district with about 60% of students receiving free and reduced lunch, a 53% White student body that had no metal

detectors and only one School Resource Officer (SRO) to an urban high school with 75% of students receiving free and reduced lunch, comprised of 10% White students, metal detectors and three SROs.

SROs carried handcuffs, pepper spray and some carried a sidearm. They had an office in the school with access to the school camera system. They had walkie-talkies tuned to the same channel that school administration and I used as well as walkie talkies that were tuned to the city's municipal police force. It was my understanding that except in extreme cases where students were an imminent danger to themselves or others, SROs were required to get permission from the building principal before handcuffing a student. The threat of cuffing a student, however, was widely used.

Antoine was one such student for whom that threat loomed large. Antoine was a very quiet junior who had transferred to our high school along with his twin brother and younger sister. All three students were bright, well-mannered and stood out because all three were very tall: both boys over six feet and their sister probably 5'8'' as a high school freshman. Antoine did not like school. In fact, though he came nearly every day, he rarely attended class. He had figured out how to skip classes by staying almost entirely to himself, relying on his quiet nature and polite manners as he slowly but purposefully walked the halls day after day. He came to my attention due to this skipping, and this is when I began working with him and communicating with his mother, who was at a loss of how to motivate Antoine to get to class. Mom was always very responsive via text or phone call and while she appreciated the information and was supportive, she was out of ideas as well. Antoine's two siblings were motivated by sports participation which kept them in good attendance and academic standing. Antoine was motivated

by no such thing. He was also not deterred by threat or imposition of detentions, in school suspensions or further calls home.

One day, Antoine's sister, who was a feisty girl who found herself in a lot of girl drama, had nearly gotten in a physical altercation with another freshman girl. Antoine found out about it and was going to take matters into his own hands and confront the girl. He was doing his regular laps around the building, but this time he was obviously agitated. He kept trying to get in the locked classroom of the other girl who had argued with his sister. As Antoine had no history of violence or fighting, especially versus females, I was following him at a considerable distance and waiting for him to appear calmer before I tried to intervene, but the building principal was not in agreement with my plan. She sent the SROs to try to interact with Antoine. Antoine was always extremely quiet, sometimes even nonresponsive and almost always wearing headphones, so it was not atypical that he didn't respond. The SROs didn't like that, and they followed him in much closer proximity than I had done. They also had their walkie talkies at loud volume and so Antoine could hear the chatter and knew that class was coming to an end, and it would be passing time soon and the officers had been instructed to cuff him if he wouldn't comply and come with them before the bell rang. I called Antoine's mom but there was no answer. We were running out of time, and it seemed that the situation was not calming Antoine but amping him up more. Finally, mom called me back and I told her what was going on and that if he didn't comply, he was going to be cuffed. She was furious and was going to come to school to get him. Communicating via cellphone with all three of her kids, mom was able to get them to go to the front lobby and wait for her. After that day, Antoine only came back to school a handful more days of the school year before his mom finally relented to his requests to become a virtual student.

Scene Four: U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer, Philippines, 2002-2004

Aside from the power differential that often accompanies pervasive and institutional punitive discipline, there is the socioeconomic disparity often present in institutions that rely heavily on punitive discipline. Except for one year of my 23-year career, I have only taught and worked in low-income schools. From 2002-2004 I was a US Peace Corps Volunteer in the Philippines. While there I worked with the Department of Education and was assigned to a tiny island called Guimaras, about 420 miles south of the capital city Manila. There was not a single behavior issue that I witnessed during my two years there. This was because going to school was a luxury and a privilege that many could not afford, even at public schools. To go to school, children had to have a uniform, and they had to have shoes. This in and of itself was an insurmountable barrier to school attendance for some families, creating a smaller pool of students. In the poor, small town schools in which I taught, there were no special services for children with special needs and no differentiation of instructions for struggling or advanced students which made school not an option for yet more students. Finally, class sizes were very large, 25-40 in an elementary classroom and so the teachers just kept teaching, and it was up to the students to keep up. The culture of the Philippines is very deferential to elders and those in positions of authority and so insubordination and disorderly behavior from children was uncommon. Just because I didn't see them, however, didn't mean it wasn't happening.

