NECESSARY “OTHERS” IN AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: 
STORIES OF STUDENTS WITH JUVENILE RECORDS

A Dissertation by

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NECESSARY “OTHERS” IN AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS:
STORIES OF STUDENTS WITH JUVENILE RECORDS

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content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the
degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Leadership.

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ABSTRACT

For decades federal and state agencies have reformed criminal and juvenile justice laws to reduce recidivism rates in the United States. Based on successes adult populations have experienced exiting the system using a Risk-Need-Response approach, a similar measure has been applied to juveniles. However, the data suggests mixed results. One reason for the differences between adult and juvenile success rates may be related to the unique experiences juveniles have in schools. Using a narrative inquiry and co-researcher methodology, this study used critical social theory and the theory of othering to examine juvenile experiences returning to school after juvenile justice involvement.
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Chapter 1

School age youth (students) involved in the juvenile justice system and juvenile recidivism rates are among the leading social justice issues facing the United States. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in 2015, there were over 884 million juvenile delinquency cases in the U.S. (Justice, 2014; Puzzanchera, Sladky, & Kang, 2015). In 2015, then President Barack Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act which provided additional supports and critical protections for disadvantaged and high need students. Current education laws suggest every student should be able to graduate as college and career ready; however, data indicates 55% of justice involved students will return to jail within a year, negatively affecting both their likelihood to graduate high school and their future employability (Macomber et al., 2010).

Problem Statement

In an effort to reduce recidivism rates in the criminal justice system, nearly every state government in the U.S. has reformed its justice codes in the last three decades ("Public Safety Performance Project," 2016). As a result of these reforms, 44 states and the District of Columbia have implemented a risk assessment tool. Thirty-eight states have adopted the use of a state-wide singular risk assessment tool; six states use a layered/regional assessment tool because of variances among regions or layered state and local probation practices; and seven states use a locally administered assessment tool. Six states have not implemented a statewide risk assessment tool (JJGPS Collaborators). Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) is one assessment tool that provides case managers, justice workers, or social workers the flexibility to identify risks, examine needs, and establish a response or intervention for individuals in the justice system.
The assessment helps identify factors that may influence a person’s likelihood to recidivate, or return to the system (Polaschek, 2012; "Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) Simulation Tool,").

In the RNR model, an individual’s likelihood of recidivating is categorized as either high, moderate, or low risk based on the number and intensity of influencing risk factors. Risk factors are categorized as either static or dynamic. Static risks are unamenable to change and difficult to control, such as criminal history, family involvement in the justice system, mental health related issues, drug dependency, and living in environments with strong criminal influence. Dynamic risks, also called criminogenic needs, can change rapidly and unexpectedly. Criminogenic needs include access to stable housing, employment, and educational opportunity and attainment (Bonta & Andrews, 2007; Latessa & Lowenkamp, 2005; "Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) Simulation Tool,"). When a person’s criminogenic needs are not met, the person is more likely to return to criminal behaviors to meet the need, particularly when static risks are also present. A high-risk evaluation based on static risks requires more intensive treatments and interventions whereas a low risk evaluation should receive only limited intervention. Individuals assessed as low risk who receive intensive treatments are more likely to recidivate than if they receive interventions appropriate for their risk level (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). However, low risk evaluations should be made a higher priority when the individual also has an unmet criminogenic need ("Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) Simulation Tool,").

RNR has worked well with reducing recidivism rates among adult offenders, therefore states have applied the model to their juvenile populations (Brogan, Haney-Caron, NeMoyer, & DeMatteo, 2015; Netto, Carter, & Bonell, 2014; Polaschek, 2012). However, some early juvenile justice reform states have pre- and post-reform data indicating mixed results from implementing RNR. One factor possibly contributing to the mixed results may be related to the
experiences justice-involved youth have at school, a setting not experienced by adult populations. Schools are designed to engender what society deems as successful or desirable social outcomes (Jeffries, 2006; Simson, 2013; "United States Department of Education," 2017). In the U.S. what it means to be a successful student and what constitutes successful schools have been narrowly defined. The hegemonic norms of student and school success often value high standardized test scores, academic achievement, and public recognition for extra-curricular/athletic prowess. In the last few years, the description of a successful student has also included career goals centered in math, science, or technology; college admittance, and being prepared to compete on a global market ("Education: Knowledge and skills for the jobs of the future," 2015; "United States Department of Education," 2017).

School age youth with histories in the juvenile justice system (hereafter referred to as students) often do not fit this prevailing definition of school success. Students typically have lower literacy levels than their peers, lower intellectual capabilities, more frequent disruptive behaviors, and inconsistent family/school/community engagement (Merkwae, 2015; Sander, Sharkey, Olivarri, Tanigawa, & Mauseth, 2010). In criminal justice research, students have described school as de-stabilizing, chaotic, and unsafe. Research has also validated that school is a risk factor negatively affecting recidivism after justice involvement (Barnert et al., 2015; Barrett & Katsiyannis, 2015; Cole & Cohen, 2013; Knefel, 2015). Yet, these students are expected to become “successful” in a school system that is likely to perpetuate their marginalization. The overall poor performance and tenuous relationship with public schools may help explain the lackluster results of RNR reforms with juvenile populations. Furthermore, the perspectives of youth with histories in the juvenile justice system are often omitted from the narrative used to describe academic experiences of American students; and, as a consequence,
their narratives are also omitted from discourse informing juvenile justice reforms and educational policy and practice (Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, & Suda, 2012; Prokkola, 2014; Zimmermann, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

A theory provides a framework to organize research into related segments of information and processes. It guides the development of research questions, the method and approach for data collection, and data analysis/interpretation (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993). To guide this study, I used critical social theory as a macro-level lens to examine the relationship between the educational system and society, and the theory of othering to more closely examine the relationships and experiences justice-involved students have with the people in their classrooms.

Critical Social Theory

Critical social theory provides a way to examine power struggles and oppression in society. Two early developers of critical social theory in schools, Michael Apple and Henry Giroux, found other theoretical frameworks inadequate to describe the colliding perspectives surrounding the relationship between school and the socio-political contexts that shape the American education system (Apple, 1995; DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1995; Giroux, 1983, 1984).

Giroux and Apple identified two dominant ideologies that influence educational practices described as content-centric and strategy based (Giroux, 1984). Content-centric practitioners reproduce dominant social ideologies in various forms across the school system; examples include expecting every student to view content from one perspective and to master content at the same time as all other students, or be tiered for intervention (Apple, 1995; Giroux, 1983, 1984; Magill & Rodriguez, 2015). Conversely, strategy based practitioners describe healthy learning environments as social, non-alienating, and inclusive where the focus is on pedagogy
and how the content is taught and tailored for each student (Giroux, 1984). Neither practitioner group necessarily operates within strict boundaries but finds itself situated on a spectrum between these ideologies. Critical social theory provides the framework to equally acknowledge that both ideologies are present in educational systems (Giroux, 1984). At either end of the spectrum, an overly deterministic approach to education leads to a form of social reproduction and that focus can lead to the disregard of other influences on student experiences such as family and community (Apple, 1995). For the price of individual agency, educational systems foster and reward students who acquiesce to societal norms (Giroux, 1983, 1984). Students who refuse to acquiesce to social norms are then labeled and removed from mainstream educational opportunities.

**Theory of Othering**

Historically schools have pushed for an assimilationist agenda where students are expected to “fit in” or conform to dominant social norms (Borrero et al., 2012; Fine, 1991). Schools operate within a “right or wrong” framework that has resulted in hegemonic binarism or “Othering” (Zimmermann, 2016). The Othering of students is the result of situations or dynamics in which a student exhibiting conformity may experience privileged social status while students exhibiting different characteristics or identities may be marginalized or Othered (Borrero et al., 2012; Kumashiro, 2000; Zimmermann, 2016). Students with histories in the juvenile justice system tend to fall into the Othered category (Cole & Cohen, 2013; Eckloff & Javidi, 1991; Knefel, 2015; Sanders & Munford, 2015). They are often marginalized from the larger educational system and estranged from the local level classroom (Besley, 2009; Burch, 2009; Fine, 1991; Shapiro & Purpel, 2005). They are frequently removed from class, suspended, or expelled from school (Lee, 2016; Merkwae, 2015; Nance, 2016; Shapiro & Purpel, 2005).
Knowledge about the process of Othering is incomplete because Othered populations routinely experience exclusion, invisibility, and silence from mainstream narratives (Kumashiro, 2000). However, researchers have identified some trends among Others in school settings, including being Othered because of race, nationality, academic performance, socio-economic status, athletic ability, and gender identity and expression (Borrero et al., 2012; Boutwell, 2015; Taylor & Coia, 2014; Zimmermann, 2016). The theory of othering may also help explain the experiences students with histories in the juvenile justice system have in school and by extension their poor academic performance and higher rates of recidivism in spite of reforms like RNR.

I used the theory of Othering to examine the relationships students with histories in the juvenile justice system had with their teachers and classmates and how RNR may have informed those relationships. For this study, the theory of Othering was used to examine the narratives of these students by looking at their backgrounds, the options available to them in school, and the choices they made in regard to how they experienced public school after juvenile justice involvement.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

This qualitative, narrative inquiry shed light on the experiences students have returning to public education after being involved in the juvenile justice system. Giving voice to often marginalized and silenced student experiences can provide decision makers, whether in government or public education, functional insights into a unique perspective on a complicated, multifaceted issue in public schools. Stake (1995) suggested that a good research question will “direct the looking and the thinking enough and not too much” (p. 15). The primary research
question guiding this study was, “How do students describe their experiences with public education after being involved in the juvenile justice system?” Secondary questions were:

- How do students describe where they fit in the educational context before and after being labeled a juvenile offender?
- How do students describe their relationships with school personnel and peers?
- How do school experiences factor into the perceptions of former justice-involved students regarding their futures?
Chapter 2

Literature Review

I began the literature review by developing a foundational understanding of the topic, then I looked for themes to help guide and focus a second search of the literature. In addition to narrowing the research topic, I looked for previously tested research methodologies and gaps in existing research (Haller & Kleine, 2001; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). My initial search of peer-reviewed articles focused on the following search terms: youth incarceration, juvenile justice, interventions, and recidivism rates. This search described demographic data and the history of juvenile justice interventions in the US. Noticing a lack of literature about why youth enter the juvenile justice system, I performed a secondary literature review using the terms, society, school, influence, school-to-prison pipeline, and prison-industrial-complex. The first part of this literature review will describe students who are in the juvenile justice system, the middle section will describe the RNR model as a rehabilitation tool, and the final part of the literature review will describe how socially constructed systems may influence students placement in the justice system and how social systems may influence their return.

Residents in the Juvenile Justice System

In 2015, there were over 884,000 juvenile justice cases representing both unique and recidivating cases. Of those cases, 640,900 involved male juveniles and 244,000 involved female juveniles. The most cases involved juveniles who were 13-15 years old (393,300), then age 16 (218,300), 17 or older (204,300), then 12 and younger (68,400) (Puzzanchera, Sladky, & Kang, 2016). Cases involving white males and white females (383,400) outnumbered all other races identified, including black (313,700), American Indian (14,400), Asian (9,700), and
Hispanic (163,600) (Puzzanchera et al., 2016). However, racial minorities continue to be disproportionately represented in the justice system (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014).

Types of Charges

The histories for juveniles in the justice system vary according to whether they are male or female. Historically, girls have been infrequently charged with severe crimes compared to their male counterparts. In 2015, males committed over 250 thousand violent crimes and girls committed approximately 60 thousand. Justice systems had targeted girls’ moral welfare with status offenses such as truancy, running away, violating curfew, being incorrigible, and issues related to sexual behavior and identity which may account for the overall larger number of girls in the juvenile justice system (Munster, 2014; Pasko, 2010). Girls in detention had histories of being victims of sexual abuse and assault at significantly higher rates compared to the trauma histories of justice-involved boys (Dierkhising, Ko, Woods-Jaeger, Briggs, et al., 2013). Advocates suggested girls who are victims of sexual violence have a trajectory toward the prison system (Dierkhising, Ko, Woods-Jaeger, Briggs, et al., 2013; J. Ford, Kerig, Desai, & Feierman, 2016; Olafson & Halladay, 2016; Pasko, 2010). However, research conducted by Calley (2012) suggested youth with a sexual abuse history are 44.6% less likely to return to the system.

Boys were more likely than girls to enter the juvenile justice system accused of drug offenses, robbery, and theft (Puzzanchera et al., 2016). Risk factors for males included being involved in both the juvenile justice system and the foster care system, maintaining anti-social
relationships, gang involvement, and maltreatment in adolescence. Juvenile males were more likely to re-offend than females (Ryan, Williams, & Courtney, 2013).

**Exposure to Trauma**

Students in the juvenile justice system sometimes came from complicated home and community situations. In a study conducted by Dierkhising, Ko, Woods-Jaeger, Ernestine, et al. (2013), they examined the lives of 658 students in the juvenile justice system. Ninety percent of the population self-identified exposure to a traumatic event; 70% identified as having a mental health disorder, and 30% identified as meeting the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Justice involved students also tended to report exposure to multiple types of traumatic experiences, also called poly-victimization (J. Ford et al., 2016; Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). Another study found 92% of students reported exposure to at least one type of trauma, but experiencing more than one was more common (Abram et al., 2004).

In a different region in the US, a study of randomly selected students in a detention center found 11% of males and 15% of females met the criteria for PTSD (Abram et al., 2004). Studies examining the connection between traumatic events, PTSD, and delinquent behavior continued to illuminate this complicated phenomenon. Some research suggested early exposure to risk factors, such as the stability of home life, conduct in school, academic achievement, and peer rejection in early developmental years may contribute to chronic and more severe delinquency patterns (Jolliffe, Farrington, Piquero, Loeber, & Hill, 2017; Staff, Whichard, Siennick, & Maggs, 2015).

**Students with Disabilities**

A large number of students involved with the juvenile justice system had some kind of disability. In 2005, a national survey was conducted to identify the number of students in the
juvenile justice system who were also eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (Office for Civil Rights, 2017). Researchers examined data from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention from 2003; they found 96,000 students were incarcerated in the juvenile justice system and 37% were eligible for services compared to 9% who were eligible in the general population. Twenty percent of the students with disabilities in the system were middle and high school students. Thirteen percent had developmental disabilities and 36% had learning disabilities (Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, & Poirier, 2005). In some facilities, 75-100% of the students had a mental health related diagnosis and approximately 35% had more severe diagnoses such as schizophrenia or bipolar (Merkwae, 2015; Skowyra & Cocozza, 2007; Thurau, 2009).

**RNR as a Rehabilitation Model**

The RNR Model focused on why a person committed an offense, the likelihood that he would re-offend, and what resources were available to reduce that risk (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). The RNR model as a stand-alone tool typically did not assess the risks associated with sexual offenders and therefore this study excluded sexual offenders, as they were sometimes limited in their ability to re-enter public education settings, or if they were able to return, re-entry for them was sometimes complicated (Netto et al., 2014). Therefore, I focused this study, and by extension this literature review, on the RNR Model (Stover, 2005) rather than treatment models used primarily with sexual offenders. Bonta and Andrews (2007) developed the RNR Model after what they describe as three previous generations of risk assessment. The first generation of risk assessment was used primarily in adult populations. It relied heavily on subjective opinions of professionals working in adult correctional and detention facilities. Professionals did not use metrics to monitor progress. Second generation actuarial assessments were more sophisticated.
Two common tools to predict human behavior were the Salient Factor Score (Hoffman, 1983) and the Statistical Information on Recidivism Scale (Nafekh & Motiuk, 2002). These scales used criminal history and questionnaire style items because they were easy to collect and analyze. The accuracy of these instruments allowed correction facilities to classify offenders and tailor supervision strategies. However, the scales did not account for changes in a person’s status, like stabilized home environments, abstinence from drug/alcohol abuse with prior abuse history, employment, or educational attainment (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). The third generation of risk assessments incorporated risks and needs into their metrics. They accounted for both criminal histories as well as mutable conditions (social circles, employment status, and the completion of treatment programs). The fourth generation, currently in use in adult and juvenile justice systems across the country, incorporated risks, needs, and responses. It also included a broader range of risk factors, systematic interventions, and progress monitoring (Bonta & Andrews, 2007).

With reliable tools to predict repeat criminal behavior, the focus shifted to classifying low risk and high risk offenders. Low risk offenders needed less supervision and monitoring and high risk offenders received more intense treatment options. Bonta and Andrews (2007) suggested all criminals have needs that deserve treatment, but not all of their needs (criminogenic needs) resulted in criminal behavior. The RNR Model focused on seven criminogenic needs, indicators, and intervention goals (Table 1). The table also describes non-criminogenic needs. The RNR Model defined non-criminogenic needs as minor needs, but they may influence how one felt in relationship to others.

Effective approaches to rehabilitation have been described in literature as providing a full spectrum of “social services [interventions] to the most at-risk students in the justice system
tailored towards building strengths, promoting success, safety, and permanency in home, school, and the community” ("Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice," 2015). While the research suggested full continuum of services to maximize effectiveness, participating states have implemented the RNR Model differently.

Two national programs have actively helped states monitor and adjust their juvenile justice programs, The Pew Charitable Trust and Models for Change. Both programs had incorporated versions of the RNR assessment tool as part of their efforts. Six states had modeled their juvenile reforms in partnership with The Pew Charitable Trust, focused on data driven analysis, examination of the state’s resources, and lessons learned from other states ("Public Safety Performance Project," 2016). Other states reformed their implementation of RNR based on the Models for Change approach, which targeted not only implementing assessment tools but also targeting social justice concerns such as mental health screening (2 states), behavioral health concerns (7 states), disproportionate minority contact (5 states), and child welfare integration (4 states).
### Table 1

**The Seven Major Risk Factors**

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<th>Intervention Goals</th>
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<td>Antisocial personality</td>
<td>Impulsive, adventurous, restless, aggressive, irritable</td>
<td>Build self-management skills, teach anger management</td>
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<td>Pro-criminal attitudes</td>
<td>Rationalizes crime, negative about law enforcement</td>
<td>Counter with prosocial attitudes, prosocial identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social supports for crime</td>
<td>Criminal friends, isolation from prosocial peers</td>
<td>Replace with prosocial acquaintances</td>
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<td>Substance abuse</td>
<td>Abuse of alcohol and/or drugs</td>
<td>Reduce substance abuse, enhance alternatives to abuse</td>
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<td>Family relationships</td>
<td>Inappropriate disciplining, poor relationships</td>
<td>Enhance warmth and caring, teach parenting skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/work relationships</td>
<td>Poor performance, low levels of satisfaction or engagement</td>
<td>Enhance work/study skills, nurture interpersonal relationships within school context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial recreational activities</td>
<td>Lack of involvement</td>
<td>Encourage participation, teach hobbies and sports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Non-criminogenic/minor needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-criminogenic/minor needs</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Poor feelings of self-worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vague feelings of personal distress</td>
<td>Anxious, depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major mental disorder</td>
<td>Schizophrenia, manic-depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical health</td>
<td>Physical deformity, nutrient deficiency</td>
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The Influence of a Capitalist Education System

RNR has provided a framework to assess the influences a student faces at a local level; however, RNR does not address students’ risks or needs within the context of an education system steered by a capitalist America. An examination of the history of the education system has traced how the system and its students have become tools for capitalist society.