Another institution that had US Peace Corps Volunteers was the Department for Social Welfare and Development. This organization ran centers that could only be compared to juvenile detention centers in the United States, but only loosely so. The center on the island where I lived was more of a multi-building compound, far away from town through winding dirt roads that was home to between 25-50 boys between the ages of 12-18. All the boys were indigent and

while there were no bars, no barbed wire and certainly no weapons or guns, the boys stayed. I had to imagine it was because they were being fed three meals a day, had water to drink, had a roof over their heads and a bed in which to sleep. The boys were there for wide-ranging reasons and wide-ranging timeframes. One boy was there for stealing a belt. One boy was there for killing someone. All the boys were there because their families, if they had any, could not afford any kind of lawyer, representative or even bribe to prevent their sons from entering the facility. These boys were not in school. They had a small library at the facility but no real structured classes and no teacher. Most of them could barely read. What were they learning there? Were they being rehabilitated? Why was everyone there poor? Did only poor kids commit punishable offenses? While this facility and these young men's stories may seem extreme, they're not all that different from so many stories in the United States.

Revelations

My experiences with Junior and Diamond showed me the lengths that individuals and systems will go to with the goal of excluding and ridding themselves of students rather than commit to educating the whole child. Undoubtedly Junior's needs were great and put a strain on the system and those of us who worked within it but as a public-school educator I am committed to providing a free and appropriate public education even when it is difficult and challenging. Diamond obviously had behaviors that were problematic. The argument of the administration in support of these systemic decisions was that they needed to look after the health and safety of the system. While I can certainly agree with that statement, allowing that goal to conflict with and supersede the rights of the individual is something that I cannot simply observe without challenge. There must be a way for our educational system to address both systemic health and safety while also preserving the educational rights and best interests of individual students.

Throughout my career, I've taught in schools where the student body was predominantly Black and Brown and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. I noticed trends. Students who were louder, who expressed frustration differently, who didn't defer immediately to adult authority—these students were often labeled as "problems."

Before volunteering in prison and later marrying my husband, I knew very little about our judicial or prison system but believed it to be "justice for all" and fair insomuch as I ascribed to the "do the crime do the time" mentality. Sadly, that is not reality. The school to prison pipeline largely impacts males of color from lower socioeconomic means. Individuals who are convicted of crimes are afforded court-appointed attorneys who are often overwhelmed, underworked, underpaid and inexperienced. Plea deals are pushed as they are much faster and cheaper alternative to a trial. Attorneys caution clients that if they don't take a plea then lose their case at trial, they will be looking at a maximum sentence; again, a deterrent to a trial, although constitutionally guaranteed, and a push for a plea bargain. Either way, prison time seems likely, almost a foregone conclusion. Without money for high-priced and high-powered attorneys that more privileged individuals have, without connections and knowledge of the technicalities of the system, the options are grim. While each state in the United States has sentencing guidelines, judges have enormous discretion for decision upon sentencing. I cannot unsee what I have experienced: systemic bias and inequity in court processes and structural injustice. I started to wonder how it was that my large family hadn't been touched by incarceration. None of my network of friends had been impacted by incarceration. Had I married into a family of morally bankrupt criminals? How were so many members of my husband's family and most of his friends either in prison, formerly incarcerated or on some kind of monitoring?

The carceral system maintains hegemonic power structures by criminalizing those without privilege. Just because my husband, his family and friends have been criminalized does not necessarily make them any more criminal than my family and friends. The cognitive dissonance that I felt between my long-held belief of what criminality looked like: lack of values or moral compass, depravity, weak family structures to name a few was not at all what I saw or felt when I got to know my new family. They were welcoming, kind, gracious, giving, supportive, loyal. They raised their children to be kind, polite, open-minded, hard-working. We were not so very different. Except that I and most of my family and friends are White, middle class. I had further othered and marginalized whole groups of people and was mirroring systemic injustices of school to prison pipeline and justice system in my own beliefs. I felt a growing awareness that was transforming me personally but also creating a critical consciousness that would transform my educational approach — emphasizing equity, voice, and resistance to institutional harm.

The socioeconomic disparities are just as prevalent in my experiences as an educator in American schools as well. I have never taught in an affluent school or district and in fact, each career move I have made was to a more urban less affluent school and district. In the Philippines the deference to authority in Filipino culture reduced visible behavior issues and there was implicit discipline through societal norms while cultural values shaping student behavior and expectations. In the United States and in the more affluent suburban schools that my children and my family members attend, I argue that while there is still a deference to authority, it is coupled with a societal and capitalistic pressure to achieve and to impress to avoid embarrassment and disgrace. Parents in these realms are used to getting what they want through pressure and social capital as well as what is known as “helicopter parenting.” Students will behave because the

consequence of not behaving is social suicide and family embarrassment. When there is misbehavior, these parents have the systemic knowledge and societal and legal standing to hire tutors, specialists, advocates and mitigate the harm to their children. It is a delicate balancing act for a school to balance educational excellence, contented parents, well-funded PTAs and a well-behaved student body. In the lower socioeconomic schools where I have worked there has usually been a sentiment and complaint of lack of parent involvement sometimes coupled with teacher laments that "parents just don't care" or "let their kids do whatever they want." My experience has led me to challenge those viewpoints.