Forming a New and Unified Society

In the early 1800s, public schools were developed not based on taxation and offered for free, but were service provided, sometimes with a charge, to help educate citizens about their rights in a newly formed country (Neem, 2016). By the mid-1800s, the Common School Movement helped unify a growing and diverse population, “to become the great equalizer” and the “balance wheel of social machinery” as it provided a uniform education that would alleviate some of the strains of socially divided classes (Mann, 1991; Papagiannis, Easton, & Owens, 1992). Some educational historians suggested the rise in state funded public education was a response to social issues on a national level such as crime, poverty, and a desire for social control or social construction (Neem, 2016; Tyack & James, 1986; Wegner, 2013).

From the late 1800s to the turn of the 20th Century, the U.S. experienced mass immigration. Public schools moved toward developing and producing citizens with increased patriotism as the United States entered World War I (Wegner, 2013). This concept was commonly implemented through the Bureau of Naturalization and the Bureau of Education to develop a singular American identity, with a common language and common social norms, among diverse immigrant groups. The Bureaus tasked public schools with educating a citizenry by providing equal access to subject matter (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001; Wegner, 2013). In time, and under the guise of efficiency and science, the educational system began
differentiating instruction and tracking students into categories based on abilities in an effort to equalize future career opportunity for all learners (Deschenes et al., 2001).

Capitalist Ideologies Infiltrate Public Schools

Citizenship continued to be an important focus from a national perspective, but the post-World War II labor industry also needed public school graduates with sophisticated skills if the U.S. was going to maintain its position as a leading industrial power. This ideology became particularly important during the Space Race against Russia from the 1950s to the 1970s, which resulted in passage of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (Amirault, 2015; "National Defense Education Act," 2017; Papagiannis et al., 1992). The National Defense Education Act represented the first time the federal government appropriated funds for public education, with a specific focus on bolstering teaching and curriculum in math, science, and foreign languages.

In the 1980s, the Reagan Administration shifted how schools would serve its citizenry. He initiated the A Nation at Risk study and began what would become a decades long image that schools were dangerous and ill-performing places and privatizing schools would improve academic outcomes (Burch, 2009; McShane, 2015). The Reagan Administration suggested the wealthy and powerful would step in to secure schools and educate students (Fasching-Varner, Mitchell, Martin, & Bennett-Haron, 2014; Gardner et al., 1983).

After the Nation at Risk study, many non-instructional aspects of school operations were privatized, in areas of school lunch/breakfast provision, custodial services, and some transportation services. Outside sources were used for cost-savings and efficiency (Burch, 2009; Papagiannis et al., 1992). Following A Nation at Risk, the education system applied a market model to federal education policy that demanded standards based education and school accountability for meeting those standards under strict timelines. Content and performance
standards based educational policies such as Goals 2000 Educate America Act, School-to-Work Opportunities Act, and Improving America’s Schools Act opened the way for school choice under President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind policy (Burch, 2009; Goals 2000: Educate America: Fact sheet, 1993; National school-to-work opportunities: Progress report, 2000; "No child left behind," 2007; Riley, 1995).

Under No Child Left Behind, states identified what tests their students would use to show adequate yearly progress (AYP) to meet mandates. When student scores indicated they were falling behind trajectories, they were tracked or placed in intervention programs (Deschenes et al., 2001). School districts had the local authority to purchase resources to improve test scores, creating revenue streams for companies providing educational materials.

Giving local authority to school districts created a competitive market for textbook providers, curriculum developers, and technology software companies who provided interventions as well as data management software, and other supplemental educational services (Burch, 2009; Hayes, 2015). The supplemental educational services may have included before school/after school programming such as Latch Key, AVID, and other academic tutoring (Burch, 2009). The education industry was not and is not just in school districts; it expands into communities through private day care regulations and private tutoring companies like Kumon Reading, Sylvan Learning, and ACT/SAT test preparation companies. If students were still unable to achieve proficiency standards when the government said they should, students were squeezed out of the system by being placed in tiered interventions and prohibited from participating in extra-curricular activities or taking elective courses where students may otherwise thrive (Burch, 2009).
Othering students from mainstream society for capital gains. In some cases, members of the educational system held deficit perspectives of marginalized students, maintaining that the hegemonic, white ideology is superior to other behaviors (D. Ford, Howard, Harris III, & Tyson, 2015; Kennedy-Lewis, Murphy, & Grosland, 2016; Tinkler & Tinkler, 2013). These members then labeled students as defiant or unruly, effectively “othering” students from their peers. Members of this practice failed to realize they were provoking the same students by frequently misunderstanding cultural differences and under-representing cultural diversity (Besley, 2009; Fine, 1991; Lee, 2016; Magill & Rodriguez, 2015). This type of misunderstanding can be seen in a study conducted by D. Ford et al. (2015), where a gifted student was labeled rude and disruptive because he laughed louder and more frequently than his peers and interrupted his teacher when he commented, “I love that part of the story” and “That’s so funny!” (p. 399). In the same study, middle school students were interviewed about the content they were studying. An eighth-grade male said,

You get tired of learning about the same White people and the same things. We need to broaden our horizons and learn about other people and even other countries. The White people are just trying to advance other White people and leave us behind and ignorant! (p. 398)

Even though the student was in a gifted classroom, his teacher found his behavior unacceptable, rude, and defiant.

The cultural misunderstanding goes far beyond just verbalized communication. Children identified as non-White have used a variety of communication tools that do not conform to the dominant, white middle class norm. “With looks, gestures, signals, body language, and tones, Black children engage in telling the truth or telling it like it is. Blacks have associated this style
with being honest, forthright, blunt, and direct; but White teachers may receive it as abrasive, confrontational, or disrespectful” (D. Ford et al., 2015, p. 401). Each of these types of responses could have been appropriate and explained by misunderstood incongruence between students’ homes and school cultural standards (Rachlin, 1989); however, schools have tended to respond to these behaviors with punitive measures. “Disciplinary practices in schools often bear a striking similarity to the strategies used to punish adults in society. Typically, schools rely on some form of exclusion or ostracism to control the behavior of students” (Noguera, 2003, p. 342). One way schools have removed labeled children is through laws protecting schools from disruptive students.

To address students identified as defiant, unruly, and a disruption to the learning process, school administrators have relied on zero tolerance policies (Nybell, 2001). In the 1990s, zero tolerance policies were implemented to address A Nation at Risk and to assuage public fear about unruly students disrupting the educational environment. School resource officers (SROs) were introduced to public school campuses across the country to enforce student conduct (Merkwae, 2015). Twenty-two states made normal youth behaviors a crime by labeling the response a disruption to school, including speaking loudly, boisterously, or challenging authority (Ripley, 2016). Based on a 1976 South Carolina law, it was illegal to “disturb school” (revised legislation pending 2017-2018) ("South Carolina General Assembly," 2017); South Dakota had boisterous behavior at school as a 2nd degree misdemeanor ("South Dakota Legislature," 2017), and in Maine, it was a civil offense to interrupt a teacher by speaking loudly ("Maine State Constitution: Education," 2017).

In response to these oppressive conditions in schools, students created a subculture where they used identifying symbols such as language, clothing, music, and aggressive behaviors to
counter the ideology of the educational system (Besley, 2009). The more entrenched a student became in the subculture, the more difficult it was for the student to fit in with mainstream society or mainstream school activities, thus perpetuating their marginalization until eventually the school expelled a student for non-compliance (Besley, 2009). This segregation of students based on standards achievement may lead to what the RNR Model identified as criminogenic and non-criminogenic risk factors, such as anti-social personality, poor school/work relationships, low level engagement/lack of involvement in pro-social recreation, isolation from prosocial peers, and low self-esteem (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). These risk factors have perpetuated the pushout of students from the education system into the juvenile justice system, another capitalist revenue stream.

The juvenile justice system has been just one department of a much larger prison industrial complex that facilitated opportunities to capitalize on marginalized and “Othered” people (Bonta & Andrews, 2007; Fasching-Varner et al., 2014; Fine, 1991). Students in the juvenile justice system have been entitled to and provided with educational opportunities, daily recreation, mental health, medical services, food/nutrition services, access to legal representation, and security. These services have often been provided by increasingly privatized, third party vendors whose business models relied on having people detained in the juvenile justice system (Barnert, Perry, & Morris, 2016; Besley, 2009; Fasching-Varner et al., 2014).

From Prison Industrial Complex to School – and Back Again

Once released from the juvenile justice system, students were encouraged to re-integrate with their families, communities, and local schools ("Models For Change," 2017). Students wishing to re-enter public school were frequently faced with systemic challenges, including a school district denying re-enrollment citing “safety” as a primary concern, and underlying
preconceptions that students with a history in the juvenile system were a negative impact on standardized test scores (Feierman, Levick, & Mody, 2009). Because students cannot be denied their right to an education ("Brown v. Topeka Board of Education, 347 US 483, 74 S," 1954), students were frequently referred to online (for profit) schools and alternative school settings (Feierman et al., 2009; R. Mendel, 2011; The Civil Rights Project Advancement Project, 2000).

Once a school agreed to accept a student with a history in the juvenile justice system, the school system has further slowed the process for enrollment, resulting in a negative impact on academic progress. Frequently students’ health and academic records have taken long periods of time to transfer between institutions and they were often incomplete (Feierman et al., 2009; Macomber et al., 2010). School districts often questioned the legitimacy and rigor of the education students earn within the juvenile justice system, so students’ grades were not honored and sometimes high school credits earned inside the juvenile justice system were not accepted by neighborhood schools (Macomber et al., 2010). Students sometimes were required to complete additional credits for courses they had already passed, often resulting in fewer educational opportunities beyond minimum basic requirements and an overall withdrawal from the education system.

Between 60-90% of the approximately 100,000 students released from detention each year eventually dropped out of public education because of systemic impediments (Arthur, 2007; Feierman et al., 2009; Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Students who dropped out exhibited increased social/behavioral health concerns as young adults (Vaughn, Salas-Wright, & Maynard, 2014); were less likely to report annual incomes greater than $20,000 (Maynard, Salas-Wright, & Vaughn, 2015); and, the rate of drop-outs participating in criminal activity as adults was higher
compared to peers who became high school graduates (Aizer & Doyle Jr, 2015; Lochner & Moretti, 2004).

Most of the academic research suggested the school-to-prison pipeline has been a negative outcome from America’s public education system. A niche within the literature however rejected the claim the American education system was at risk, and argued that it has worked as it was designed (Fasching-Varner et al., 2014; George, 2016; Weissman, 2015). Fasching-Varner et al. (2014) stated, “Without school failure there is no opportunity for an educational reform industrial complex, and without people to punish, similarly, there is no need for the prison industrial complex” (p. 441). The education system and the prison system worked in tandem to continue to marginalize and “Other” young people by pushing them from mainstream educational opportunities, increasing their likelihood of entering the prison industrial complex first as juveniles and potentially again as adults (George, 2016; Schept, Wall, & Brisman, 2015).
Chapter 3
Research Design and Methodology

Storytelling is a way to create a conversational space for further research, discussion, and change within a system. Organizations, groups, and societies are storytelling systems and they are the spaces where we learn (Mead, 2014). Understanding how students’ relationships at school and within the context of society may influence the student’s outlook toward his own potential to recidivate can be a starting place for further discussion and understanding. Speaking with adjudicated students is the only way to begin to understand how social institutions shape student outcomes. As described by Shaw and Burgess in their narrative from 1930, *The Jack Roller- A Delinquent Boy’s Own Story*

A social institution can be fully understood only if we do not limit ourselves to the abstract study of its formal organization, but analyze the way in which it appears in the personal experience of various members of the group and follow the influence which it has upon their lives. (p. 20)

The often silenced voices of legally entangled students have an epistemological power an academic is not likely to understand without the context of their stories. For these reasons, I chose to pursue a narrative inquiry methodology that utilized former students with a history of juvenile justice involvement as co-constructors and co-researchers.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested narrative inquiry highlights moral, ethical, political, and social influences that shape new theoretical understandings of human experiences. Narrative inquiry uses emergent design and in-depth interviews that delve into facets of the human experience. Using critical social theory and the theory of othering, this collection of
narratives, told and analyzed by former students and myself, exemplifies the challenges they faced returning to public education after juvenile justice involvement.

Narrative inquiry researchers have described combining narrative inquiry with a theory as giving voice to a silenced people (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009; Kohl & Farthing, 2013; Naidu, 2012). However, critical theorists have also discussed the notion of “giving voice” to marginalized people as a potentially dehumanizing approach. Pollack and Eldridge (2015) described this activity as penal spectatorship: researchers, documentarist, and artists wanting to hear the voices of, and capture the pain of, marginalized others to inform privileged classes. While this notion of giving voice may seem altruistic, it can perpetuate stigmas associated with superiority and subjugation leading to the re-traumatization of the participant (Besley, 2009; Pollack & Eldridge, 2015; Simson, 2013). Pollack and Eldridge (2015) also cautioned that asking justice involved persons to describe experiences from their perspectives requires them to become penal spectators of their own lives- an objectifying and debasing activity. To limit the penal spectatorship component, this study included a collaborative effort between the co-researchers and myself to construct their stories of re-entering public school after justice involvement. Together, we examined points of resonance within individual narratives and across narratives.

**Participant (Co-Researcher) Selection and Compensation**

The four co-researchers who participated in the study were located within the United States where the juvenile justice system had been reformed using the RNR model. The following states had not implemented the RNR model and were therefore excluded from consideration: Alabama, California, Idaho, Michigan, Nevada, and New Jersey (JJGPS Collaborators). I used a purposeful sampling technique to select co-researchers who could
provide insight into the lived experience under consideration (Butina, 2015; Creswell, 2015; Merriam, 2009). In addition to empirically understanding the re-integration process, I sought to find three to five co-researchers who had strong communication skills and a desire to participate in the research process. Identifying potential co-researchers was difficult given the personal nature of this study; however, I began the search by emailing a preliminary letter to professional colleagues who worked with at-risk youth, family and children services, as well as counselors in public schools. Using a snowball technique, I asked my colleagues to distribute the preliminary letter to any of their colleagues as well (Creswell, 2015). I also asked colleagues to distribute an inclusion/exclusion criteria sheet, an informed consent letter, and my contact information to any potential co-researcher.

**Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study.** The preliminary letter (Appendix A) explained the criteria potential co-researchers had to meet. These criteria included males between the ages of 18 and 26 who were charged with non-sex offender crimes as juveniles. The co-researcher’s detainment must have occurred after juvenile justice reform laws were implemented using the RNR model. The co-researcher needed regular access to the internet.

At the time of the study and throughout its duration, the co-researchers could not be involved with the criminal justice system. If they became legally entangled, then I was obligated to exit them from the study. Being a participant in the foster care system did not exclude a person from participation, but it could not be the sole reason for justice involvement. Females were excluded from this study because they have sometimes been charged with “prostitution” and placed in secure facilities when they were actually victims of human trafficking (Ocen, 2015; Phillips, 2015).
Quantity of Co-Researchers

I limited the number of co-researchers to a maximum of five people for two reasons. First, I wanted to work with the co-researchers to develop their narratives and better understand their experiences. The small number also allowed us to collaborate more frequently, increasing the rigor and dependability of the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Second, using a co-researcher approach required a considerable amount of time on behalf of the co-researchers. By limiting the number of narratives the co-researchers had to write and analyze, I had hoped the co-researchers would be able see the research process to its conclusion. When a co-researcher completed a phase of the study, he received a small stipend as compensation for his specific contribution to each completed phase.

Co-Researcher Compensation

Each co-researcher was asked to participate in three separate phases of the study, highlighted in this section and explained in detail in the data collection and data interpretation sections. After each phase, each co-researcher received a stipend on a Visa check card. Phase 1 included an in-depth interview for initial data collection. The interviews were approximately 60-90 minutes. After a co-researcher completed this phase, he received $50 deposited on his individual Visa check card. Co-researchers then proceeded to Phase 2 of the study where they were asked to respond to the anonymized stories of other co-researchers. This phase required approximately 45 minutes to one hour of reading the stories of other co-researchers. After completion of this phase, each co-researcher received an additional $25 on his check card. For the final phase of the study, co-researchers were asked to review a summary of my findings and provide a response describing their experience as co-researchers. At the conclusion of this phase, co-researchers received $25 deposited on their check cards. The co-researcher received
$50 for completing the first phase, and $25 each for completing Phase 2 and Phase 3 for a total of $100 for contributing to all phases of the study. If a co-researcher did not complete all three phases, he was still compensated for the phases he completed.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation

When potential co-researchers were identified, I arranged to meet with them in a quiet, but public setting in their city of residence (e.g., public library, coffee shop, community building, etc.). Transcribed narratives are located in Chapters 4-7. In two cases, co-researchers requested phone interviews. Those exceptions are noted at the beginning of their narratives in Chapters 5 and 6. Before the narrative inquiry began, I read the informed consent letter and sought verbal consent as an alternative to signed consent (Appendix B). Providing a signed consent would require the co-researcher to admit to a criminal background that is sealed by juvenile courts. Four co-researchers, Juan Pedro, AJ, Denny, and Wylham, participated in at least the first phase of the study.