It has become my practice to notice the students who I predict will have challenging behaviors and reach out to parents at the very beginning of the school year to tell them something positive about their child. I cannot count the number of times that I have done this that has been met with utter disbelief on the part of the parent and often the comment that "no one from school has ever called me before with something good." Not only is that tragic and disheartening but it becomes a detriment to the educational team that should surround a student to ensure success. When parents of students with difficult behaviors only get communication to tell them how terrible their child is, that is what they come to expect. They answer the phone already in defensive mode ready to defend their child, whether or not they find the child's behavior defensible. Sometimes they even answer with something to the effect of "What did he do now?"

If a parent and family have only had negative and combative interactions with the school, it creates a dichotomy and an us versus them mentality that puts the student in the middle. When I anticipate needing the support of the parent and make a deposit into that family-school relationship by telling the parent that I see something in their child. I notice their child. I like

their child. It is amazing the kind of trust that builds, and I can hear and feel the defensive walls coming down. I work hard to make my words match my actions with both the family and the child. I do not yell, I do not coerce, I do not belittle, and I do not shame. I teach. And when I must inform families of misbehavior, I am not expecting an action on their part. I don't expect or want the child to be grounded or punished. I inform in a productive spirit of education by simply stating what the expectation is and what the behavior was and how the student can change their behavior to meet the expectation. It is not a value judgement. It is not an attack. It is not a call for action on the part of the parent. It is purely information.

Final Revelations

Each of the scenes in each of the four themes marks a moment of awakening. My early years as an educator were shaped by passive compliance and fear of being perceived as ineffective, which left me complicit in punitive systems I have now come to critique. Over time, through both school and courtroom experiences, I have developed a critical feminist lens that has helped me see how institutional power operates through shame, fear, isolation, and racialized discipline to preserve order at the expense of student dignity and agency. Encounters with students like Junior, Diamond, Eddie, David, and Charlie revealed how schools and the justice system often prioritize institutional control over care, equity, and education—mirroring broader carceral logics that criminalize poverty and difference. These realizations, deepened by my personal proximity to the prison system first through volunteer teaching and later through my marriage, have fostered a transformation in my practice toward restorative justice, equity, and relationship-centered discipline, as well as a commitment to challenging systemic inequities that strip students and families of voice, agency, and trust.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present my findings and reflections on how my lived experiences as an educator, restorative justice facilitator, and witness to the carceral system have shaped my understanding of discipline, authority, and equity in schools. Through narrative and critical analysis, I traced how my practice evolved from passive compliance within punitive systems to an active commitment to restorative justice and educational equity. Four central themes emerged: Early Experiences that Link Power to Shame, Institutional Power Enforces and Sustains Racialized Discipline, Control Creates Contradictions in Carceral and School Systems and Systems Reinforce Socioeconomic Disparities and Criminalize Poverty. I explored these themes through vignettes presented as scenes from different points in my personal and professional life. Through narrative and critical analysis, I traced how my practice evolved from passive compliance within punitive systems to an active commitment to restorative justice and educational equity.

In the first theme: Early Experiences that Link Power to Shame, I examine my early career which was marked by uncertainty, passivity, and a complicit acceptance of disciplinary practices that I now recognize as harmful. I internalized the expectation that "good" teaching meant tight control and compliance, even when this came at the expense of student dignity. This stage of my professional life demonstrated how shame, humiliation, and fear were often misused as tools for managing classrooms. Although I lacked the confidence and language to challenge these practices at the time, the seeds of critical reflection were planted and through these early experiences with punitive discipline, the lens through which I later evaluated carceral and educational systems was shaped.

In the second theme: Institutional Power Enforces and Sustains Racialized Discipline, the scenes detail that as I gained more experience, I noticed how discipline was applied unevenly across racial and socioeconomic lines. Black and Brown students were disproportionately punished for behaviors that would not have drawn consequences for White students, such as posture, tone, or perceived defiance. Critical feminist analysis helped me see these moments as more than isolated incidents; they reflected systemic patterns that privilege order and authority over care and equity. My observations in courtrooms further revealed parallels between school discipline and the justice system—both spaces where power is unequally distributed and silence is demanded from those with less privilege. Through these scenes, my understanding of punitive discipline grew as I witnessed the racialized and systemic deployment of power.

In the third theme: Control Creates Contradictions in Carceral and School Systems examines the pervasive contradictions in purported purpose of policy with implementation application of policy. My own compliance as a young teacher mirrored the pressures I later saw placed on students, incarcerated individuals and even myself in the carceral setting: remain silent, accept judgments, and suppress resistance. This deference was often enforced through threats, shame, or exclusion—mechanisms that not only control individuals but also reinforce systemic hierarchies. Reflecting on this theme highlighted how fear undermines learning, dignity, and growth. It also forced me to examine my complicity and transformation over time, deepening my critical consciousness and reinforcing my commitment to restorative approaches.