Phase 1

To start Phase 1 of the study, I attempted to garner a deep, rich, narrative by building a rapport with each co-researcher as we discussed the aims and purposes of the study, why the co-researcher wanted to participate, and what he hoped would come from the study. I used a semi-structured interview format to ask several guiding questions based in the theoretical framework and developed to respond to the research questions (Creswell, 2015; Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012). The interview protocol and sample questions are included in Appendix C. The questions established a foundation for the co-researchers’ experiences and relationships with teachers, administrators, and peers upon re-entering public school after juvenile justice system involvement. The questions asked about the process for re-entering public education and the
period that followed as it pertained to re-entry and recidivism, and as defined by the co-researcher. I also asked the co-researcher to discuss his ambitions and outlook. However, because this was a narrative inquiry following an emergent design, additional questions and lines of inquiry were explored as the co-researchers told their stories (Creswell, 2015; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016).

Prior to concluding the initial interview with each co-researcher, we discussed how to use Google Classroom and Gmail for the remainder of the study. The Google platform was chosen because all electronic transfers would be encrypted incoming and outgoing and Google met the confidentiality and anonymity requirements for ISO 2700, the rigorous standard for information security, including the safeties ensured by Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) ("HIPAA Compliance with G Suite,").

Once I collected the individual narratives, I transcribed the audio recordings, removed identifiers such as the names of people, cities, and programs, then I replaced them with pseudonyms. This process required reorganizing the transcript into chronological order, asking clarifying questions to make sense of time and place, and further discussions to gather a context for the events (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2015). Using the Google Classroom platform and Gmail, I sent the transcripts back to each co-researcher individually to ensure I had represented his story as he intended (Creswell, 2015).

Each co-researcher was emailed a link to the Google Classroom that allowed him to join a unique classroom where the remaining phases of the study would take place. After emailing links to each co-researcher, and following up with emails and phone conversations, two co-researchers, Wylham and Denny, proceeded to Phases 2 and 3 of the study. They preferred using
Gmail rather than the Google Classroom Platform because both responded to the next phases using Smart Phones and Google Classroom proved cumbersome.

**Phase 2**

Once I had completed Phase 1, I asked each co-researcher to begin Phase 2 of the study by creating an audio recording of his anonymized story and uploading the recording to Google Classroom. At this point, two of the four co-researchers stopped responding to email and phone requests to continue with the study. Only Wylham and Denny continued with the remaining phases of the study.

If the study had continued as planned, the co-researchers had the option to outsource the audio recording of his story. I would have contacted Wichita State University Theatre Department or Wichita Theatre and Performing Arts to request a member of similar age, ethnicity, and dialect to record the story with the pseudonyms. At no point would the outsourced narrator have had contact with the co-researcher or the original story. He would have only read from the story that was written using pseudonyms. The audio recorder would have received $25 deposited on a Visa check card for each recording. As the study unfolded, however, this step became unnecessary.

After the anonymized written stories and their audio recordings were uploaded to the designated Google Classroom website, I planned to download them and re-assign them to the other co-researchers. The co-researchers would have received an email asking them to visit their unique Google Classroom where they would have been provided links where they would have the option to either listen to or read the story of two to three other co-researchers. Denny and Wylham reviewed all four stories collected during Phase 1, including the stories from the co-researchers who left the study. Because of limited access to the internet, both Denny and
Wylham requested electronic copies of the stories they would review so they could be easily downloaded onto their smart phones.

To maintain organization and facilitate accurate data analysis, I maintained a printed matrix using real names of co-researchers and their corresponding pseudonyms in order to track the stories examined by each co-researcher. Using a password protected Google Form linked into the Google Classroom, I intended to ask each co-researcher to describe his thoughts during the story, describe any parts that resonate with him, and describe what he would say to the author of the story if he could meet him. The website had a text-entry area for the co-researcher to respond to each prompt (Appendix D). Because of limited access to the internet, instead of using a Google Form for follow-up responses to the stories, I called Wylham and Denny for follow-up interviews. These interviews were transcribed and analyzed. A discussion of these follow-up conversations is further explained in Chapter 8. This helped keep the study’s orientation on the co-researchers’ perspectives and maintained their participation as a contributor in the study (Pollack & Eldridge, 2015).

**Phase 3**

During Phase 3, I considered my own positionality and reflexivity. As a public education high school English teacher from a white, middle class family who was raised with a major university as my childhood playground, I have accessed opportunities to further my education and pursue my career interests. I have learned to navigate social and academic institutions with ease perhaps because my parents, teachers, and people of authority in career interests all represented similar white, middle class backgrounds. I have never been labeled an “other” in American academic contexts.
Pursuing a career in teaching has provided me the opportunity to work with students from diverse socioeconomic, academic, and racial backgrounds. Some of my students were involved in the juvenile justice system where I saw many return to school and then return to the juvenile justice system. Working with diverse populations, particularly the students who received an education in the juvenile detention facility, I was exposed to a variety of learning styles. Many students despised multiple-choice tests and constructed responses. However, they were exceptional at connecting their stories with the literature we studied in class—and their connections were frequently expressed through what may be considered loud, dramatic, interactive storytelling. In some school contexts, these expressions may be considered out of line and disruptive. Even in a juvenile detention facility, this form of expressiveness was looked down upon by school administrators and detention facility staff. As I learned about my students, I learned to look for understanding and knowledge demonstration through a wider lens. My perspective developed; however, it is still a work in progress.

Because of these experiences, I made particular assumptions about my co-researchers’ experiences with school. I assumed they would find school challenging, ostracizing, and perhaps places of conflict. By using narrative inquiry and seeking a shared analysis approach to this study, I attempted to maintain focus on their experiences and filter out my own. Completely extracting my personal experiences from the study was impossible. However, to monitor my subjectivity, I maintained a weekly journal describing progress in the study as well as my responses to what I experienced through the narrative inquiry process (Nichols, 2016; Silverman, 2013).

During data analysis and interpretation, I responded to the narrative using marginal notes that juxtaposed my thoughts about his story. I also shared and sought feedback about my
interpretations with the co-researchers as a form of member-checking by asking questions such as, “What do you think this section means?” and “Can you tell me more about what happened in that situation?” (Creswell, 2015). I did not extract my personal responses from the findings in the study but tried to delineate my responses from ideas expressed by the co-researchers.

During Phase 3, I examined the narratives to identify emergent themes using the lenses of critical social theory and theory of othering. In an effort not to reduce the co-researchers’ stories into units of data, I examined their experiences in large segments, looked for themes related to both his interpersonal relationships within the school setting as well as relationships or activities within social systems. After my data interpretation, I emailed the co-researchers with a link to review a summary of my findings. I asked for a final response about their perceptions of the findings and asked them to describe their experiences as co-researchers in this study (Appendix E).

**Research Quality**

Prior to the turn of the 19th Century, qualitative researchers focused their methodologies on objective relationships between the researcher and the researched. Data was seen as bounded, a temporal, and immediately transferable to other similar situations. With growing interest toward narrative inquiry in the late 19th Century, however, the relationship between the researcher and the researched became a dynamic exploration of human experience mediated by culture, experience, time, and place (Clandinin, 2007).

Some researchers have challenged the subjectivity and epistemological validity of narrative inquiry. In quantitative research, the validity of a study is measured by how the study can be replicated. Polkinghorne (2007) suggested the validation of knowledge claims based on
narrative inquiry required a researcher to provide sufficient evidence to follow an argument that justifies the claim. Beyond this, it is up to the reader to determine if the claim is reliable.

**Reliability**

Transitioning from other methods of quantitative research and qualitative research that considered verification and falsification of data, Bruner (1991) suggested, “narratives are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and ‘narrative necessity’ rather than empirical verification” (p. 4). Narrative inquiry methodologists offered varying perspectives about what makes narrative research reliable. Common themes across this spectrum of ideas included markers for reliable narrative studies such as access, honesty, verisimilitude, and familiarity (Clandinin, 2007, 2013; Creswell, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Huberman, 1995; Polkinghorne, 2007; Webster & Mertova, 2007; Wells, 2011).

**Access.** A reliable narrative inquiry must provide the reader access to the context and the process used to develop new knowledge (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The context of a study describes the roadmap of communication between the researcher and co-researchers, as well as how and where the data collection takes place. This includes approval from an Institutional Review Board, a clear explanation of the rights and responsibilities for all study co-researchers, and consent to participate in the study (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The study must also clearly describe the conditions under which the data was collected. The conditions may encourage, limit, or suppress details from the story that may alter analysis and interpretation (Wells, 2011).

The process for reliable narrative inquiry research includes data collection as described in the Methodology section, as well as how the stories are structured. Similar to literary analysis, structures include the time, place, and events/plot that become part of the research narrative, with the time and events providing shape for the story (Huberman, 1995; Wells, 2011). The sequence
of events provides a beginning, middle, and end with consideration for past, present, and future. Time related structures consider the significance, intention, and value of these events for the co-researcher (Polkinghorne, 2007; Webster & Mertova, 2007). As the researcher, I have provided a vivid description of where the events take place because place creates a context for social, political, and cultural understanding of the events (Butina, 2015; Polkinghorne, 2007).

The second component for reader access is a roadmap describing how the data leads the researcher to claims made during analysis and interpretation. The researcher’s responsibility includes not only constructing the story in a coherent way but providing an interpretation that conveys the deeper meaning behind the story (Butina, 2015). Narrative research interpretation typically follows one of two approaches: literary analysis or inter-relational contexts. When using literary analysis, the researcher examines the themes in a story or across stories as well as the plot structure implemented. The second approach examines the inter-relationships between the story’s events and the social, political, cultural contexts that may have shaped the events. In this study, each co-researcher has attached meaning to those experiences (Polkinghorne, 2007).

**Honesty.** The honesty or trustworthiness of a narrative inquiry is based on the assumption that the human researcher is a valuable research tool. A researcher’s ability to respond to personal and environmental cues and, in turn, make those cues explicit in the construction of the narrative cannot be developed through any other means. A person’s ability to adapt to the co-researcher’s verbal and non-verbal responses allows the researcher to absorb multiple data types simultaneously. Only humans are able to comprehend a phenomenon and its surroundings in its entirety, in a process known as holistic-emphasis (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Further, only humans are capable of expanding a knowledge base working on a spectrum from propositional to tacit knowledge. People can process incoming data and immediately develop a
meaningful response by asking clarifying questions or requesting elaboration. And finally, humans as research tools provide the opportunity to explore atypical or idiosyncratic responses to develop a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study has the additional layer of mutual collaboration as the co-researchers read and responded to each other’s stories as well as the final analysis to provide multiple perspectives at multiple stages of the study (Creswell, 2015; Wells, 2011).

**Verisimilitude.** Qualitative research attempts to ascertain verisimilitude, or the presence of truth or reality. Webster and Mertova (2007) suggested three criteria to help researchers attain verisimilitude: resonance, plausibility, and confirmation through like and other events. A story’s ability to resonate with a reader suggests the story sounds true enough that it can be connected with pre-existing experiences and provide a new perspective on a topic. A story that attains verisimilitude allows the reader to live the experience vicariously (Huberman, 1995). The story is considered plausible when it is told in a realistic and relatable way without risk of a researcher attempting to create a “happy ending” or choosing only the stories that seem the most sensational (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The third component to assist in achieving verisimilitude is the use of “like” or “other” events. By referencing “like” or similar events, “other” events resonate and become more plausible to the reader (Webster & Mertova, 2007). As with verisimilitude, authenticity is achieved by the story telling. Providing the perspectives of critical others during data analysis and interpretation supports the authenticity of the story (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

**Familiarity.** Webster and Mertova (2007) cautioned narrative inquiry researchers about allowing familiarity, or routine ways of thinking and writing, to interfere with research analysis. Without considering the how and why of thinking, researchers cease to examine their own
thought processes that may “dull” or misguide research analysis and interpretation. Narrative inquiry methodologists suggest two approaches to reliable analysis and interpretation. One approach considers the text as an object that can be interpreted as the story teller intended and the second suggests a reader’s interpretation is based on philosophical hermeneutics, or the influence a reader’s personal experiences and contexts have on her interpretation of the story (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Polkinghorne, 2007). By using a co-researcher approach, I sought to capture the storyteller’s intentions through member checking and co-construction of the story. However, future readers of this study will use their own contexts and experiences to understand the co-researchers’ stories in conjunction with our analysis and interpretation. To believe that a reader’s context can be completely eliminated from interpretation, perpetuates the dehumanization and marginalization of people while simultaneously silencing discussions on a critical social issue.

Narrative inquiry provides a unique opportunity to examine the human condition through reflection, discussion, and the re-telling of stories influenced by the context of experience, temporality, and distance over time (Caine et al., 2013; Clandinin et al., 2009). This study relied on collaborative techniques between the researcher and co-researchers to ensure the integrity of the co-researchers’ stories as they recounted the significant events that marked their lives. The re-telling of stories is an ongoing process throughout our lives as different parts of our pasts become more important and other parts of our lives become less important, depending on not only how we see ourselves in the moment but also who we want to become (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008).
Chapter 4

The Story of Juan Pablo

Because of the sensitive nature of this story, all names, cities, and other personal identifiers have been replaced with pseudonyms. The following story was graciously retold to me on a Friday evening at a coffee shop in the town where the co-researcher currently lives. However, much of the story, spanning close to 15 years, takes place along the Mexico/United States border where people endure sweltering summers, fluctuating incomes, blurred sense of family ties, and regular contact with authorities. There are four main characters in this story: Dad, Step-Mom, Mr. P., and Juan Pablo, the storyteller.

Characters

Juan Pablo. My name is Juan Pablo. Many people in my family have told me, I’m pretty sure it’s a lie, but almost everyone in my family has told me that they crossed me over\(^1\) the day I was born. They say I am of “white soil.”

Sometimes I called myself a Mexican, other times, I was Hispanic, and other times I was Mexican-American. I was a dark skinned Mexican. My skin was brown, like really brown. The sun, playing football, working in the fields, I never used sunscreen. I was brown. I was dirt brown. They called me “Black.” I am so much lighter here [in a more northern state].

I have met my mother three times in my life, the day I was born, again when I was 4, and then when I was 13. I am 22 now. The last time I saw her, I went to stay with her for a week over Spring Break. She didn’t have food or electricity in the house. I found her in her room one day praying to La Santisima Muerte, like the grim reaper in Mexican Catholic culture. She was praying to Santisima Muerte to protect me. By the end of the week, she had misspent the bus

\(^1\) Crossing over in this context means to illegally enter the U.S. by crossing the U.S./Mexico border.
fare to send me back to my dad’s house. Because of her, I missed another week of school. She has never been a big part of my life.

I’m an only child. Technically, I’m an only child. I have 3 step siblings, but I call them my brothers and sisters. We grew up along the border in a small town called Esperanza. It had around 10 thousand people, but I’m pretty sure it has grown by now. If you google my name, what pops up is an article by the Tribune; in the article, my town is described as a Smuggler’s Paradise. But in this town, having an education means you will likely have many leadership roles in the community.

**Dad.** My dad is a really smart man. He was good with his hands and often found jobs in construction or carpentry. He had a lot of theories about life and was a real hard-ass about me going to school. When I was 7 or 8, I learned he was wanted by the FBI and DEA for drug smuggling. My family tells me the day I was born, my father was burned alive after a drug bust went horribly wrong. He survived, but his 5’4” body is scarred from head to toe from third degree burns. He has cerebral palsy and suffers with extreme paranoia. My dad and I share the same name.

**Step-Mom.** When I was 4, I met my future step-mom. My step-mom was extremely beautiful and very religious. At the time, she was married to a sicario for the cartele [a Mexican hitman]. They had a lot of properties. When he died, the income stopped coming in and she married my dad. Suddenly I had 2 brothers and a sister, and we had a lot of houses we couldn’t afford. Even though she would scream at me all the time, she never hit me. She took care of me and taught me to be tough.

**Mr. P.** In the 1970s, Mr. P. was part of the U.S. military, an assistant principal at my school and the municipal court judge in Esperanza. He provided commentary for lots of sports
events; most people knew him as “The Voice of Esperanza.” Everyone respected Mr. P. He knew how to make things happen. People listened to him. He has always lived in the area.

Growing Up / Early Years

My siblings and I were really good friends when we were 4 years old, running around the church playground. As soon as we got with my step-mom’s family, it was chaotic. We were all fighting all the time because my brothers, they just didn’t care. They did not care.

I had to learn how to fight because these guys weren’t accepting me as a brother. I don’t know where I went wrong, but it happened. They didn’t call me brother until we were maybe 5. It was hard to be accepted by my family. It took so long. I just wanted them to be my brothers. I never had a brother before. I was a little snitch too and snitches get stitches. They never stabbed me or anything, but we fought all the time.

We got spanked all the time too. Our parents spanked the shit out of us. It was almost a daily thing. Our parents were kind of ruthless with tree branches, water hoses, hangers. Thin tree branches… those were the worst. They always left marks. But that’s what made me tough. My brothers made me tough.

Grace Period

There was this time when my dad tried to stay straight. He wasn’t really doing anything bad. At least, I don’t think he was doing anything bad. I didn’t feel lied to during this… grace period. My dad became an American citizen. He and my step-mom were working really hard. They were going to church a lot and they went to a missionary training program about an hour west of us. We were poor so we couldn’t afford a babysitter. We were pretty young, most of us were young, and they didn’t want us to be alone, so they would take us with them.
We had borrowed a Dodge Caravan to drive the hour long trip. My sister would sleep on the back bench seat and my brothers and I would sleep in the middle on the floor. We weren’t allowed to sleep until we were on the way home, around 9:00pm. That was our bedtime because we were organized. Every night we were asleep by 9:00pm. We’re trying to keep it straight. Every day we had chores and schedules. We were an organized family for the first time in ... I mean, now that I hear myself, it sounds funny. We were organized for the first time in my life.

There was this one time when my parents were going to missionary school and they had asked my grandparents to come down to watch us. My grandparents lived about an hour north of us. It wasn’t a big deal for them to come down and see us, or for us to go visit them. When they came to watch us, I was about 13 or 14 years old. My sister was 15; we had just celebrated her quinceañera.

I don’t know all of the details, I never asked, but the grace period ended that day. My grandpa raped my sister. My grandfather destroyed her life. She had always been happy, but he took it from her. Now she’s hooked on Serenity [a synthetic marijuana product]. She is still in the shit; she’s back there; she is still at home. I’m pretty sure my sister confided in my dad and he didn’t do anything about it. My mom and her entire family wanted my dad and grandfather dead. They called the cops on my dad and that’s when it all went downhill.