In the fourth and final theme: Systems Reinforce Socioeconomic Disparities and Criminalize Poverty I present the striking mirroring of carceral logics across institutions. Isolation, exclusion, threats of handcuffs or detention, and zero-tolerance policies appeared in both schools and the justice system. Students like Junior, Diamond and Antoine and those in the

Philippines were often treated as problems to be removed rather than as children to be supported, just as defendants in courtrooms were managed as cases rather than people. These experiences revealed how the school-to-prison pipeline is sustained by policies and practices that prioritize institutional safety and control over individual rights and development. Often cultural or socioeconomic differences and lack of systemic knowledge acts as a barrier to individuals seeking service from educational and judicial entities.

Taken together, these findings illustrate my journey from compliance to critical reflection, and from silence to active resistance against punitive systems. My narrative highlights how schools and the justice system often reproduce harm through shame, fear, exclusion, and racialized discipline, while also showing how critical feminist analysis and restorative practices can open pathways toward equity and healing. These themes provide the foundation for Chapter five, where I will discuss the implications of these findings, consider how restorative justice offers a counter-framework to carceral logic, and explore the possibilities for reimagining discipline in schools and beyond.

Chapter 5 - There is Another Way

The purpose of this autoethnographic study was to explore my experience and sense making as an educator whose personal and professional lives intertwine with tensions associated with punitive and restorative discipline practices. In this chapter I answer my research questions and interpret my findings in context of the review of literature, concluding that restorative justice rather than punitive discipline is the way forward. Finally, I conclude the chapter with implications for practice.

Research Questions

The research questions used to guide my study were:

1) How do my experiences with the carceral system inform my educational practice?

2) How do my experiences with punitive discipline in the school system inform my educational practice?

3) How does my understanding of punitive discipline change and grow as I move through the intersectional spaces of my life?

Through analytic codes, motif coding and narrative coding I stitched my ribbons of data together into four themes: Early Experiences that Link Power to Shame, Institutional Power Enforces and Sustains Racialized Discipline, Control Creates Contradictions in Carceral and School Systems and Systems Reinforce Socioeconomic Disparities and Criminalize Poverty. Through these themes I was able to arrive at the answers to my research questions which serve as an anchor for the information presented in this chapter. My perspective as an educator and wife of an incarcerated individual grants me the unique vantagepoint to tell my stories within these intersecting spaces. In this chapter, I answer the research questions. Through a critical feminist

lens, I draw conclusions and discuss implications for educational practice. Finally, I conclude the chapter with suggestions that could further this work.

How do my experiences with the carceral system inform my educational practice?

To answer this research question, I chronicle my experiences in Theme 3: Control Creates Contradictions in Carceral and School Systems and Theme 4: Systems Reinforce Socioeconomic Disparities and Criminalize Poverty. My experiences with the carceral system have profoundly reshaped my educational practice by illuminating how deeply schools mirror prisons in their reliance on surveillance, exclusion, and fear as tools of control.

In vignettes shared in Theme 3: Control Creates Contradictions in Carceral and School Systems, I detail my experiences of sitting in courtrooms where defendants were silenced and visiting prisons where every action was scrutinized under unspoken, unevenly applied and often contradictory rules helped me see that many school practices — from isolation rooms to the threat of handcuffs — operate through the same logic of domination. The courtroom demanded deference, shrouded its unspoken rules in mystery, and punished those who could not conform quickly enough. I recognized in these experiences the same patterns I have witnessed in schools: students judged for posture, tone, or perceived noncompliance rather than for substantive misbehavior. These insights revealed that both institutions use discipline to maintain order and protect institutional authority at the expense of individual growth. As an educator, this understanding compels me to resist punitive measures that mirror incarceration, choosing instead to ground my practice in restorative justice, where relationships and repair—not exclusion—form the basis of accountability.

Through my experiences detailed in Theme 4: Systems Reinforce Socioeconomic Disparities and Criminalize Poverty, I came to realize that due to a lack of knowledge and

experience in school systems that operate under middle and upper class rules, students weren't playing by the rules, not necessarily because they were choosing that path but because they didn't know how to choose a different path. Not knowing the rules, both written and unwritten, was hindering the very learning that was supposed to be taking place. I began to see it as my job to help students to know the rules in the school system, in the school system so that they could make informed decisions and do a kind of code-switching between what many called their "street life" and their "school life."

How do my experiences with punitive discipline in the school system inform my educational practice?

I answer this research question through vignettes in Theme 2: Institutional Power Enforces and Sustains Racialized Discipline, Theme 3: Control Creates Contradictions in Carceral and School Systems and Theme 4: Systems Reinforce Socioeconomic Disparities and Criminalize Poverty highlight my experiences with punitive discipline in schools that has fundamentally reshaped my educational practice. The early years of my career were marked by a quiet complicity: I deferred to punitive systems even when they did not align with my instincts as an educator. I remember the awkwardness of phone calls home, the pressure to "manage" students, and the silence I kept when removals and punishments felt disproportionate.

Through Theme 2: Institutional Power Enforces and Sustains Racialized Discipline, I shared stories that expose the ways that shame, exclusion, and disproportionate punishment harm rather than help students. At first my data was purely observational but as my career progressed, I noticed trends of discipline data that showed real racial disparity. Trends such as Black boys being harshly disciplined for non-compliance, tone or posture far more frequently than their white counterparts, Eddie being tackled by an SRO at morning metals for showing hesitance and

non-compliance, likely embarrassment, over revealing the metal-wrapped condom in his jeans pocket. Institutional power values order over relationship and I witness to that in my vignettes about young Heather being humiliated in the classroom by her father while I stood by complicitly.

In Theme 3: Control Creates Contradictions in Carceral and School Systems, I remember how powerless and ignorant I felt sitting in a courtroom where I didn't know the rules, was treated with derision and contempt for not knowing, a feeling I sadly realized is all too familiar to many students sitting in so many classrooms in school systems across the country. The presence of SROs in so many of our public schools creates a carceral environment in a learning environment that should value the risk-taking and learning inherent in growth but instead instills fear and compliance. Through my experiences with students like McKinley, Taylor, Junior, and Diamond in which they were pushed aside rather than supported, I came to understand that punitive systems do not teach regulation or responsibility — they teach fear, mistrust, and alienation. Moreover, and most importantly, punitive systems do not teach and therefore have no place in educational settings.

Through Theme 4: Systems Reinforce Socioeconomic Disparities and Criminalize Poverty, I examined how schools in either or both Black and Brown neighborhoods or lower socioeconomic neighborhoods have metal detectors, more SROs, rely on threats of handcuffs to gain compliance and have more surveillance than Whiter more affluent schools. The populations of these aforementioned schools also more closely align with the incarcerated populations with which I have experienced.

Through vignettes in Theme 4, I tell of Antoine who was not violent or dangerous, only agitated and non-compliant and rather than employing any kind of relationship-based strategy to

calm him, the threat of handcuffs and ultimately being sent home from school was the answer. I detail my experiences in the Philippines as a Peace Corps volunteer where education was viewed as a privilege not a right and if students didn't have the means with which to purchase school uniforms, shoes, transportation other than walking, they remained un or undereducated. Finally, I contrast between affluent and low-income American school parents and their differing methods with which they advocate for their students and the deficit-based viewpoint of many educators on those varying methods.

Over time, I came to see how discipline was often racialized and class-based, with Black and Brown students subjected to harsher scrutiny and faster escalation than their White peers. These realizations forced me to confront my own role in reinforcing inequity. They also pushed me to reject the false belief that shame or humiliation could teach lessons worth learning. Now, in my restorative practice, I strive to uphold dignity, provide opportunities for reflection, and treat mistakes as teachable moments rather than punishable offenses.

How does my understanding of punitive discipline change and grow as I move through the intersectional spaces of my life?

The answer to this question weaves through the telling of vignettes in all four themes: Theme 1: Early Experiences that Link Power to Shame, Theme 2: Institutional Power Enforces and Sustains Racialized Discipline, Theme 3: Control Creates Contradictions in Carceral and School Systems and Theme 4: Systems Reinforce Socioeconomic Disparities and Criminalize Poverty. My understanding of punitive discipline has shifted dramatically as I have moved through the intersectional spaces of my life — as a White, middle-class teacher, a Peace Corps volunteer, an educator in predominantly Black and Brown schools, and as the spouse of someone directly impacted by incarceration.

My understanding of punitive discipline evolved in stages, each deepened by the intersectional contexts I inhabited. As a novice teacher, my fear of being perceived as incompetent led me to comply with systems I did not yet have the language to critique. Early in my career, I accepted discipline as synonymous with order and deferred to authority, believing compliance ensured safety. Living and teaching in the Philippines revealed that behavior is shaped by cultural norms, not universal truths, which disrupted my assumptions about what constitutes "misbehavior."

Later in my career, in U.S. schools serving low-income and racialized communities, I confronted the disproportionate punishment of marginalized students and recognized my own complicity in reinforcing inequities. My marriage into a family touched deeply by the justice system further transformed my thinking, making visible the parallels between carceral logics and school discipline.