A Moratorium on Grace

My parents stopped going to missionary school and our properties were starting to fall apart. We just didn’t have the money to take care of them or pay the taxes or mortgage, or whatever. Dad was working a lot, but he was always a temporary job. They would cut him any random day. I remember dad woke me up one day, I think it was a Tuesday, at like 3 in the morning. He told me we were leaving. I had to grab my stuff. I was so confused and I
remember asking him, “What’s going on? What’s happening? I have school tomorrow.” I walked outside and my mom was crying saying she was sorry. That’s when I first learned my dad was dealing meth. When we arrived at the new town, he told me I couldn’t talk to anybody, and I couldn’t make too many friends and word couldn’t get out that we were there.

We were living from trailer to trailer. Sometimes we would live with my uncle, then they would get in a fight and we would leave again. I was never able to really establish myself in one place. But my dad made sure I was enrolled at school. It was important to him. The only time he would keep me out was if he had hit me with a tree branch. He would look at me and say, “Nope, left a mark that time. You aren’t going to school looking like that.”

This one year was really bad. We were always moving. Sometimes we stayed with family, sometimes in trailers, occasionally we stayed in hotels; this year, we spent a lot of nights in abandoned houses. I remember sleeping on couch springs. My dad put his coat over the springs on an abandoned couch. The cushions had rotted away. I slept there that night. I remember seeing my dad sitting at the window looking out. He had fallen asleep with his chin on the windowsill. He was always scared someone was coming to get him.

My dad was warranted. I’m not sure what he did, but he had a lot of warrants. He was wanted all the time. One time we were at my uncle’s house and this guy came in. He was wearing a suit and he held up a paper that said “Wanted” across the top and my dad’s picture was beneath the block letters. I thought to myself, “Whoa, we’re on that level?” My dad’s not even that cool. He’s short, skinny, and scarred from head to toe.

Even though we were on the run, and it was the hardest part of living with him, my dad made sure I was in school. I was in trouble a lot. I had these notices I had to give him. I was scared of my dad, I knew better than to lie. I gave him the requests for parent teacher
conferences or meetings or whatever they called them. I never hid them from my dad. I knew he would never show up. He never showed up to anything. He never saw middle school graduation, or any football games. He didn’t even go to my high school graduation. He couldn’t; he was wanted.

As a kid, you live by other people’s decisions. My dad had a lot of ideas and theories. He knew that I needed to be at school. He also knew he was living a dangerous life. A lot of my dad’s friends got busted. He got busted sometimes too. We were always going to bail bonds. I didn’t really know what they were, but we were always going. I always heard about bail bonds. My uncles would pay for the bond, or my step-mom, if she had the money.

We were in this big city once, on a deal, and my dad got busted. Around here you hear about people getting caught with a few ounces, or maybe a few pounds. But where I’m from, people got caught with 600-700 pounds at a time. My dad got busted. That’s when it went to the shitter because I was the one who was with him. I was the one who was with him. I remember when the cops asked my dad for his name. He casually said, “Juan Pablo” and I thought to myself, “Shit, dude, that’s my name too!”

After that, my step-mom left. She didn’t want to be on the run and wrapped up anymore, so I went to live with my uncles. My uncles were making a lot of deals during this time too. I remember they gave me to like three different girlfriends in a 6 month period. Some of these girls were straight (not on drugs) and others were in deep. They took me to a notary 8 or 9 times, just giving up my rights to these girls they barely knew. We were always hiding or on the run. Getting up in the middle of the night happened 5-6 more times. The thing is, whoever I was living with, or whoever had legal rights to me, they always made sure I was in school. If we
were in Esperanza, I went to the same school district. If were in the city, they always sent me to the same school.

Living in foster care. My uncles and their girlfriends kind of gave up on taking care of me. I went to a church down the road from where we had been living in Esperanza. A lawyer had given the pastor and his wife a house and they were going to start a foster care home. She had known my dad. I don’t know how, but they had known each other for a long time. She said they would have 2 adults and space for 12 kids, if I wanted to live there. There were 12 kids in that foster care and 10 of them were my cousins. Their mom, my aunt, popped out kids to get a government check.

There were a lot of rules in foster care. Lots and lots of rules. They had more rules than when I lived with my step-mom and she was pretty strict. If we messed up, we had more chores to do. The pastor was fake as crap. My cousins and I were onto her. They were nice at church, but we knew they were fake. If we messed up, she would beat the shit out of us. She had survived breast cancer a long time ago and her arm was swollen after that. We called her swollen arm, “Fiona’s hand”... It was a really heavy hand.

Every day we had nap time between 12:00-1:00pm. The whole house had to sleep. If we didn’t, we had to go outside and do chores. We had to fill 5 wheel barrows full of Sweet Gum Tree balls. Sometimes I would fill the bottom of the wheel barrow with dirt, then cover them with the spike balls. She always found out though. We could not lie; she always knew.

Living there [along the U.S./Mexican border] was really hard. I was about 15 then. I didn’t want to follow their rules, take naps, be home by 10pm. The thing is, I was used to living with my dad and my uncles. They would let me do whatever I wanted. For a full 4-5 months, I was used to doing whatever I wanted. I didn’t know these people. They weren’t my parents. I
got into a fight with every single guy there. I beat the living shit out of two of them. I was just angry. It was probably the angriest time in my life. The thing is, I never showed it at school. I never showed it at school. I was a very quiet kid. Maybe not quiet, but very awkward. I didn’t have the nicest clothes. I didn’t have the nicest clothes at all.

The first time I was arrested, it was because I ran away, and they called the cops. I got tasered for that shit. That shit hurt. I started running, maybe I was 15 at this time. I got tased because I was running. I was running and right at the corner of a house, there was a cop. I just ran through him. I was a little kid, maybe 90 to 100 pounds. I ran into him. He grabbed me and I threw a punch and that’s when he tased me and slammed me on the ground.

I spent about 24 hours in a room with other people underneath the county courthouse. That’s where they put juveniles. No one ever talked to me, no one ever asked me any questions. Something happened, the cops called the judge, Mr. P., and then I was released. After that, the foster care people didn’t want me home, so I moved in with my dad who was out of jail again. A lot of the things that happened, I kept them to myself. I was a very quiet person. Not many people knew I had been locked up. To this day, not a lot of people know.

My dad and I were living in this apartment with two sketchy friends. I got a phone call from my uncle when I was getting ready for school. He said my dad had been shot while making a deal and dad was in the hospital. My uncle told me I had to get the fuck out of the house because it was the guys who were in the house who shot dad. I had known these guys for a while now; in fact, the guy who shot my dad had driven me to school the day before. I remember he was covered in [my dad’s] blood and he still drove me to school. I remember on the drive over, he was complaining about my dad and how unfair he was. I stayed quiet. I didn’t know what he was talking about.
When I got the phone call from my uncle, I went to school and later, I went to my
cousin’s house. We were outside popping fireworks. I remember having a good-ass time even
though I just found out my dad was in the hospital. It’s weird how I could find comfort when
there was chaos. Chaos was just always around us. We were outside messing around, and like
10 black Suburbans pulled up and took me. These guys were from the cartels my dad worked
for. They took me to a ranch. I think I was there for about a week or two. It was nice. I didn’t
mind living there. When three days had ended, they asked me if I wanted to see my dad. While
my dad was in the hospital, they found out he had colon cancer. He survived somehow. I
remember asking myself, “Why isn’t my dad’s life normal?”

I spent those 2 weeks in hiding at the ranch or visiting my dad in the hospital. When he
was released, we got an apartment together. It wasn’t working out very well and dad ended up
getting arrested. I asked my [former] step-mom if I could stay with her for a while and she let
me.

I had open gym one day after school. My friends were starting to get picked up and I got
a call from my brother:

“JP? Where the hell are you?”
“I’m at school. What’s up?”
“You not at the house?”
“No...” and then my brother hung up.

I went outside to walk home and saw dark clouds of smoke a few blocks away. Our house was
burning down; something went wrong with the electrical circuits. Thankfully none of us were
there. Our house burned down and people didn’t know I was part of that family. People knew
my step-mom’s family, but they never included me. People gave a lot of donations and clothes
and stuff, but I didn’t get as much as my step brothers and sister. They were even glad the house
burned because they got so much new stuff.
I’ve already lived that life. I didn’t have anything. I told my dad about the house and not getting any donations. He told me, “It’s time for you to start picking up your own load.” I was 15 years old. He told me I had to go to a meeting, maybe 45 minutes deep into Mexico. This was when shit was real bad back home. There was a huge war going on in Mexico. I mean, it’s still going on right now. In the town right across the border, they found heads and bodies in the park. People were hung from bridges. Teeth were sent to moms of the people they killed. These guys were savages. Savages. The things they were doing to people... one of my cousins was chopped into pieces because he stole 600 pounds of marijuana.

When my dad told me I had to go to this meeting, he told me I was going to be a look-out just to see if there were any cops coming. I was going to be at a Jack-in-the-Box [fast food restaurant]. If I heard anything, I was to ..communicate it. I didn’t go to the meeting. My dad told me to go, but I decided not to. I was scared.

The week before my dad told me about this meeting, the U.S. Border Patrol had come to our school to give us a presentation about the cartels because they were recruiting kids my age. Kids like me. It was like an awareness presentation. I didn’t go to the meeting because I knew what kind of life I was about to go into. My dad—I had lived it with my dad already.

I was having a lot of problems in the classroom around this time. I had all the signs. I had all the fucking signs. Like my entire life, I showed the signs and no one ever asked. I had the same tear that I had on my shoulder, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. My sophomore year of high school I had one polo and two pairs of pants. We had a dress code. We had to wear a red polo, and it had to be a real Polo. I was quiet. And the thing is, I knew this wasn’t normal. I remember seeing my friends’ homes. I knew it wasn’t normal. What I was going through was not normal.
Mr. P. had given me a job because he lived down the street. He knew we had lost everything in the house fire. He gave me a job being his DJ while he provided commentary for varsity games. They called him “The Voice of Esperanza.” When he did the commentating, I played music for him. It was kind of a show. It really was a show. We did almost everything together: basketball, football, volleyball. He would give me $20 a game and they were usually double headers. I was making $80 a week by age 15.

There was a time when things really weren’t working out at my step-mom’s house. My mom was stressed out because we didn’t get an insurance check for the house. She took a lot of blame out on me, screaming at me all the time. Mr. P. always told me to just talk it out and not to get mad. He knew I had a temper so he would talk to me about how to talk to people. I was his right hand man. I had never been to so many games. Eating out was pretty cool too. That was something new.

When my step-mom was yelling at me once, my brother stood up for me. It was the first time he ever stood up for me. I went into my room to get away from her. I was going to pack what I could and leave. I could hear my step-mom and brother outside the house. She slapped the shit out him. He later pleaded with me to stay with them and I did, but a few days later I ran away again.

I moved in with an elderly aunt and uncle in their apartment. They said I could stay there for 2 weeks because they had a limited income. They spent their days doing what old people do, eating their meals and watching TV. Old Mexican people are funny. After the 2 weeks, I left. I slept the next 4 nights in a park, then asked my aunt if I could stay with her again. She agreed for a short time only.
Grace Restored

That summer I got a job working in the court house with Mr. P. Basically I was shredding papers. As I was shredding the papers, old case files, I looked at all the names. They were my cousins and my uncles; they were my family. So many dumb things, urinating in public, drug possession, eluding the police. It was eye opening. I don’t think he had me shred them intentionally. Even today, Mr. P. doesn’t readily connect my name with my family’s name.

I was doing 2-a-days for high school football that summer. The court house job didn’t pay a lot for me to pitch in and my aunt said I had to leave. My grandma came into town. She always makes the decisions for the family. She told me I should ask Mr. P. if I could live with him. She said it so casually as if people ask strangers if they can move in. I didn’t have anything to lose, so I asked him.

The day I moved into Mr. P.’s house, I had a trash bag of clothes. Everything I owned fit in that one bag. I remember him showing me to my room. I had never had a room to myself. He saw the bag of clothes and the next day he took me to the mall. I had never been to a mall before. I had always bought my school clothes from the thrift store using the $100 check my parents received for being migrant workers. They had worked in the fields, we all did, at some point, but it didn’t pay enough for the family.

We walked into the mall and he took me to American Eagle. I thought the Eagle was the coolest. I had all these emblems, pictures in my head, I wanted to wear finally on my shirt. The Moose from Abercrombie, the Hollister Seagull on the left chest, or the Aeropostale A87. I had never been able to do that in my life. We go to the store and Polos are pretty expensive, I found out then. Polos were like $60-$80. I never would have thought in my wildest dreams, I would wear ... and he bought me six.
Whenever that happened, people noticed me. They noticed me. In my school, there were poor kids and a lot of rich kids. Millionaire kids whose parents were very wealthy because they were working “wrong.” There was a lot of money thrown around town. People started noticing my clothes. A girl even noticed. I liked the attention. It was the first time anyone had ever noticed me.

Mr. P. drove a $90 thousand Mercedes and then he bought a Harley just for fun. People noticed when I got into Mr. P’s car to go home after school. I used to get stopped and searched by the cops all the time just because of my dad’s name and all that he’s done. That kinda stopped once Mr. P. adopted me. He took me to all the games and introduced me to meet important people. He taught me to speak politely. Even today, he’s always correcting me.

Little by little my name started growing and I started to become a person who was admired by a lot of people. As a freshman, I was one of the smallest kids on the football team. I barely knew the rules, but I was scrappy. I kept working hard though and by senior year I was first team all-district. My team wasn’t very good, so I was kind of a big name. My coach invited some college coaches to have a look at me. I ended up with a scholarship to go to college. My girlfriend was the only person to attend my high school graduation... and now I’m in my senior year of college and I will graduate with double majors in kinesiology and special education.

I became successful through the generosity of others.
I am who I am through their generosity.
I would never say that I did this by myself.
Chapter 5

The Story of Alejandro José

The following story was told to me on a Friday evening. Alejandro José (AJ) asked that we share a video conferencing call to conduct this interview because he worked two jobs; maintained a busy schedule, lacked personal transportation, and he lived in a town that is often difficult to reach due to inclement winter weather. AJ was positioned in a living room with his cell phone camera angled in his general direction. Most of the time he was in view, but he was also a very animated storyteller and sometimes went off screen spontaneously. I was positioned in a quiet room in my house. We used our cell phones to conduct the video conference call and I used my laptop’s microphone to audio-record his story.

AJ lives in a different state now than where he was raised and where he was involved in the juvenile justice system. As a young person, he lived in a town with approximately 15,000 people nestled in the mountains. On a clear day, a person could look from a high point in his hometown of Canto to another town about 8 miles away called Bayshore. Almost 100 years ago, an infrastructure project was built that separated the two communities of Canto and Bayshore. Since then, the two communities have developed distinct demographics and economic opportunities.

When AJ was growing up, Canto had one major manufacturing company that produced seatbelts for cars, a few used car lots, and one dealership. Everyone else worked in small, family owned businesses. Families moved to Canto because it was within driving distance of the state penitentiary 15 miles north, housing costs were lower than average, and social welfare programs were less restrictive than in neighboring counties. Canto was described as a meth addicts’ haven. Bayshore, on the other hand, was an affluent community that consisted of summer homes with...
beach fronts, and a strong summer tourism industry with high-end restaurants and lodging options. People in Bayshore had access to more money and social capital than people in Canto. Likewise, if people worked for, or contracted with, industry in Bayshore, they benefited from increased social capital.

Characters

A.J. I’m 23 years old now and I have been sober for, I want to say 200 or is it 300 days? [He defines sober as being free of drug use, but he admits to drinking alcohol a little too much.] I don’t like to keep track of the number because then I focus on who I was rather than being present and focusing on my life today. In high school, I thought I wanted to be a skateboarder. I had no idea I would become a chef. I stay busy with work. I never went to school for it, but I have worked as a head chef, in management, and the guy at the bottom. It makes me happy.

Mr. Jimmy. Mr. Jimmy, the school resource officer (SRO), was about 6’ tall, but he was more round than tall. He was from the area, but not Canto. His office was at one end of the school, near the counselor’s office, and the administrators were in the other end of the building. It wasn’t that big of a school, maybe 500 kids. Mr. Jimmy and I knew each other well. Of the school administration, he was the only one I didn’t like.

School Administration. The school had a principal, an assistant principal, and the guy across the street. I don’t know what his title was [superintendent], but he and I knew each other well. I think he managed the whole district. They were nice people; they took care of students, and they tried to do what was right while still pushing us to do better.

Julie: During my sophomore year, I met Julie. We dated for a couple of years and then we got engaged. As soon as I graduated high school, we moved into an apartment across the street from the high school. Julie had to complete one more year. We had everything, a house
[apartment], a dog, a car, and I had a job. I was able to take care of us. But she wouldn’t stop drinking, and then she wouldn’t stop taking pills.

Skateboarding Among Them

In high school, in our town, there were skateboarders and athletes. I’m not going to call them jocks. I feel that’s kind of mean calling people jocks. Skateboarders is different. We rode skateboards. We were skaters and we were all friends. There was Michael, Jonnie, Evan, Josh, Garrett, Alex… James went from being a skateboarder to being an athlete because his father wanted him to. There was a group, there were so many of us who were like friends and stuff, we never really did anything crazy. Yeah maybe we drank at a party, but we weren’t like beating people up, there were so many of us. I have maybe 10-15 of our friends who can vouch, the police thought we were a gang because there were so many of us. We were a big group of friends. It isn’t like we were rolling around shooting people, or stabbing people, we rode a skateboard. They solo’d us out.

That was the thing about skateboarding, we had so much fun in Canto, we would skateboard but then again we would also get harassed by the cops. They put up skate stoppers (physical barriers along concrete edges to prevent skateboarders from riding the ledge). It wasn’t like we were going around breaking stuff, vandalizing or graffiti-ing; we weren’t doing any of that stuff. We were just trying to skateboard.

The cops started harassing us while we were trying to have fun. In Canto we all loved to skateboard, street skate. That’s what we did to have fun. We kept doing all that and they put up skate stoppers then started giving us tickets for skateboarding on the sidewalks. Regarding skate-stoppers, when a skateboarder comes along to wax it up, with candle wax and our trucks (wheel assembly), and we’re going to hit that skate stopper and go flying off our boards. If
you’re a smart skate boarder, you know not to even try to hit that skate stopper. If you try to grind it, momentum is going fast, you’re going to hit that piece of metal that your truck can’t go over and you just stop and then you fly off. It’s like “hey, we know you aren’t dumb enough to try to grind this, or try to skateboard on it, it’s going to hurt ya.” Skate stoppers are any skateboarder’s worst nightmare.

I remember a couple of times, I remember my mom almost sued a couple of the police officers because they got a little handy and when they took the skateboard out of my hand, I was little y’know, I was prepubescent, I was a lot younger, I wasn’t as big as I am now and, like, grown, y’know. So when they tried to take my skateboard, they ripped it out of my hand, and it wasn’t their intentions, but it kinda threw me on the ground and split me open a little bit on my chin. AJ pointed to a scar on his chin.

It wasn’t really police brutality. It wasn’t their intention to do that, but after that, if the cops were going to do that and take away all the fun we were having, we weren’t going to sit back and take it. We started asking about all the people who were riding their bikes or scooters, or people riding those little shoe things with the wheels – Heely’s and roller blades? What’s the difference if they’re riding on 2 wheels and we’re riding on 4?

After that we (young people) went to city hall and said, “Hey, what we want to do, if you’re going to take away our right to skateboard on the street...Then when the community comes and asks for something, and you give everyone else something, then you take away from us, you have to give us a skate park.” We kept complaining and complaining. They gave us what we wanted, I guess. They gave us the most bare minimum, but they still did it. It was almost like being a part of communism. It’s almost like a racial thing (AJ later explained most of the kids
were Caucasian; two were Hispanic). We were skaters, just because we were doing what we were doing, we were never ever, ever, trying to vandalize.

That’s what they kept saying “you guys are vandalizing.” We kept saying, “what about a bike, or roller blades, or scooters? You can’t solo us out-- that’s not how America works.” It took all of us, about 30 of us, to actually make something happen. We decided to go to city hall and use the system to get us a skate park. There were some people [who advocated for us]. They didn’t really come down to city hall with us, but they saw us. Mr. Edwards, he was part of City Hall. He saw us. Our friend, John, his dad stuck up for us. The dads didn’t really like skateboarding that much, but then they realized their sons were really good at it, so they decided to support it. Then they realized that all of us guys were just really nice people too. Just because we liked really long hair and we liked to skateboard, and skate around and have fun, we’re not bad people.

My step-dad kind of helped in a way, because he was a big painting contractor. He was the best painting business in the state. Everyone in Canto knew how big of an impact my step dad had in Canto and in Bayshore. So I think he may have said something. There were a few dads, but it was really all the younger guys trying to stick up for what they wanted when we were getting solo’d out.

We were a bunch of young guys who loved skateboarding, and they were trying to take it away from us. We were young, we didn’t have any money; we were still in high school. We didn’t get a skate park until like freshman year... they took forever. I don’t want to say it was deliberate, but maybe. It wasn’t like they were saying they were going to build it really slow that they get really mad each day. The whole project took 3 years.
**Interactions at school.** I was always the guy who wanted to make people laugh, to make people smile, whether I was a little bit annoying, a little bit too much, that’s who I was. I actually loved Canto High School too. I loved everything about all the teachers. I was kind of the class clown. I was kind of a pain in the ass. I look back and I think maybe I could have done a little better. Maybe not as intense and class clowny. But that’s who I am. I learned though. I’m still learning. I’m not perfect and we’re all still humans.

At Canto High School, I did not like the SRO. There were a lot of times that he was a person in charge. He was kind of a bully in a way. The SRO talked to the guys at the police department in Canto. They would catch us at a party underage drinking, smoking, or just having fun. Y’know, we’re not doing anything. We’re just being teenagers. So I remember the SRO, Mr. Jimmy, I remember his name. I liked him. I really did like him. There were times that he reminded me a little bit of myself, my anger, my step dad’s anger. When you have a man come at another man, and they have differences, it goes to testosterone, unless you can control your anger.

Mr. Jimmy, he tried to do good, but if a person wants to be a grown up, it’s kind of like being a boss. If you want your whole entire staff, which I learned from being a boss, I’ve been a boss. I’ve been an executive chef, I’m an apprentice under a really good executive chef right now, but one thing I learned from being that asshole boss, is that when you are a teacher, or a boss, a parent, or a best friend, the way you talk to somebody, you have to know how to cater to somebody you care about, cater to their feelings so they will get motivated from it. Not take advantage if you have a bad day. You tell them good job today. I know you did this, but we’re going to have a better day tomorrow, right? And they look at you and go, “Yeah” and they look up to you. What I have learned is that whether you are a teacher, a boss, or an SRO, whoever
you are trying to teach, you can make them lose all sense of motivation, I wanted to strive to do it
the right way.

Mr. Jimmy did that just a touch; just a touch, he let his anger get in the way. There were
a couple of times he screamed at me and got in my face and tried to get me to punch him. The
principal, assistant principal, and the superintendent can all vouch for that. All of them will
vouch for that. There was a time that Mr. Jimmy got in my face and told me to hit him. He kept
screaming in my face and telling me to hit him because I was mad about something that
happened. I was hiding behind a bush near his office at school. Some of my friends were
coming down the sidewalk. I was hiding behind it and Mr. Jimmy was on the street. I came out
and Mr. Jimmy pulled his gun on me because I came running out towards them (my friends). I
don’t blame him. For a split second, he did the natural thing. I was running out behind them,
trying to scare them, and he pulls out his gun. I looked at him and clearly said, “Hey dude, Mr.
Jimmy, it’s your student. It’s AJ.”

It was crazy. It was because I was part of the skater group, I had already been mad at
him. I had already yelled at him and disrespected him. He pulled a gun on me and dropped me
[to the ground]. He told me to put my hands on my head. I was under age. He shouldn’t have
done that.

My mom almost sued the police and the school for that because I was just being me,
being me, silly stupid AJ. I wasn’t going to stab him. I didn’t even have a knife! That really
happened. I remember I got so mad and it hurt my feelings because the principal didn’t stick up
for me. I was trying to express my statements. “Hey, he just pulled a gun on a student. I’m
underage,” I told him. He knows who I was. I told him it was AJ. I put my hands up. I didn’t
resist. I didn’t do nothing. I shouldn’t be in the whole equation of resisting arrest. I’m a minor.
I’m young. I ran. And I remember, I was bawling. The principal told me to stop, and I’m crying, and I said, “Wait until my mom finds out about this. My mom has a really good lawyer. You guys do not want to hear from my mom’s lawyer.” I said, “I’m leaving. I don’t care if I get OSS (out of school suspension) or get kicked out.” The principal chased me down the hallway yelling, “AJ, stop, stop! Stop!” I yelled back, “No, you aren’t going to get me. You need to get onto your SRO, the school cop.” I remember I left and my mom yelled at them so bad; they let me have those 16 days that I got suspended, that I got all of my credits. It isn’t like they gave me an A+, but he [the principal] made sure I passed. Because he knows how much it hurt my heart that another grown man would scream at me and pull a gun on me. I didn’t respect Mr. Jimmy after he pulled the gun on me. I went crazy. I shouldn’t’ve did that. Two wrongs don’t make a right. But when a grown man yells at student, that’s being a grown up about it? No one is going to stick up for me when I’m underage and I get a gun pulled? I know the school administration felt bad. They made sure that AJ would be ok.

In all reality, they knew that they could have got in trouble. If my mom, and my mom didn’t have that much money, but if we were big millionaires or lived in Countryside Estates, or owned two of those houses over there, they knew they could have gotten in a lot of trouble. I got 16 days free. I thought I was going to fail my sophomore year because of that, because I was having a bad year. I could have been doing better. I was drinking. I was just being a teenager.

Besides that, I loved my teachers. I tested their buttons a lot. That’s not ok. I was just being young and dumb. I remember this time we were doing group projects and I kept running my mouth. My teacher kept warning me and what did I do? I said the wrong thing, so the teacher told me I could do the project by myself. It made me pause. Everybody else actually had
other people to get help from. It made me work harder. I was the class clown. I had to work a little bit harder. It was like, “Hey, you want to be an idiot? You need to fix it.”

Canto did good. Canto did pretty good. They had a pretty strong impact on me. You know what they did? They had patience with me. If you have patience with someone it means you care about them. If you know someone has an anger problem, or an addiction problem, and you go out of the way and look after them, that shows you that you actually care. I feel that’s what a lot of teachers did. I was a little shit back then. I was an asshole.

They did good. I could be dead right now. I loved all the teachers there. They made me feel worth being. They always told me, “You’re going to be something big. You’re going to make people happy.” When I was being a little asshole, and they had those thoughts, they thought I was worth fighting for. Without them, I wouldn’t be where I am right now.

It’s better to get in trouble when you’re young

and have these things happen to you so you can learn,

rather than when you’re older and the repercussions are more.

Transitioning from Juvenile Consequences to Adulthood

I graduated high school when I was 17. Right after graduation, Julie (my girlfriend) and I were getting drunk a lot and eating a lot of Xanax and stuff like that. I’m going to be real with you. I’m not afraid of what I’ve done wrong. Me and her got really drunk. I don’t know what I got mad about, but she was jealous about something, our minds were altered. We were not who we really are. She kicked me in my nose and broke it. I remember reaching to get my phone from her hands and I remember being mad. I started to destroy the house. She came at me and
started hitting me and hitting me. When she was hitting me, the front door kicked open and the
cops rushed in. She had called the cops while I was destroying the house. I didn’t want to hurt
her, but I wanted to destroy all the things I had given her. After she hit me a few times, I guess I
smacked her. When the cops came in, they seen me smack her. The cops tackled me on the
couch and they charged me with domestic assault. She didn’t press charges on me, but the state
picked up the case. They put me in juvenile hall (juvie) for it. I was there for 2 months.

I had already graduated by this time, so I didn’t have education while in juvie. When I
came back out of juvie, I was 18. I had this person in juvie, a corrections officer, tell me to write
a letter to myself and describe how being in juvie made me feel, how it makes me want to better
myself, how I want to change my ways to be a better person. So I wrote the letter. That was the
only advice I ever got in juvie. No one ever asked about my family, or jobs, or friends. Just that
one guy told me to write a letter to myself. He said I was the only person who could ever make
me change.

When I got out of juvie, I gave that letter to my mom. She cried. She laminated it. When I
got out, Julie and I lived across the street from the school. Julie was into drugs and not going
to school. She was a senior with one semester to go. She just had to walk across the street. I
was embarrassed. I was in my feelings. It was a small town. I thought people would think I was
a woman beater. I was worried people would say, “Look there’s AJ! He beats up his girlfriend”
or “look, it’s AJ. He’s a skater” or “here’s AJ. He’s been locked up. He’s crazy.” I was
always worried about what other people think.

Julie and I went on with life. Then later, about 2 years later, Julie and I got into another
fight. I ran from the cops. This time I was older and went to adult jail. After I got out, I knew I
had to change. I gave up the drinking, but Julie didn’t. She said she would try, but she was still
doing pills and drinking. I went maybe 2 or 3 months not doing anything. One night I was mad at her, and she was drinking a lot too. I didn’t want to go home because we were arguing, but she found me in a bar flirting with the bartender. Julie and I got into it and I got in trouble for another domestic case. When I got out, that’s when I decided to move out of state and started over out here. As much as I loved her, it wasn’t worth going through it again.

**Drug addiction in a small town.** Right now, the thing about me is, I moved away from Canto because of drug addiction. I did get addicted to drugs. It’s not cool and dealing with everything, from when I was 17, no not from then, but I would say probably when I was 20-23 were the hardest times of my life because I had a drug addiction. And it was everyone around me that I loved, my family, my mom, my grandma, my best friend, Evan. My mom’s mom had a really big drug addiction. She was doing drugs all the time; I found her one day after she over-dosed. My real dad was born in Puerto Rico; my uncle José died of a heroin overdose; my uncle Jesse died from a heroin overdose. Half of my family, my Spanish family, was addicted to drugs. My real father is an alcoholic. My mom had a speed addiction; my step-dad had a speed addiction.

There was so much going on in such a small town. There’s still a lot going on in Canto for such a small place. My ex fiancé, she’s still there, she’s so gone on speed. Canto has her wrapped up in all of that stuff. I wish I could guide her away from all of that. I had my addiction there and I had to get out. It’s not worth it. Life’s too short. There are so many kids from my grade who are slowly deteriorating, smoking meth, and doing blue boys, and molly. They’re all doing stuff that makes you slowly deteriorate. I still want to do those things in a way, but it’s not worth it. All I can do is pray for my family and friends and tell them I love them. I knew I had to get away from that. But I can’t ever go back there.
After I lost my friend, Evan, my good buddy, I wasn’t about it no more. He died of alcoholism and suicide. It sucked, and I want to be real. I drink a little. I drink way too much actually. I drink too much right now. I’m trying to numb everything. It does make me feel better when I drink a little bit. I don’t get crazy or anything, but... it does make me feel a little bit happier when I drink. But I don’t need that either.

Finding what makes me happy. To understand where I am now, I have to go back a little bit. Before I got that addiction, I started cooking a little bit. I didn’t realize I liked the cooking. I started working at a grocery store buffet just doing dishes and stuff and cooking a little bit. Then, after that, I found a job in Bayshore. I moved there with Julie after she left high school. We got engaged, did the whole shindig. We were in love. We had our addictions. I wouldn’t call it an addiction. It was more like young dumb stupid stuff. Fighting over dumb stuff. We broke up and then I realized that the only thing that I had that made me happy was to cook food. So that’s what I did. I cooked at Delrose, a high end restaurant in Bayshore. At Delrose was the first time I got trained by a French chef, sort of. I never really went to school for it or got a certification for it. I’m food safe certified, but anyone can pass that class. At Delrose, during the slow season in Bayshore, some friends and I were asked to work at Savannah Grill, a restaurant opening in the town where I live now. The owners said it was going to open in a few weeks. Grand opening in the winter. Everybody thought it was a bold thing to do. Who is going to open a brand new restaurant in the winter? We did it. And it didn’t make sense, because it was exotic food like farm to table, like a lot of good stuff that a lot of people wouldn’t understand unless they tried it. They wouldn’t understand unless they really... what is it? Trust the chef. If you go to a really good restaurant, a farm to table restaurant, trust the chef. Seek an adventure in a way. I moved out of state, I got away from the drugs, and this is
what I have right now. Right now I do not live with my family. I don’t live with any of my friends from Canto. I live with my good friend who I met working in Bayshore. He struggles with addiction. He is an alcoholic.

You know why I keep cooking food? I get a little sad sometimes. I don’t know what it’s about but maybe it’s because I’m homesick. My mom’s not there. I’m not there with my brother or my friends. I’m living in the mountains getting over my addiction because I know that this is a better spot because this place is beautiful and it’s gorgeous and it really makes me appreciate life. So what’s going on right now? It’s me, and my good buddy, and we cook. We cook good food.
Chapter 6

The Story of Denny

I met Denny through an agency in his state tasked with implementing RNR reforms. Denny has worked closely with this agency to monitor his case. When he first reached out to me, I asked him if all of his cases were closed with the juvenile justice system and he said, “Well, I think so. My attorney says I’m finished and I talked to a judge who said it was finished, but I have never seen any paperwork.” I followed up later asking him if he had any responsibilities he had to manage regarding his case, he replied, “I don’t think so. I’m never certain about my case. But my attorney says I’m finished.”

Denny requested a phone interview because he is frequently interrupted at home and his situation is constantly in flux. We tried three times to have a scheduled phone interview over the course of two weeks, but he apologetically asked to reschedule each time. On the fourth try, two and a half weeks after making initial contact, we were able to conduct the phone interview. I used the speaker feature on my cell phone and the microphone on my laptop to record the call.

Denny’s story takes place in the Appalachian Mountains. His town serves as a transportation hub to other parts of the state and across the country. He described it as a sleepy town where kids go to the mall or out to the lake to have fun and socialize, but there is not much else to do. He attended Middleton High School and then later an Alternative School about an hour away. Denny admitted to not getting along with a lot of people including peers, teachers, and family. He was in his early twenties and described himself as a loner with a streak of defiance.
Growing Up/Early Years: Not Fitting In

I had a lot of issues when I was in school. Y’know, I guess some people do and some people don’t. I had an interesting bunch of teachers. I had some who worked with special education and some who worked with troubled students. I actually had some very decent teachers. I remember one guy, I had a coach, what was his name? Coach Craig. He was a really cool guy. He was the kind of guy who would screw [joke] with ya. But you could tell that he cared. He was the kind of guy who would tell ya that he didn’t care, but you could tell that he did. He would playfully screw with the students. He would joke with them. He was a great guy. He actually cared about our success. He would push us when we needed it.

It’s hard for me to explain my perspective sometimes. I was a bit different. When I asked Denny to describe his experiences in school, he started to respond, then stopped. There was a long pause of about 30 seconds where Denny started to speak, then became silent again. After several starts, he asked me to repeat the question stating, “I lost my train of thought trying to answer this one.” He eventually continued, I wasn’t into any sports or clubs or anything. I was kind of an introvert-geek. I stayed around the kids who were at the table trading Pokémon cards. I never fit in with my peers or the way school functioned, not even when I was little. It only became clearer and clearer as I got older.

But as far as the school system goes, it’s never worked for me. Because I’m not, I’m very, very, individual in a sense. I guess that’s the best way to put it. I don’t like having anybody tell me what I need to do, or what I should or shouldn’t do with my life, y’know. I’m a true Freedomist. In school, they don’t give you a lot of options in what you want to pursue as far as an individual. It just really sucks when you have a school system that tells you, you need all these things, to do what? They didn’t even ask me what I wanted to do with my life. They’re just
telling me I need all these things. I was wasting 18 years of my life, focusing on things I’m not
gonna need as an adult. They should just give me more options and more of a pathway. Throw
down the necessities, then give me a path toward my own success. There is no individuality in
the school systems. They want everything and everybody to fit in a box or on paper. That’s a
problem with all institutions, really.