As my career progressed, as I saw racialized discipline in schools and the criminalization of poverty within the justice system, I began to connect my classroom experiences to broader social inequities. Through personal relationships, particularly with those directly impacted by incarceration, I recognized how privilege shielded my own family and community while others bore disproportionate burdens. These overlapping insights cultivated a critical consciousness: one that sees punitive discipline not as an isolated practice but as part of a continuum of systemic harm. My growth has been in learning to resist complicity, to question institutional authority, and to adopt restorative justice as a feminist, equity-driven alternative.

Critical Feminism as a Lens

Critical autoethnography provides a methodological and theoretical foundation for this study, situating personal narrative as both political and pedagogical. As Holman Jones (2018)

argues, personal stories illuminate how cultures are created and compromised through institutional, political, and social relations of power. In my work, sharing my lived experiences with punitive discipline and carceral systems is not simply self-expression; it is a feminist intervention that challenges dominant narratives and opens possibilities for equity and repair.

Feminist scholarship emphasizes that the personal is political (Behar, 1996; Sarachild, 1975). My experiences as an educator, restorative justice facilitator, and family member of incarcerated individuals reveal how systems of discipline reproduce patriarchal and racialized power structures. These stories are not isolated incidents but exemplify broader systemic patterns of domination, exclusion, and control. Critical feminist theory, therefore, provides the lens through which I interpret my journey from complicity to resistance.

Devalue Care and Equity

In answering my first research question, Critical feminist theory enabled me to interpret patterns within carceral settings as systemic, rooted in patriarchal and racialized structures that devalue care and equity. Witnessing how carceral systems treated my husband, his family, and those I taught while incarcerated paralleled for me how classed power operates in schools. These insights transformed my pedagogy: I moved from passive acceptance of disciplinary norms to restorative practices that center student voice, emphasize repair, and resist the reproduction of carceral logics in schools. This shift reflects the feminist commitment to praxis—turning theory into action (Crenshaw, 1991; Johnson-Bailey, 2003).

Silence and Compliance

Feminist theory also sharpened my understanding of punitive school discipline as reproducing patriarchal authority and silencing marginalized voices. In my early career, silence and compliance defined my response to institutional power, echoing Olesen's (2007) observation

that feminist research challenges the taken-for-granted "normalcy" of such hierarchies. Today, I resist these logics by adopting restorative practices that position discipline as an opportunity for healing and relational growth rather than exclusion and harm. This transformation demonstrates a feminist ethic of care—prioritizing dignity, relationship, and equity over domination (Ettorre, 2017).

Intersectionality

My evolving critical consciousness reflects the feminist principle of intersectionality (Boylorn & Orbe, 2021; Crenshaw, 1991). Experiences across schools, courts, and prisons revealed that what once appeared to be individual misbehavior or personal failure was in fact structural harm shaped by racism, poverty, and systemic neglect. Critical feminism insists on locating these patterns within intersecting systems of oppression and power. My growth reflects this epistemology: feelings of outrage, sadness, and empathy became catalysts for action (Ettorre, 2017), driving me toward restorative justice as a practice of resistance.

Through the lens of critical feminism, my experiences are not singular but representative of larger structural inequities in both education and the justice system. Critical feminist autoethnography reframes these stories as sites of political resistance and consciousness-raising, aligning with the feminist imperative to transform oppressive systems. My journey from silence to restorative praxis embodies a feminist ethic of care, insisting that educational leadership must move beyond compliance and toward equity, healing, and justice (Anzaldúa, 2022; Behar, 1996).

Conclusions- Restorative Justice is the Way Forward

Taken together, the literature and my lived experiences point to the same conclusion: punitive systems—whether in prisons or schools—neither correct behavior nor produce safety. The carceral shift from rehabilitation to retribution (e.g., tough-on-crime statutes, mandatory

minimums, and “penal harm”) expanded incarceration without delivering deterrence or humane outcomes (Johnson et al., 1997; Rothman, 1980; Tonry, 2022; Travis et al., 2014). In parallel, schools imported this logic through zero-tolerance codes, SRO expansion, and exclusionary discipline, which research links to lost instructional time, lower achievement, higher dropout, and increased adult justice involvement—disproportionately for Black, Latinx, disabled, and low-income students (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019; Brown, 2006; Fadus et al., 2021; Heitzeg, 2014, 2014; Hirschfield, 2008; Losen & Martinez, 2020; Losen & Whitaker, 2017; Skiba & Losen, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). What I witnessed in classrooms, hallways, courtrooms, and visiting rooms confirms the scholarship’s throughline: systems that prize control, surveillance, and shame normalize inequity and cultivate fear, not learning or belonging (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017; Strategies for Youth, 2019).

Restorative practices offer a research-supported and ethically grounded alternative. The literature shows that restorative approaches—when implemented school-wide with fidelity—reduce suspensions, strengthen relationships, and improve climate by centering harm, needs, and repair rather than blame and exclusion (Crowe, 2018; Fronius et al., 2019; Joseph et al., 2021; Losen & Whitaker, 2017; Mansfield et al., 2018). My practice echoes these findings: when students were met with curiosity, taught regulation skills, and invited to make amends, they re-entered community with more agency and fewer repeats of harm; when they were isolated, cuff-threatened, or publicly shamed, the cycle hardened (Losen & Martinez, 2020; Skiba & Losen, 2016). Restorative justice is not a soft substitute for discipline; it is principled accountability that attends to context, teaches pro-social skills, and interrupts the school-to-prison pipeline, aligning with Indigenous and community-centered traditions of repair (Brummer, 2021; Davis, 2019; Zehr, 2016).

Moving forward, the work is both structural and relational. At the systems level, districts must revise codes of conduct away from mandatory removals, invest in SEL and restorative training, and use disaggregated discipline data for continuous improvement (Losen & Martinez, 2020; Skiba & Losen, 2016). With the passage of the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) in 2018, it is unconscionable that educational systems are still relying on antiquated, static and punitive systems and ignoring the call to educate the whole child in a way that is culturally responsive, trauma sensitive and growth-oriented (Brummer, 2021; DeMatthews, 2016; DeMatthews et al., 2017; National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), 2018).

At the leadership level, schools should align policy, procedures, physical spaces, and adult learning with restorative principles; ensure SRO roles are educationally bounded and de-escalation trained; and build family partnerships that replace fear with trust (Brummer, 2021; Gowri, 2003; Hirschfield, 2010; D. Smith et al., 2015, 2022; Strategies for Youth, 2019). At the classroom level, educators need time and support to run circles, co-create norms, teach repair, and document growth (Joseph et al., 2021; D. Smith et al., 2015, 2022). Schools and classrooms should adopt a restorative pedagogy that invites and inspires classroom teachers and students to critically evaluate curriculum, systems and their own learning (Brummer, 2021; McMahon et al., 2024). The literature provides the evidence base; Chapter 4 provides the lived evidence. Together they make a compelling case: if our aim is safety, equity, and learning, restorative justice is not just a worthy option—it is the way forward.

Implications for Practice

Rethinking Discipline through Restorative Practices

The findings from my lived experiences and supported by the literature point to a pressing need for schools to move away from punitive and exclusionary models of discipline. As documented in the literature (Losen & Martinez, 2020; Skiba & Losen, 2016), these models fail to improve school safety or student outcomes and instead perpetuate cycles of harm and inequality. My experiences with students such as Junior, Antoine, McKinley, and others highlight the ways punitive practices not only damage individual students but also corrode trust between families and schools. Restorative practices, by contrast, offer schools a framework that centers repair, healing, and accountability (Fronius et al., 2019; McMahon et al., 2024; Zehr, 2016). Practitioners must be intentional about embedding restorative philosophy into school culture, not as an "add-on" but as a guiding ethos shaping daily practice.

Training and Professional Development

One clear implication for practice is the need for robust professional development. Teachers, administrators, and school resource officers often lack training in child development, de-escalation, and restorative justice (Strategies for Youth, 2019). District and building leaders need to be not only encouraged but required to critically evaluate their discipline, educational attainment and student belonging data and make professional development on that data. My own trajectory—from compliance with traditional discipline to embracing restorative practices—demonstrates the transformative potential of training paired with critical reflection. Districts and states should prioritize ongoing professional development that equips educators with relational tools, trauma-informed strategies, and a restorative mindset. Without such training, even well-intentioned educators are likely to revert to punitive reflexes in moments of stress.

Equity as a Guiding Principle

Critical feminist theory, woven throughout my analysis, illuminates how discipline practices disproportionately harm students at the intersections of race, class, and disability (Heitzeg, 2014; Sawyer III & White Hodge, 2014). For practitioners, this means equity cannot be an afterthought. Educators must actively interrogate whose behaviors are labeled "defiant," whose families are deemed "uninvolved," and whose dignity is preserved or denied in daily practice. Restorative justice must be implemented with an explicit equity lens, ensuring that students most impacted by systemic inequities are not further marginalized by how "restoration" is practiced in schools. If educators are not critically evaluating their role in perpetrating systemic harm on a personal level, educational leaders must be courageous in adopting transformational leadership principles that are unrelentingly help them to do so (McMahon et al., 2024).