**Middleton High School.** I was in school until I turned 18 which was probably my 10th
or 11th year; it must have been my 11th year. My high school looked pretty bleak, kind of like a
prison building. It was big and brown. It had some blues in it. It looked industrialized, a big red
box. It was pretty simple. The largest part was probably the gym. The classrooms looked
industrialized, white painted cinderblock bricks. There wasn’t much to that kind of stuff, y’know.
That’s pretty much it, tile floors and a white cinder-block wall. The teachers did their best to
kind of decorate them, y’know, a little bit. You kind of get a feel from class to class, y’know, kind
of who the teachers are, but nothing from the school.

The high school energy wasn’t good. It’s high school. It’s 2018. I don’t think schools
really teach the way they should, at least that’s my opinion. There’s a lot of lost kids especially
in a place like Middleton High which is where I went. Nobody knows what they are doing and
the few kids that do, they go through with flying colors and that leaves the rest of us just as lost
as when we started high school. There isn’t very good staffing. The staff just babysat people.
They just weren’t very interested in teaching and the students, the students were not the
friendliest bunch, y’know. You get a mix of people. Some mix together and some don’t. There’s
going to be a big clash of energy, people from everywhere who just don’t mix together.

But at Middleton High, I probably had my worst staff experience there. Because I had a
little bit of a troubled time growing up, I ended up in what they called an EBD classroom. The
EBD classroom is for emotionally, not emotionally, but behaviorally troubled kids. It’s for kids who, for whatever reason, they act out. The teachers that were in charge, who were taking care of those kids, were awful people. They belittled those kids; they egged on the issues those kids had; instead of helping them, they would make fun of them. It wasn’t borderline, it was abusive. It was pretty awful. We [my mother and I] fought a long battle trying to fix all that. Other than that, y’know, I had pretty great teachers too.

First offense. I was going through a rough time, as I usually was throughout school, honestly. That wasn’t rare. They [the school district] didn’t like that and because of all the stuff I was going through, I experimented with certain substances I shouldn’t have. I had gotten to the point where I was probably at the peak of my downward spiral. I brought some of those substances to school because I didn’t want to go without them for one, single day. I got caught. That’s when the school district decided they didn’t want to deal with me anymore.

Part of the System

The school resource officer (SRO) took me down to the station for possession. The SRO said, “I’m really sorry, man. I do not want to be the one doing this.” Everyone liked him, including me. He was basically telling me, basically, he hoped I would get things straightened up so he didn’t have to deal with me anymore. “These things happen to the best of us, but I hope it doesn’t happen again,” he said. They released me to my mom and I went to alternative school after that. My school district didn’t offer any options. I was forced to go to alternative school. It was forced upon me.

Legally speaking, I have to go somewhere to school and the alternative school was the only place for me to go. They said, “You’re going here or you’re going to juvie” or wherever they send kids who don’t go to school. When I enrolled at the alternative school, I met with a
counselor. It was crap. It was crap like all the other parts of that school. I’m not for sure, I was going through a lot at that time, but I think the counselor talked to me about what I needed, and what was going on in my life at that time.

**Alternative high school: Like a prison.** The alternative school was in a whole other town from my high school. It was about an hour away after picking up all the kids on the bus. I hated every morning. The alternative school itself was like a beaten down building from the ‘40s. It was awful. It was nasty. It looked like it hadn’t had anything done to it since then. They just didn’t care at that place.

That’s the bottom line. The staff didn’t care. They didn’t care about the building. It seemed like to me, the school board, or whoever made the decisions over the school system, the alternative school was their hole where they threw whatever they didn’t want. Money-wise, staff-wise, whatever, it was their “back room.” That’s kinda how I felt about it. They had some really old computers there. They had some really old equipment there, that’s for sure. We couldn’t take any additional classes like shop or cooking. It was run like a prison. It was run on a level system. “Oh, you’ve been good! You get these privileges.” It was awful. It doesn’t feel good.

Most of the population out there were the losers--people who didn’t even care to be successful. It isn’t that all of them couldn’t [be successful]—some of them couldn’t, but most of them just wouldn’t [try to be successful]. It just wasn’t my scene. It really wasn’t. School has only influenced me by affirming my already held beliefs that I do not want to be part of any institution.

**Assault.** When the school district doesn’t want to deal with you, here’s what happens: When you have issues, and you, yourself, don’t know how to approach these issues, they don’t
want to deal with you. They throw people in the corner – in the hole, in the back room. That’s what ended up happening to me eventually.

I ended up assaulting another student. It came out to be fourth degree assault, causing physical injury (a misdemeanor). That was my mistake. My bad. I’ve gotta control myself a little bit better. I was going through an emotional time. Like I said, I was troubled all throughout school.

The best way I can describe it was, high school was beneath me. I felt like I would go to school and they would teach me something, and I would be like, “well, I already knew most of this shit anyway.” It slowly made me realize, I could have learned most of this with my own individual research outside of school. Y’know, in a matter of hours, rather than days. It started to make me think, “This whole system is crap. Wasting people’s lives away.” Teaching stuff, gah, this gets me emotional sometimes. Here Denny took a long pause and changed the topic to a decision he was able to make.

**Drop-out request.** The reason I wanted to drop out is because they tried to throw me into the alternative school. The alternative school would take people from all grades and from all standards. But they [school districts] take kids that they don’t want to deal with and they throw them in these alternative schools. To really get an understanding of who those students were... First of all, I didn’t belong there. I did not connect with those students because they were a bunch of losers and that’s probably the best way I can put it. I’m not trying to be a mean person in saying that, but that’s what they did, they sent the losers there. It was at that point that I decided it was a better idea for me to drop out because I was being forced to attend a babysitting service. That place did not care about my success. I was not going to stay in a place where they basically gave me middle school paper work and told me, “Just do your work.”
That’s what they did. They didn’t even try to teach. They were awful. I wasn’t going to sit there and ruin my future. I wasn’t going to sit there until I turned 21.

When I went before the judge with my combined case of possession and assault, I showed some respect to the judge. I wanted to ask his permission, no, I wanted his blessing to drop out of high school. I wanted to find my own success. The judge said, “Yeah, you can drop out. But, I want to see your GED.” So I’ve been going to court every few months, for the last couple of years, because he wants my GED.

I am working toward it. But what he doesn’t understand, and I can’t explain to him is, I have a real bad defiance streak. The more someone tries to force it down my throat, something that’s for me in the first place, the more it’s hard for me to get it. So he just ended up making it worse in the long run. Stressing me out for years. I have hated the ordeal. I just wanted them to leave me alone so I could actually be successful. I never spent time in juvie, but I’ve had to report every few months for years. I would go in and they would review everything to see if anything’s changed. Denny said with laughter, the judge would say, “We’re going to get it. You’re going to get it.” He was stressing me out. I would tell him it has nothing to do with him. It was my life. Just calm down.

The best and funniest thing about this whole thing. The court system doesn’t even know what’s going on most of the time, apparently. The judge doesn’t know what’s going on. I mean, he sent me to a few places to help me get a GED. He also sent me to get help with some of my issues with anxiety and such. When I did have some trouble, the judge suggested I go to therapy, to see a psychiatrist to get some medication to help, or some crap like that. Which, I don’t believe in in the first place because it’s all about money. The judge wanted me to go see this particular doctor. We [my mom, lawyer and I] tried to tell him that this doctor does not see
adults which I was at the time. “She’ll help, just tell her I sent you to her” the judge had said. When we finally got to her, after months, because to see this person clients have to go through several weeks of therapy first. I had to do that too. They tell me the doctor can’t see me because I’m an adult.

Then we had to wait to see the judge, again, to tell him, the psychiatrist couldn’t see me. The point is, the judge doesn’t know anything about anything. He just wants to take something from people. Don’t get me wrong. We could not have gotten a better judge as far as compassion goes. But as far as knowing what he’s talking about, it wasn’t there. He didn’t know what I was going through, and he didn’t know what it would take to go through all the things he had asked of me.

Joining the System to Survive

The last time I checked with my lawyer, he said my case was closed a few weeks ago, but I haven’t seen any paper work yet. I’ve asked a couple of times and he assures me my case is closed. I never did get my GED, so I find it hard to believe the judge would just let me go. If given the opportunity to pursue my own interests, I would probably want to do what I want to do now. I want to be an EMT [disregarding the fact he needs a GED or high school diploma to achieve this goal]. I had a lot of aspirations before all of this. The bureaucracy around everything in 2018, makes everything seem like more of a hassle than it’s worth though. Right now, I’m looking for a job and trying to start on my path toward success.

A few weeks after the initial interview, Denny left a voicemail message asking that I contact him to move ahead with the next phase of the study. He had been able to read Wylham and AJ’s stories, but his internet was limited to his phone and he did not want to type out his
responses. His responses will be discussed in Chapter 8. During this phone conversation, I asked him how things were going, and his reply adds to his initial story:

    Just today I took a huge step. My targeted case manager stops in regularly to see how I’m doing and he’s been pushing me to go to Voc Rehab to help get a job so that I can get a place. Technically, right now, I’m homeless. I live in transitional housing, like a halfway house. My case manager said Voc Rehab could help. As you know, I want to be an EMT, but I need to work on some things before I can do that. I need to get a job and rent an apartment before I can think about college. I went to Voc Rehab after not wanting to go there for weeks, digging in my heels and not going. Voc Rehab is just another institution run by “The Man.” The people in these places don’t care about anyone. They work their 9-5 and go home to their families while the rest of us are left to figure it out.

    So I went in there and I had a piss-poor attitude. The lady I was supposed to meet for the appointment didn’t come out to see me for 30 minutes. We later figured out it wasn’t her fault but the secretary didn’t process my intake papers properly. I almost lost trust with her. People in these places get one chance and if they break a person’s trust, that’s it. I walk away. But she seemed to care after we started talking. She actually said, “I can tell you really want to do something with your life. Let’s start the process.” I have to find some paperwork and submit it by next week, then I’ll be in the system and I can start getting paired up with work opportunities. We’ll see how it goes. I don’t have a lot of hope with these sorts of programs. They’ve failed before, but I have to try something at this point even if it means becoming part of “The System.”

    Don’t let anything you see in school influence what you want to do in life.

    Find your own success.
Chapter 7

The Story of Wylham

I worked with the directors of a drop-in center for homeless youth and youth in crisis for several months as I sought approval to find eligible co-researchers for this study. They served youth between the ages of 12 and 21. I was cautioned more than once that the youth were highly transient and I could stop in and find an eligible candidate one week, but he may disappear again for several weeks. On a Thursday evening, as I walked up to the church where my GPS suggested I should go, two men approached me as I walked down the sidewalk. I asked if this was the right place. Thankfully it was. They told me to go to the basement and I would find the director there.

As I approached the back door, there were 10-15 young people milling about, some shooting basketballs, and others sitting on picnic tables. I found the steps leading to the basement door, a heavy, metal security door with a peep-hole. I knocked loudly, but no one answered. Eventually a girl exited and I ducked into the drop-in center. A teenage mother held a baby on a peeling, black pleather couch. She tried to comfort a crying toddler pulling at her pant-leg. The director said, “I have a volunteer for you. His name is Wylham.” She motioned to another worker and said, “Get Wylham and set them up in the art room.” He did as he was told. Within moments, Wylham and I were sitting at a paint splattered art table and we were going over the criteria for the study. Wylham said, “They’ll be gone soon. It will quiet down,” referring to another mother and young child in the next room, partitioned by a curtain.

Characters

Wylham. *I am African-American, non-Latino. I like to read and I do not talk to my family. Growing up, my brother and I were abused by our father and neglected by our mother.*
We were put into foster care when I was about 7 years old. Eventually I was adopted, but I don’t get along with my adopted parents either. Sometimes I talk to my adopted dad, but I am pretty close with my brother. I’ve spent my entire life in one system or another, foster care, juvenile corrections, treatment facilities, and now I’m in a shelter [for displaced/homeless people].

While speaking with Wylham, I noticed he spoke quickly and he often started in the middle of a thought. He rubbed his hands up and down his arms frantically, then he would pause, and start again.

**Growing Up in a Small Town**

I grew up in a town with about 1500 people. About 300 people live inside the city limits. Everybody else lived out on family farms. It’s agricultural work, growing crops. It’s a very tight knit community. News travelled quickly, even faster than you could tell your own parents sometimes. Everybody knows everybody. I liked it. I liked riding my bike. There wasn’t very much to do. I mean, you could go to the movies, but that was it. They only showed one movie at a time and that was mostly in the summer.

Most of us spent our days 4-wheeling or mudding with pick-up trucks. As long as you were on your own property, the cops didn’t care. Most of us had firing ranges on our own properties. The cops didn’t mind if we were firing ammunition there. I collected a few firearms myself. I learned weapons manufacturing. When I find something I like, I kind of stick with it. I’ve learned how to make firearms, swords, bows, spears and clubs. And I even got my pilot’s license once. I can’t fly anymore because I never renewed it, but I have it.

**Public School:** My school was really small. There were maybe 60 kids in elementary, middle school, and high school. Our school was broken into fours: K-4, 5-8, and 9-12. It was really close. Everybody knew everybody. The building, depending on what school you went to.
The elementary was the newest one. It’s only about 5 years old. All the others are either the original building or they have been there awhile. The middle school is one of the original buildings. They renovated it back in the 1970s. The high school they tore down and built a parking lot. The high school was rebuilt right next to it. It was designated a fire hazard because it was three stories tall and not handicap accessible. Now it’s large and flat. All the buildings are brick, red brick.

Up until high school, I took reading, writing— the core classes. For my extra curriculars, I enjoyed taking band. I started carpentry in 8th grade. When I went to high school, I took woodshop, FFA [Future Farmers of America], and a few agricultural classes they had there too. I took an electronics class and an aviation class on top of that. Most of these were extra curriculars, so they were not part of the actual school day.

Then I also played sports. I played football. Wrestling I did the longest. I did it all the way, in 4th grade. I did pee-wee leagues in middle school. Eventually I dropped wrestling and tried football, basketball. I preferred wrestling. I tried baseball. I decided I didn’t like either of them (football or baseball). In middle school, I wrestled one last year in pee-wee. In middle school, I tried basketball and track. I dropped basketball. In track, I beat the school record eight times. I beat my own record seven times in 100 meter dash.

Public school didn’t know what to do with me. I liked most of my teachers. There were a few that I didn’t. Mostly it was because I didn’t like the way they were doing something. I felt like they were being too hard. But later on I realized what they were doing. It actually encouraged me to continue studying the way I have. I would go through school and get bored. I was always ahead in the textbook. I was always ahead and I really liked reading, so…
When I was in elementary school, they had to pull books from the middle school. By the time I got to middle school, they had to pull high school books for me to read and they really didn’t like doing that. I was always ahead in academic work.

One year I slipped. I got lazy. Most of the time I was a straight A kid. I really liked studying and everything. I was ahead. I learned really fast. If I liked it, I would stick with it until I finished it. Nobody was going to persuade me not to do it. That’s how I figured a bunch of things out, I mean.

I would always take the previous year’s ACT test. In 6th grade, I would get bored and start taking them. I took them just for fun. I took one ACT for real, but I don’t have a score. It was never sent in by the school. The high school had some problems with its doors and apparently the locks weren’t engaging. It’s been replaced since then. Someone broke into the school and stole a bunch of senior photos from ’70 something to ’90 something. They destroyed the main office. Everyone assumes they [my ACT test] were shoveled somewhere during the clean-up. A bunch of volunteers came in to clean up the office. None of the students were allowed to come back in the next day either.

Schools in treatment didn’t do much: Some programs were interesting. My [adopted] parents sent me to a residential treatment center for anger and aggression issues and mental health issues. Most of my issues that landed me in DYC [Department of Youth Corrections] were related to destruction of property. Mostly destruction of property. I was never held for more than a week. A lot of it was because of that [being in the treatment center] because I don’t like the feeling of being closed in. I don’t like being closed in. Eventually they started thinking mental health and stuff like that and things just escalated from there. Like I said, I’ve never spent more than a week there.
When I was in DYC, to be honest, the school didn’t do very much. They were just repeating stuff I’ve already known and I kind of lose focus after that. Some of it was really interesting. I mean, I learned welding. They had a welding program. I tried that. But most of the time, when I was in corrections, I tried to do my best and stay out of trouble. I went to school and followed the rules and stuff too. I wanted to avoid problems.

I liked some of the school programs. Some of the schools were really interesting. I learned about different aspects of history that other schools don’t really touch on. One of them was talking about the intermediate period between the fall of Rome and the Dark Ages. There was a period there when Rome hadn’t officially collapsed, but it was going to. And most schools don’t touch on it. They say, “There’s Rome; Rome falls; Rome divides.” From there they just go into the Dark Ages. I liked the part about when Rome split itself up because of barbarians like the Gauls who fought amongst themselves. Teachers forget to tell us that this also led to the fall of Rome.

When I left the DYC school, I didn’t go back to a traditional public school, but it was through the treatment centers I attended. Each one was different, but they were affiliated with a local school district. They mostly taught the same courses as them. At least the majority of them did. Some of them were their own school district, so they made up their own programs.

My classes in treatment centers could range from 5 students up to 15. Sometimes as many as 60 in a bigger area. It just depended on what we were doing. Some of the schools the classes were online that followed the public school. Some of them had a teacher for reading, a teacher for math and everybody was put into a grade. It was more like a traditional school style. It varied between where I was at and what was going on.
Pretty much every time I transferred schools or facilities, I was asked a lot of questions about why I thought I was there, what my family life was like, and if I liked school. Most of them did it during the intake process for the school. All the paperwork was done behind the scenes. I guess my case manager handled it, I don’t know. My parents were never involved that I know of. They were run mostly through the treatment centers. It was just part of the day from 7:30 until 3:15 each day.

The drop-in center was about to close, so I asked Wylham what advice he would give school leaders if they had students like him and he responded,

*Some people’s views on how the kids are is not actually who they are. It’s kind of like judging a book by its cover. They may see someone who has a record for this, and they want to stay away from them, or they may say, “Here, do this” without really guiding them. Sometimes you have to give people a chance to change. Don’t judge a person by what they’ve done, but what they are doing.*

At the time of this interview, Wylham identified himself as homeless and unemployed. He was 19 years old. When the center closed its doors for the evening, one of the workers put him in a passenger van and took him to a local homeless shelter. He could return to the center the next day between noon and 4pm, but the center would not be open for youth over the weekend.