System-Level Leadership and Policy Shifts

Finally, implications extend beyond classroom-level practice. School leaders and policymakers must examine codes of conduct, discipline data, and structural inequities. Just as my analysis revealed how policies like zero-tolerance mirrored the punitive turn in prisons, restorative practices demand systemic reform (Brummer, 2021). Building leaders should reframe discipline policies around harm and healing rather than compliance and control, ensuring families are partners in this process. At the policy level, state departments of education and school boards should incentivize restorative frameworks, provide funding for training, and require accountability measures that track racial and socioeconomic disparities in discipline. This policy shift cannot simply be words on paper with no action towards change. The NELP

standards are now seven years old (National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), 2018) but true change towards realizing those leadership imperatives is lagging.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study affirms that restorative justice provides a more humane and equitable path forward, it also underscores the many unanswered questions that remain. My findings, situated within both personal narrative and the broader literature, highlight the urgent need for continued inquiry into how schools and carceral systems perpetuate or resist inequity. The following recommendations for future research emerge directly from these insights.

Longitudinal Studies of Restorative Practices

Although restorative practices are increasingly adopted in schools, little research tracks their long-term impacts on student outcomes such as academic achievement, school climate, or post-secondary trajectories. Longitudinal studies could assess whether restorative approaches interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline over time and across multiple contexts (Losen & Martinez, 2020; Skiba & Losen, 2016).

Comparative Research Across Contexts

This study focused on under-resourced, urban schools. Future research should compare the implementation of restorative practices in suburban and rural schools, affluent districts, and schools with varied racial demographics. Such comparative analyses would illuminate whether restorative practices challenge inequities similarly across diverse contexts, or whether new challenges emerge (Heitzeg, 2014; Hirschfield, 2008).

Intersectionality and Marginalized Identities

Critical feminist theory guided my interpretation, but future research should explicitly center the voices of those most harmed by punitive systems. Participatory and narrative

methodologies could elevate the experiences of students and families at the intersections of race, class, gender, and disability, offering a fuller account of how inequities compound in disciplinary encounters (Fadus et al., 2021; Losen & Whitaker, 2017).

Educator Beliefs and Transformational Journeys

My journey from compliance to critical reflection underscores the need for more research on educator transformation. Future studies could explore what professional development, leadership supports, or personal encounters with injustice most influence teachers' and administrators' willingness to abandon punitive practices (Maynard & Weinstein, 2021; Smith et al., 2022).

Bridging School and Carceral Reform

Finally, this study highlights the structural parallels between schools and prisons, particularly in their reliance on control and exclusion. Future research could examine how lessons from restorative school practices might inform prison reform, and conversely, how carceral education programs could inspire new approaches in schools (Abu-Jamal, 2014; Travis et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Ultimately, this work is not just a reflection on my journey through systems of schooling and punishment—it is a declaration that personal transformation is inseparable from systemic change. My story is not singular; it represents countless educators, students, and families navigating institutions shaped by carceral logic. To disrupt these cycles, we must reimagine education as a site of healing rather than harm, restoration rather than retribution, and relationship rather than control.

The "so what" of this research is that lived experience is theory. My life as an educator, actor in and witness of punitive systems stands as both evidence and resistance. It reminds us that policies and practices are not neutral—they are lived through bodies, identities, and communities. When we center those stories, we do more than critique; we create new pathways for justice in our schools and ourselves.

This critical autoethnography invites educators, leaders, and policymakers to listen differently—to see that transformation begins when we refuse to replicate the punishment we have endured or learned as practice. My narrative becomes an offering: a call to build classrooms and communities rooted in empathy, accountability, and human dignity. That is the work of restorative education. That is the work of liberation. To see the harm that our educational and carceral systems have heaped upon individuals, families and entire communities, to bear witness to the blatant disregard for the fundamental right of human growth and dignity upon which our educational and correctional systems claim to be built upon and to continue to conduct business as usual is ethically and morally reprehensible. Every educator at every level must face the fact that to choose to do nothing is to be culpable if not willing in perpetuating classism, racism and the school to prison pipeline. As I have always told my students, "once you know better you have a duty to do better. I don't want apologies without changed behavior." We simply can no longer ignore and claim not to see the harm. We can no longer apologize for the harm that our systems cause. *We* must change our behavior.

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Appendix A - IRB Exemption

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of Research Integrity,
Compliance and Security

TO: Royce Ann Collins
Educational Leadership
Manhattan, KS 66506

Proposal Number: IRB-12972

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 06/13/2025

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Navigating borders and transgressing boundaries: A feminist autoethnography."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written – and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §104(d), category:Exempt Category 2 Subsection ii.**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 06/13/2025 12:12 PM ET

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