Two weeks after meeting Wylham and combing through the transcripts of his story, I reached out to him again. He said we could meet anywhere as long as it was within walking distance of the drop-in center. We made plans to meet in 4 days at the public library. On the day of the meeting, he said an emergency came up and he would not be able to meet, but he would be able to respond to questions via email. He provided a few clarifying details then informed me he
was no longer part of the drop-in program. I asked Wylham what had transpired at the center.

He sighed and replied, “I felt like some of the staff were being stuck up, and a staff wasn't using the correct pronouncing [sic] of my name, even though I told them repeatedly how to pronounce it.” Wylham has a government provided cell phone and he spends his nights in local shelters. He is trying to find work and stabilize his living situation. He came to his current city a few months ago to visit his biological family, but they had a falling out and now he says, “I’m stranded here without a job and without a house. I’m not sure what’s going to happen next.”
Chapter 8

Interpretation, Analysis, and Implications of Narrative Themes

The goal of this research was to determine how students describe their experiences with public education after being involved with the juvenile justice system. This study mirrors data described in the literature review and reveals ongoing challenges for schools educating these students. People with histories in the juvenile justice system sometimes have multiple contributing factors that have shaped their past, present, and future life experiences. All four co-researchers were invited to examine the narratives for themes. Denny and Wylham agreed to continue with this phase. Together, we used the lenses of critical social theory and theory of othering to examine all four stories for themes. This chapter will first describe the themes identified in individual narratives, and then the chapter will describe themes across the narratives. Finally, this chapter will conclude with implications for school system policy and practitioners.

Themes in Individual Narratives

Narrative inquiry researchers have suggested no universal process exists to analyze stories, but suggest one of four approaches: thematic, structural, dialogic/performance, and visual analysis (Butina, 2015; Pollack & Eldridge, 2015). To maintain focus on the researchers’ experiences, I chose thematic analysis for this study. The four participants, Juan Pablo, Alejandro José, Denny, and Wylham, described unique experiences leading up to and after their juvenile justice involvement. Each story revealed a unique theme, the role of the family, social control, othering, and standardized learning.
Juan Pablo: Role of Family

Leonardo (2004) suggested critical social theory examines social rather than interpersonal instances of oppression. He posited when a person’s exposure and experiences with oppression are difficult to overcome, such as oppression from family dynamics and interpersonal relationships, these experiences formulate a person’s perceptions of reality and they become systemic. The idea of family, home, and neighborhood are idealized as safe places for children to grow, but for some, home and community are challenging places to live (Barnert et al., 2015). According to Juan Pablo, his family experienced resource scarcity, limited education, immigrant status, unstable work history (among parents), unpredictable housing, and drug/criminal activity within the family. Juan Pablo mentioned several times that he knew his life was not normal growing up. He described feeling like it was chaotic and he had another type of lifestyle, one that was different from his peers. Juan Pablo indicated he understood most parents want their children to be safe and to succeed in life; the way his parents and guardians tried to do this, however, was different from his peers.

Juan Pablo’s family acted as protectors for him. They sought what they believed would be a better life by bringing him to the United States on the day he was born. His biological father struggled to provide for his family through traditional means, so he ventured into more lucrative, although criminal, business arrangements. Juan Pablo’s father made sure other people had legal rights to Juan Pablo when the father’s business activities became dangerous. While not involved in most of his life, Juan Pablo remembered his biological mother praying to La Santisima Muerte for his protection.

Throughout Juan Pablo’s life, his family stressed the importance of education. His biological father wanted him to attend school and recognized it was important for his success.
Juan Pablo describes his father as a wise and smart person, supported by his rank in the drug cartel, and his skills as a carpenter. Yet, the importance placed on Juan Pablo’s education was juxtaposed with his father’s decision to live on the run or in hiding. Further, his father’s physical contact and resulting visible marks on Juan Pablo sometimes prevented him from going to school. While education was described as important, decisions were made for Juan Pablo affecting his educational experiences in exchange for the family’s financial stability.

Juan Pablo’s family expressed their desire for him to be successful and to have a better life, but he also described instances when his guardians, biological parents, and stepbrothers would physically beat him. He acknowledged these events differently. He described these situations with his stepbrothers as a rite of passage. He wanted to be accepted by them, but it took a long time; they would beat him up for years even, but he said it made him tough. He said he was weak before, a snitch and a baby, but his brothers made him tough. This mentality is not unlike that of other initiations where members initiate new members through a beating process, but once they are in (gangs, U.S. military, fraternities), they become a family just as Juan Pablo’s brothers accepted him after enough beatings (Nuwer, 2018; Steinberg, Allensworth, & Johnson, 2011; Venkatesh, 2008).

The way Juan Pablo described these physical events with his dad and step-mom is different from the events with his stepbrothers. In some cases, his step-mom and dad spanked him with hangars, wires, and hoses. Juan Pablo did not recognize being spanked or hit with instruments as a form of physical abuse. He later said his mother used to yell at him all the time, but he admired her for never hitting him. He said he continues to love her to this day. He described being beaten by his stepbrothers as an emotionally and physically painful experience,
but he was better, tougher, because of that experience. Being spanked by his parents with various instruments was described as painful but deserved because he was misbehaving.

**Alejandro José: Governmentality of 21st Century Youth**

Without regard to the stages of human development, in neoliberal ideology, if students are not able to control themselves, they are no longer useful and should be controlled by other agencies for the betterment of society (Besley, 2009; Foucault, 1995). When AJ was in high school, school districts structured discipline and social management on theories from the 1990s to “securitize schools and criminalize youth” using zero-tolerance policies so schools could focus on students who represented docile learners (Schept et al., 2015, p. 97). Students who disrupted school frequently had interactions with school resource officers (Nybell, 2001).

Several times in AJ’s narrative, he described himself as young, dumb, AJ, suggesting that he was too young to know better and the SRO who pointed a gun at him did not have a right to point a weapon at him. AJ believed then and continues to believe in the retelling of his story, the school did not have a right to punish him with consequences such as out of school suspension because he was a minor and he did not do anything “that bad.” In AJ’s state, at the time of these events, SROs operated in a partnership with local school systems, but remained in an official capacity with the local sheriff’s department. They were not employees of the school district. AJ remembered the SRO both as a police officer in the community and someone who was “in charge” at the school. AJ seemed to think that he was outside any consequence because of his age and his enrollment status at the school. AJ was acting out of his own subjectivity and mentality rather than the social governance the SRO was trying to enforce. AJ described feeling like the SRO was trying to create a community that was free of skaters and their activities; whereas, AJ was running out to joke around with his friends and have a good time. AJ described
being on school grounds where he thought social rules did not apply to students or minors (Besley, 2009).

**Denny: Othering**

Research suggested being Othered in public schools prevents students from developing meaningful academic identities (Borrero et al., 2012). Denny describes being pulled out of public education and set aside in the back of someone’s closet. Throughout his public schooling, he said he preferred to be alone and he did not care to socialize with many people. After being Othered and eliminated from mainstream educational experiences, Denny asked his judge to be released from public education altogether. Denny described several occasions when he chose to isolate himself from others, including going to the lake with a few close friends rather than the mall with a lot of people, choosing not to attend school rather than attend with people he called “Losers”. These self-isolating and othering actions are described as major risk factors for recidivism (Bonta & Andrews, 2007).

In Denny’s state, RNR and juvenile justice research-based reforms are in place. Part of the reform requires state agencies to develop a rehabilitation plan for their clients including community-based social services and community integration in order to decrease the likelihood a student will continue to engage in at-risk behaviors (Carney & Buttell, 2003; Flecha & Soler, 2013; Gehring & Hollingsworth, 2002; Sander et al., 2010; Williams, LeCroy, & Vivian, 2014). Reintegrating clients into their communities and connecting them with support systems to meet their criminogenic needs is designed to offset or reverse the “Othering” and isolating effects of alternative education and juvenile justice involvement (Eckloff & Javidi, 1991; Sanders & Munford, 2015).
The closure of his juvenile case provided him with a targeted case manager who encouraged Denny to connect with social services. Denny described how much he detested being part of institutionalized systems and spent several weeks digging his heels in to avoid connecting with services, specifically Voc Rehab. However, Denny reconsidered becoming part of a system may help him stabilize his criminogenic needs through housing, employment, and future educational opportunities.

Wylham: Self-Selected Learning

Wylham described always being part of an institution in some way, foster care, school, and residential treatment centers. He had early markers for at-risk tendencies, including being removed from his biological parents due to neglect and abuse, as well as being placed in foster care (Goldkind, 2011; Olafson & Halladay, 2016). However, Wylham described coming from a positive home environment and a long history of academic achievement through extracurricular activities. Being connected to his community and demonstrating academic success in school should have helped Wylham avoid criminal activity; however, he was charged with destruction of property and aggressive behaviors due to an incident that took place outside of school. His behaviors were later connected to a medical diagnosis for emotional behavioral (EBD)/oppositional defiance disorder. He was sent to several residential treatment centers for his condition and described the school experiences as similar to those in a regular school. What he remembers most are the teachers who taught him something non-traditional. As an avid and accomplished reader, Wylham had learned standardized curriculum before or faster than his peers, but it was the extra-curricular activities and enriched curriculum that he remembers most about school. He described feeling successful and accomplished with non-standardized content learning experiences.
Conclusions

The individual co-researcher stories contained important themes reflected in the literature. Similarly, two themes emerged across the co-researchers’ stories also echoing concepts identified in Chapters 1 and 2. Co-researchers described their connectedness at school and how visible or Othered they felt within the school systems.

Relationships with School

School connectedness emerged as a theme, suggesting the quality of a relationship between the student and school personnel mattered. If the relationship was positive, research suggested the relationship could lead to increased positive outcomes for the student (Sander et al., 2010). All of the co-researchers described the impact of someone at school. Juan Pablo described teachers who ignored all of his signs (e.g. torn t-shirt, inconsistent attendance); as well as Mr. P., who gave him his first job and started his path toward a different lifestyle. AJ thought his teachers did “pretty good,” but he also remembered how hurt he felt when the principal did not support him and when the SRO threatened him. Denny recalled his teachers being worthless and subpar, but he noted his current Voc Rehab worker showed interest in him. Before being involved in the juvenile justice system, Wylham remembered positive experiences with teachers who taught him something interesting and supported him learning outside of the standard curriculum.

Most co-researchers recalled at least one positive relationship within the school environment. After reviewing Wylham’s narrative, Denny noted that trust is the most important aspect of being part of an institution, whether it is school, work, or something else. Denny said he understood Wylham’s frustrations with the system as he had experienced many of them himself. He said if he could meet Wylham, he would want to offer him encouragement and to
keep trying because eventually things will come together again. If the trust someone has with another person who works for an institution (teacher, case worker, etc.) is damaged or broken, “it becomes very difficult to ever trust them again. It makes [a person] not want to go back there or any other place for help.” Critical theorists suggest institutions are places where people representing dominant identities, who act as gatekeepers to success, and people with subordinate identities may respond to authoritarian “gatekeeping” practices by submitting, resisting, escaping, or avoiding the practices altogether. Avoidance tactics may be particularly evident with individuals diagnosed with oppositional defiance tendencies (Fasching-Varner et al., 2014; Magill & Rodriguez, 2015; Richard Mendel, 2013). Specific to the school setting, Othered populations are more likely to drop out of school or fail to distinguish themselves academically (Fine, 1991; Fine & Weis, 2003; Kumashiro, 2000).

Denny and Wylham both described being avid readers and wanting to be challenged academically. Prior to having contact with the juvenile justice system, Wylham found success academically and socially; Denny described himself as intelligent, but he did not get along with school personnel or the way schools were run. After juvenile justice involvement, Denny and Wylham described a different relationship with their school systems. They describe being enrolled in alternative programs where they could be treated for characteristics associated with EBD/oppositional defiance. They both described power struggle experiences between school personnel/treatment center staff and themselves. Denny described limited access to resources such as learning materials and quality instructors. Wylham described treatment center schools that followed local school district curriculum or online curriculum, but “they did not do much.” When he returned to public school, he was told those completed course credits would not transfer
and he would have to repeat his junior and senior years in high school (Borrero et al., 2012).

Eventually both Denny and Wylham dropped out of public school having lost trust in the system.

**Visibility and Othering**

Each of the co-researchers described varying degrees of visibility within their school systems. Denny described himself as intelligent, and friendly to a close group of friends. He had a group of friends who meant everything to him. But he also described himself as a loner and preferred not to socialize with most groups. He says he was regularly set aside from peers through alternative programming and resource rooms for people with EBD/oppositional defiance diagnoses. Wylham, on the other hand, was involved in numerous extra-curricular activities at school and he described feeling successful in many of them. He enjoyed being with people and had many friends. Like Denny, however, he was also removed from mainstream public education because of his juvenile record.

AJ described himself as being well known, a bit of a class clown, but he made people happy. He says everyone knew him. He also described being progressive and involving his town hall to seek change in his community. He did not shy away from or avoid engaging government processes to affect change for his group of friends.

Juan Pablo described being unseen during most of his public school experience. He said he had all the signs of someone in need of help, a rip in a shirt he wore every day, but no one said anything. On the other hand, he had to give his dad notices from his teachers who requested a conference at school. He had signs and teachers were reaching out to his family, but given his dad’s legal status and history with the criminal justice system, his dad chose not respond to those notices. Once he had the right clothes, and appeared to have connections, Juan Pablo said people
began to notice him, he made the right connections with influential people, and learned to speak properly.

**Implications for School System Policy and Practice**

The following sections describe implications for school personnel who may have contact with students with histories in the system. Next steps include consistent use of RNR assessments, the advancement of RNR principles through policy changes in combination with restorative justice practices.

**Policy Change**

Based on the findings in this study and in published research, schools have the opportunity to play a two-part role to support students exposed to criminal activity and to help reduce their likelihood of re-offending if they have already been involved. Research indicated that using the Risk-Need-Response method has helped reduce the likelihood of an adult re-offending, perhaps schools should consider using it as an assessment for students who persistently engage in disruptive behaviors (Brogan, Haney-Caron, NeMoyer, & DeMatteo, 2015; Netto, Carter, & Bonell, 2014; Polaschek, 2012). Rather than doling out a consequence from a pre-approved script, counselors or disciplinarian personnel could engage in active dialogue to identify what the student is trying to achieve by his actions, then, together, they develop a plan to meet those needs before the student reaches a level of criminal activity.

If a student has already reached criminal involvement, RNR principles should be implemented for re-integration into the school and within the school community. Community engagement or a sense of social responsibility to a community can reduce the likelihood of a student offending his community (Hirschi, 1969; Stansfield, 2016). Students have expressed receptiveness to after school programs that were gender-specific, helped students academically
or vocationally, and lasted until the evening hours. Some students indicated they would be receptive to community agencies stepping in to help them, especially if they had “similar backgrounds, especially adults from their neighborhoods” (Barnert et al., 2015, p. 1369).

Community engagement requires a collaboration of service providers: foster care, social workers, counseling, vocational rehabilitation, and teachers to engage and support students. Bullis, Yovanoff, Mueller, and Havel (2002) suggested connecting students with positive community programming would significantly reduce their future involvement with the judicial system. The research team defined student engagement as employed and working toward academic attainment, and pro-social behaviors. School buildings provide an opportunity for students to feel connected to their school community as well as a centralized location for students to receive rehabilitative services to help them transition from the juvenile justice system back into society (Evans, 2016).

**Restorative Justice**

Another approach to student management is restorative discipline, or restorative justice (RJ). RJ was developed in Australia and provides a whole school approach to building positive school climate by encouraging “belonging over exclusion; social engagement over control; and meaningful accountability over punishment” ("Restorative discipline in schools," 2018).

Restorative justice aims to build trust when trust has been lost, such as when students are removed from the classroom community as a consequence to disruptive behaviors (Smith, Frey, & Fisher, 2018). Punitive disciplinary practices remove students from the learning environment; whereas, restorative justice engages students with stakeholders whom he has harmed and, together, they discuss the social impact of one’s actions, maintain accountability, and mend relationships (Gonzalez, 2012; Lynch, 2010; Smith et al., 2018).
Some schools have implemented complementary, non-academic programming, such as peer mediation and youth courts, to help students stay in school, reduce resentment, and potentially stave recidivism, while also addressing disruptive behaviors (González, 2012). The literature suggests three tenants to RJ. The first tenant requires an understanding that offending behavior is not against the school, but against the [learning] community (Braithwaite, 1989). The second tenant suggests families, victims, and/or community should be part of the resolution (Lynch, 2010; Zehr, 2005). Resolutions may include apologies, payment to the victim, providing labor/work for the victim, community service, or a committee may design a customized consequence that is not prescribed (Daly & Hayes, 2001). The third tenant is often tied to a moral potential and finds its base in the humanist tradition: “attending to the actual needs of individuals through a process that reflects community values” (Arrigo, 1999, pp. 303-304; Wheeldon, 2009).

One of the challenges posited toward restorative justice is that it creates a victim-focused lens and does not necessarily address the reasons a person behaves in a harmful way toward another person (Pavlich, 2005). Using the RNR assessment tool as apart of restorative justice practices, could help schools identify the criminogenic and non-criminogenic needs of the offender. Then, equipped with a more complete understanding of student needs, agency professionals could be accessed to not only begin student re-integration into his school community, but also begin to repair trust between stakeholders.
Chapter 9

Reflections on a Methodology

Using an innovative methodology, this research project aimed to examine the experiences former students (co-researchers) have re-entering public school after being involved in the juvenile justice system by creating a partnership between co-researchers and myself. Over the course of a 12 month period, I encountered several obstacles and challenges to execute the planned methodology. This chapter will discuss the challenges I faced finding co-researchers and the methodological adjustments I had to consider.

Methodological Challenges

Research suggested that as risk factors increase, a person’s resilience and a person’s ability to persist through challenges becomes less likely (Sanders & Munford, 2015). When I began conceptualizing this study, I was a teacher at a juvenile detention facility. As a teacher, and not a detention worker, I was not supposed to know why my students were “on the inside.” Teachers were told the less we know, the better. If we know about a student, his case, or his interactions with other students on the inside, we could be called as witnesses. For my first year I held onto this belief that it was in my best interest to know less about my students. However, during my second and third years, I listened more closely to what my students said, and what their case workers revealed to other employees. I learned some of my students were murderers and some came from violent home lives, so jail was a safe harbor. Other students were diagnosed with mental health related issues and needed differentiated instruction and trust-building exercises. When I was part of the institution, I had access to valuable information to do my job better. However, after receiving IRB approval to conduct this study, I was on the outside of the institution and accessing resources related to juvenile justice records became much more
difficult. Likewise, when students exit the juvenile system and attempt to re-enter society, they face myriad obstacles. They are on the outside of institutional processes. Some of those challenges include addressing their criminogenic needs such as knowing how to attain stable housing, employment, and educational opportunity. Unlike students who have been on the inside of the juvenile justice system, I had the social privilege of knowing how they worked. Having this perspective allowed me to focus on how to attain the access to the resources I needed for this study through patience, persistence, and determination.

**Persistence: Effort v. Results**

Since the inception of this study, I have known finding co-researchers would be my greatest challenge. People with histories in the juvenile justice system are typically protected by sealed records; their right to privacy is frequently respected but not guaranteed (Nolasco, Spaic, & Vaughn, 2015). Once I had identified my target population for co-researchers, I immediately began networking and building relationships with agencies tasked with juvenile justice reform, criminal justice implementation, and at-risk support programs. During the year leading up to the study’s commencement, I spoke with juvenile justice/educational liaisons, juvenile parole officers, sheriffs’ offices, police department gang task forces, social workers, youth counselors, and transitional/independent living programs. I made numerous phone calls to over 75 organizations and agencies. Research suggested staff who work within the juvenile justice system have sometimes had an impact on research studies based on departmental policies, personal willingness to support research, and other work-related factors including additional responsibilities to assist and overtime pay (Nolasco et al., 2015).

Several agency representatives said they would “keep an eye out” within their client lists and contact me if anyone met the criteria. Following participant recruitment strategies described
by Stringer (2007) and Resnik (2018), every two weeks I began emailing and calling the agency stakeholders who likely had the largest client list. I wanted the agency contacts to know that their expertise and input into the system was critical; they had an opportunity to help inform policy makers about the juvenile justice system. I was frequently told, “due to privacy laws, we would not be able to help you with this study.” While respectable, I was still frustrated because I had considered this when I designed the study. During our conversations and in the IRB approved study materials, I had explicitly detailed responsibilities for me, the researcher, and them, the advocacy group (Washington, 2004). The agencies themselves were never asked to provide me with information, but rather, to pass my information on to potential co-researchers who would contact me themselves. This procedural difference did not change the rote response, perhaps indicating their own institutionalization.

There were a few “almost” co-researchers. I had reached out to a family member who was a former county sheriff in Georgia. His former colleague worked with at-risk youth. Unexpectedly, after weeks of not making progress toward co-researcher identification, a man left a voicemail message for me. He was interested in the study, but he was not sure if he met the criteria. He was slightly outside of the age perimeter. We had a lengthy conversation about all of the other criteria and determined he was a good match. Working with vulnerable and difficult to access populations sometimes requires modifications with the IRB application (Nolasco et al., 2015). I applied to the IRB to revise the age range to include individuals up to age 29. Once it was approved, a mere 4 days later, I reached out to the person in Georgia. Without any explanation, he said he was no longer interested in participating in the study.

Feeling desperate to find someone who met the criteria, and who wanted to participate, I went to social media because I could target specific interest groups who are sometimes invisible
to the general public (King, O'Rourke, & DeLongis, 2014). I joined groups on Facebook advocating for criminal and juvenile justice reform. I gained permission to join closed Facebook groups and I requested additional permission to post the IRB approved introduction letter and letter of consent. By contacting advocacy and support groups online, the respondents were able to provide feedback when it was convenient for them, in a familiar place (platform), and within the privacy of their homes or offices (King et al., 2014; Pan et al., 2009). One mother in Florida said her son met the criteria, but she would have to ask him. A week went by and I did not hear anything, so I contacted her again. She said they had been overwhelmed with a situation and she would try to reach him again that week. Finally, two weeks later, she said he was not interested. While he met the criteria and appreciated the study’s focus, he was busy studying for a licensure exam for his first job after being released from adult prison.

Struggling with personal convictions about using social media to solicit research study participants, and the authenticity/verifiability of online identities, I created a Twitter account and began following and talking with justice reform advocates (Cover, 2015). The response was tremendous. I was overwhelmed with messages of support and people asking to “follow” my feed. One advocate, a professor and public speaker on the issue, said he knew a potential co-researcher and he would pass my information on to him. About three weeks later, I received a phone call from California. He was a well-spoken individual who was interested in the study. Further, he was part of a large network of individuals who had been in the juvenile system and wanted to see reforms. I thought to myself, “This is it! This is where my study takes off!” We spoke for a while longer and then he asked, “So what’s the compensation for doing this?” I replied with a description of the compensation plan for each of the three phases as outlined the consent letter. He said he appreciated the study, but he could not do it for less than $200. People
were always asking him for his story, “and it’s a really good story” and he just could not give it away for small amounts. I thanked him for his time and explained I could not offer what he was asking.

The amount of effort I put into the first few weeks of this study far surpassed my initial estimations. My dogged persistence did not net the number of co-researchers I had hoped. Rather, my patience in building relationships and connecting with individuals who had access within the system, initially returned two co-researchers. Fortunately, my research needs were neither imminent nor life threatening. I could be (somewhat) patient while navigating the bureaucratic systems to achieve my end goal.

**Patience: Meeting Needs v. Waiting on Others**

Two of the many agencies I contacted required the most patience from me, but they also yielded two additional participants. I am grateful for the agencies’ willingness to assist me in finding potential co-researchers, I was certainly on their time-table and not my own. About a year before this study began, I began noticing how involved The Pew Charitable trust was with national juvenile justice reforms. I contacted the juvenile justice reform department which put me in touch with two state agencies they were working with closely. From there, every 3-4 months I reached out to the contact to let them know I was still working on the study. Then as I became closer to defending the proposal and IRB approval, I requested my contact start looking more earnestly. Again, I made sure the contact knew the integral role she was playing in this study (Resnik, 2018). Six weeks after gaining IRB approval, the contact said they had given my information to two potential co-researchers. One was unable to participate because he was involuntarily placed in a psychiatric facility for mental health related concerns and the other co-researcher was Denny.
Another agency I worked closely with resulted in another co-researcher. The drop-in center described in Wylham’s story is an outreach service for a modern-day orphanage. Initially I spoke with a representative listed on the drop-in center’s website. She later described herself as a low-level, hourly worker with a passion to help kids in need because she was once one of them. She passed my study and contact information on to her boss, and then it was later passed on to the CEO of the organization. Six weeks had passed from the first phone call to the time it reached the CEO’s desk. After three more attempts seeking approval over the course of three more weeks, the CEO granted permission as long as I anonymized the study’s findings. I found it curious that the delay was related to procedural information clearly outlined in the documentation she received the first day. Once I had the approval, I made arrangements with the drop-in center to just “drop in” and see who was available for the study. On the first visit, I met Wylham and listened to his story.

Finding AJ and Juan Pablo required far less time and effort but relying on personal relationships was necessary. I reached out to two educational professionals I have spoken with online for a number of years. One of the colleagues I taught with early in my teaching career before she moved out of state and the other I knew from a social media website that addresses trauma-informed teaching practices. Both educators contacted their network of advocates and former students, passed the study materials on to them, and then I received an email from Juan Pablo, and later one from AJ. After the initial contact, we made arrangements to conduct the Phase 1 interview.

**Determination: Finishing a Study v. Finishing the Study**

Despite my persistent efforts to connect with potential co-researchers, three months into this study, I had only managed to connect with one co-researcher. I reached out to my
dissertation committee chair for advice. She suggested I consider a methods piece—a detailed analysis describing an abstract ideal, innovative methodology that when applied in the real world proved difficult. I spent about 10 days mulling over this idea, abandoning what I had hoped to accomplish with the intended study so that I could focus on completing a study for the sake of degree completion. I knew there was value in analyzing this methodology and its challenges. I had analyzed several approaches to develop the methodology in an effort to focus on the co-researcher’s experiences.

Frustrated this study was not proceeding as planned, I continued to return to why I started this doctoral program and why I chose this topic to study: I wanted young people with histories in the system to share their ideas and an opportunity to have an impact on a system they may not have been previously afforded. Yet, just as I was about to resign the original study about other people, so that I could attain my goal of completing this doctoral program within my timeframe, Denny reached out, then AJ, and then I received approval for the drop-in center where I met Wylham.

Other Methodology Complications

The original methodology proved more complicated than I had envisioned which may have been a contributing factor for only two of the co-researchers completing all three phases of the study. Personal and social obligations may have also been contributing factors. AJ and Juan Pablo both have their criminogenic needs met with stable housing and income due to employment or family contributions; whereas, Wylham and Denny are trying to stabilize these criminogenic needs. Money, even in the form of gift cards, may have been a valuable incentive for them to participate in the study.
I had also previously assumed co-researchers would have access to the internet either through public libraries or smart phones. I did not consider that government paid cell phone programs would include flip phones without internet capability. Research and personal experiences with juveniles in the systems suggests their lives can sometimes be chaotic and unpredictable, yet I did not consider how difficult scheduling initial interviews would be, particularly in person. Phone interviews proved adequate, however, one co-researcher asked me if I had met any of the other co-researchers in person. By this time, I had interviewed someone in person. He indicated it would have been easier to do an in-person interview because he struggles with trust issues and seeing a person helps alleviate that anxiety sometimes (Cavanagh & Cauffman, 2015; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016).

Finally, another significant challenge this methodology presented was a predictable timeline. Denny asked for due dates for responses to the follow-up tasks in Phases 2 and 3. Both Wylham and Denny asked several times what the next steps were in the process and when they could anticipate hearing back from me. I could not provide particulars because the timeline involved many people with different schedules (Lane, Goldstein, Heilbrun, Cruise, & Pennacchia, 2012), but I tried to reassure them I would call, email, or text at each stage of the process.

For dissertation research, this study presented numerous challenges and obstacles. There are three things I would do differently and recommend for anyone else who wants to conduct narrative inquiry with marginalized groups. First, I would not conduct research with difficult to reach participants if there is a tight a timeframe. Involving marginalized groups in research is valuable and informative. The research process deserves more time than the twelve months of networking I provided and the four months of co-researching I anticipated. Second, I would
target specific facilities or programs that advocate and support marginalized groups. I had cast a wide net to identify potential co-researchers, but if I had targeted specific organizations and built relationships with more than one of them, I think I would have found co-researchers more quickly. Finally, after identifying co-researchers, I would advance the co-researching team through Phases 2 and 3 as a cohort so that co-researchers had timelines and their feedback could be clarified and triangulated in a more organized process.
REFERENCES


Office for Civil Rights. (2017). *Protecting students with disabilities.* Retrieved March 21, 2017 from [https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html)


LIST OF APPENDICES
To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Kristi Arends. I am a student in Wichita State University’s Doctoral Program for Educational Leadership. In the next few weeks I hope to begin my dissertation research examining the experiences of males who re-entered public school after juvenile justice involvement.

I am looking for potential study co-researchers who meet the following criteria:

- Males between the ages of 18 and 24 at the time the study commences, December 1, 2017.
- Juvenile justice involvement after (year of RNR implementation in State).
- Juvenile justice involvement cannot be related to crimes of a sexual nature.
- Juvenile justice involvement cannot be related to or in lieu of foster care placement. However, if the person was involved in the foster care system and accused of a crime, he could be a potential co-researcher.
- If the person was placed in out of home care, secure care, or other diversion program, he may be a potential co-researcher. Juvenile detention placement/incarceration is not a prerequisite.
- After justice involvement, he enrolled in a public school.
- He cannot be currently involved in juvenile or adult justice systems (parole, probation, etc.).
- He must have regular access to the Internet.

If you have individuals in mind, please distribute the informed consent letter to them and ask them to contact me. At the end of each of three phases, co-researchers will earn a stipend. Total compensation will be $100.

My email address: kdarends@shockers.wichita.edu
My cell phone number: 316-655-6477 if you have questions.

Thank you for the work you do and any assistance you may provide this study.

Best regards,
Kristi Arends
Appendix B

Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

**Purpose:** You are invited to participate in a research study where you will be asked to provide your story as it relates to your former involvement in the juvenile justice system and your experiences re-entering a public school setting.

**Participant Selection:** You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you were involved in the juvenile justice system after your state reformed its juvenile justice laws to incorporate a Risk-Need-Response approach to rehabilitation. You are an essential part of the study because you will provide meaningful data upon which decisions about the juvenile justice system can be made. Approximately 3 to 5 participants from select states across the country will be invited to join the study.

**Explanation of Procedures:** If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete 3 phases at the end of each phase you will receive a stipend. During Phase 1, we will meet in person and you will participate in an interview lasting between 60-90 minutes. I will ask you questions like, “Describe your school in the weeks leading up to being involved in the justice system” and “Describe your relationships with teachers and students when you returned.” For the last 2 phases of the study, we will interact online using Google Classroom. During Phase 2 of the study, I will ask you to record your story after I have removed personally identifying information. If you do not wish to audio record your story, I am prepared to hire an actor for this task. I will then ask you to listen to or read the stories of other participants who have finished the same process. During Phase 3 of the study, I will ask you to read a summary of the findings and respond to them. Any data collected at any point in this study may be used in the final report.

**Discomfort/Risks:** There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable with a question asked during the interview, you may skip it.

If at any point you feel too distressed to continue the study, please inform the researcher and you may discontinue your participation without penalty. If the distress continues after you discontinue or finish participation, you may wish to contact the Wichita State University Counseling and Testing Center. They are located in Grace Wilkie Hall room 320, phone number (316)-978-3440, email Wanda.Holt@wichita.edu.
**Benefits:** The study will add to the existing body of knowledge on students’ experiences with the juvenile justice system in the United States. The study will also serve to inform scholars in criminal justice, educational leadership, and government entities implementing juvenile justice reform about the continual improvement and provision for students transitioning out of the juvenile justice system into public school districts. Participants in this study will receive a $100 stipend divided across three phases of this study.

**Confidentiality:** Every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, in order to make sure the study is done properly and safely, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. By verbally acknowledging your consent to participate in this study, you are giving me permission to share information about you with the following groups:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board;

The researchers may publish the results of the study. If they do, they will only discuss group results. Your name will not be used in any publication or presentation about the study.

All the audio-recorded data collected will be on an encrypted website on Google’s platform until the study concludes. In addition, all the written data will be shredded and the recorded data will be destroyed after five years.

**Payment to Subjects:** Participants in this study will receive payment for each completed phase of the study. After Phase 1, the initial interview, participants will receive $50 on a Visa check card. After Phase 2, listening to/reading the stories of other participants and providing a response, the participant will receive $25.00 on the Visa check card. After Phase 3, responding to the final summary of findings, the participant will receive an additional $25.00 on the Visa check card. If a participant must withdraw from the study, he will only be paid for the phases he completes.

**Refusal/Withdrawal:** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**Contact:** If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me: Kristi Arends, kdarends@shockers.wichita.edu, 316-655-6477 or Dr. Jean Patterson, Address: Department of Counseling, Educational Leadership, Educational and School Psychology, 1845 Fairmount, Box 142, Wichita, KS 67260-0142, Telephone: 316-978-5696, Email: jean.patterson@wichita.edu. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, and Telephone (316) 978-3285.
You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your verbal consent indicates that:

- You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above,
- You are aware that this is a research study,
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, and
- You have voluntarily decided to participate.

You are not giving up any legal rights acknowledging these statements. You will be given a copy of this consent letter to keep.

If you agree to participate, for the recording, please say, “I consent to participate in this study.”

____________________________________________
Printed Name of Witness

____________________________________________   ________________________
Witness Signature               Date
Appendix C

Introduction and Interview Questions

Hello, my name is Kristi Arends and I represent Wichita State University's doctoral program in Educational Leadership. I appreciate your willingness to assist in this study. You were selected as a participant in this study because of your unique experience re-enrolling in public education after being involved in the juvenile justice system.

Before I begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversation. I would like to audio record this session for clarity and later transcription. Although we will be on a first name basis, no names or other identifiers will be used after this initial phase of the study. These identifying details will be replaced for Phases 2 and 3 in this study and during the final report. This session will take approximately 60-90 minutes. After this session, future correspondence will take place online. Before I leave today, I will make sure you are comfortable with the online platform for Phases 2 and 3. Do you have any questions?

Guiding Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself now.
   a. Job
   b. Family
   c. Hobbies

2. Tell me about the community where you grew up.
   a. What did you do for fun?
   b. What did it look like?
   c. What did you hear or smell?
   d. What was the vibe there?

3. What was school like?
   a. How did the building look?
   b. Tell me about your classes
   c. Tell me about your teachers
   d. Did you play any sports? Or participate in any other school activities?
      i. Coaches?
   e. Did you feel like you fit in with your peers and the way school worked?

4. Can you tell me about the weeks that lead up to your juvenile justice system involvement?
   a. How was life?
   b. What was going on with you and your friends, or you and family during this time?
   c. How was school?
5. What was life like when you were in the system?
   a. Did you attend school?
   b. Were there any programs offered for you to attend?
   c. What happened when you left?
   d. Where did you go? Home, placement?

6. When did you re-enroll in public school?
   a. What was that like?
   b. Who was with you when you did that?
   c. Did people know where you had been?
      i. Who?
      ii. Describe those relationships

7. Were you involved in any programs when you returned?
   a. Programs
   b. Clubs
   c. Academic or social interventions?
   d. Any extra-curricular activities?
   e. What were your relationships like at school after you re-enrolled?
   f. Did you feel like you fit in?

8. Did you graduate from high school or finish a GED program, go to work?

9. Now that you’re an adult, what advice would you give schools to help students return after being in juvenile justice?

10. How has being labeled a juvenile offender affected you?

11. Describe what you want for your future.
   a. Describe what role, if any, school has played in your future outlook.
Appendix D

Prompts for Participants to Respond to Individual Stories

1. Please describe your thoughts as you heard or listened to the story of other participants.

2. Describe any parts of the story that are familiar to your own experiences.

3. Talk about any parts of the story you may have found interesting.

4. If you could speak directly to the author of this story, what would you say to him?
Appendix E
Response to Summary Findings

1. After reading the summary of findings for this study, please describe your reaction.

2. Please tell me what you hope will come from this study’s findings.

3. Please describe your experience as a co-researcher in this study.