FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

# THE FORGOTTEN: THE INTERNALIZED EFFECTS OF SCHOOL SPECIFIC SLOW VIOLENCE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the

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in

TEACHING AND LEARNING

by

Kala Carlesha Milagros Jones

2022

To: Dean Michael Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This dissertation, written by Kala Carlesha Milagros Jones, and entitled The Forgotten: The Internalized Effects of School Specific Slow Violence, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgement.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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Maria Lovett

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Date of Defense: June 27, 2022

The dissertation of Kala Carlesha Milagros Jones is approved.

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Dean Michael Heithaus
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Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
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Florida International University, 2022

# DEDICATION

To All the Students I Failed,

No, not the kids who fell short of the "C" in my AP Psychology class—you earned that grade and I'm not talking it back.

Not the kids who failed my AP Research, AP Seminar or African American Lit classes either.

You know what, anyone who had me as a teacher and was displeased with your final grade, I'm not talking to you.

Or maybe I am.

I'm sorry for sitting back, watching, and doing nothing. For being complicit in your miseducation.

I am sorry for being just another cog in the machine that is urban public school education.

I am sorry for not doing something sooner... for saying something sooner.

I am sorry for watching the system work effortlessly while I held out faith that it would eventually break in your favor.

I am sorry for not telling you that you deserve better. That you always deserved better.

I am sorry for hiding my frustrations with the school from you until they were too big to deny. I think I might've given you the impression that if the situation isn't blatantly wrong, comical even, then the fight wasn't worth the headache.

It was always worth the fight because your education should've never been taken lightly.

I'm sorry for all the times I let stuff slide. Adults get tired too. You're an adult now, so I'm sure you've realized this by now.

I'm sorry for not taking more days off. I often overcompensated so that you and your classmates knew someone cared, even if that meant my mental health had to suffer. And here I am wondering where you got this impression that suffering is part of the deal.

Let this dissertation serve as a metaphor of me putting my foot down.

It stops here.

I know this doesn't change anything. That's the past right?

Well, I was watching a video recently and I learned that the hero and the villain often have the same origin story. The difference is how they respond. The villain says, “the world hurt me, so I’m gonna hurt it back”. The hero says, “the world hurt me and I’m not gonna let that happen to anyone else”.

From this day forward, I’m gonna work on being the hero you deserved.

Figure 0.1. Dedication

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to start by expressing my gratitude and appreciation to my major professor, Dr. James Burns. Thank you for introducing me to slow violence during my first class with you and supporting me every day since then. Your teachings, wisdom, feedback, and support have been invaluable, and I couldn't think of a better dissertation chair to guide me on this journey.

I want to give a special thanks to my dissertation committee, Dr. Rebecca Christ, Dr. Maria Lovett, and Dr. Christopher Busey. Thank you for all your time, energy, and encouragement throughout this process. Thank you all for always pushing me to make the tough choices on my own. I am more confident than ever in my academic capabilities, and you all have played a huge role in that.

My sincere gratefulness to my ten co-researchers who collaborated with me to complete this work. Thank you for being open and honest about your experiences and for trusting me with your counterstories. I could not have done this work without you all. I hope you are proud of how you are represented in this work and of the change we created together.

To my mother. Thank you for being my first cheerleader and biggest supporter. Thank you for introducing me to collaborative community work at an early age. You helped to inspire this research. Even as you navigated through some of the most difficult times, you still managed to show up for me and lessen my load when I needed. The lessons you taught me on hard work, determination and perseverance got me to this point.

To the most supportive partner I could have ever asked for Thay Brown. Thank you for always seeing the light at the end of this tunnel. Throughout this process, you

have been incapable of seeing the glass half empty and refused to let me see it either. Thank you for being understanding, attentive and encouraging from the inception of this research until now.

To my family, friends, and line sisters. Thank you for your support. Thank you for understanding my absence at important life milestones and celebrations. Thank you for stepping in in any way you can. Thank you for continuing to have my back and provide support, inspiration, encouragement, and funny memes.

To my grandniece Cyanni. Thank you for being so understanding when I couldn't take you on fun adventures because I had to write. Thank you for always being quick to tell someone not to bother me because "Auntie has homework". Although you are only just beginning school and can't read just yet, I want you to know that I will always be working to make sure your educational journey is easier than mine.

To the rabble rousers crew. I have had the pleasure of working alongside you all in this fight for educational equity for seven years now and I am still in awe. You all remind me that I'm not alone. Thank you for being so supportive throughout this journey. I can't imagine working where we work and going at this alone.

And to my students, past, present, and future. This work is for you. I hope I made you proud.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

THE FORGOTTEN: THE INTERNALIZED EFFECTS

OF SCHOOL SPECIFIC SLOW VIOLENCE

by

Kala Carlesha Milagros Jones

Florida International University, 2022

Miami, Florida

Professor James Burns, Major Professor

Due to its nuanced character traits, slow violence has been allowed to persist within our society for centuries, resulting in impacts that have historically reached catastrophic proportions. With a focus on the education realm, this study describes the impact of school specific slow violence on marginalized communities. The purpose of this study was three-fold: (1) It sought to investigate how school specific slow violence has impacted the lives of Black and Latinx folx, (2) to explore how survivors of school specific slow violence made meaning of the experiences, and (3) investigate its influence on co-researchers' agency via activism as we co-created a social action plan to mitigate specific slow violence acts. This youth participatory action research study centered ten recent graduates of a low-income and majority Black high school in South Florida. The data culminated in four major themes that highlighted the experiences of these recent graduates, which included a correlation between trauma and triumph, slow violence's impact on the accountability co-researchers assigned to culpable parties, the increase in agency with the introduction of new knowledge and the effects of pride on co-researcher's perception.

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## PROLOGUE

A confession: I never wanted to be a teacher. Not because of the pay or the long hours or the lack of work-home balance—not for any of the justifiable reasons—but because, I knew I would only want to teach in my hometown, at my old high school. A place responsible for so much of the happiness I experienced in my formative years… and just as much pain. Even as a senior at Mount Holyoke College, I knew that going back home would be tough. I knew it would require me to deal with a part of my life that up until then, I had pretended didn't exist. Even when I applied for Teach for America, I deliberately made Miami my number 10 choice.

And yet, here I am.

Seven. Years. Later.

Over the past seven years, I have spent 7-8 hours a day, approximately 40 hours a week with some of the dopest humans I have ever met. I have borne witness to some of my kids' proudest moments… and some of their lowest. From promposals to breakups, graduations to bad grades, full-ride scholarships to lost classmates—they've handled it all. And I've been privileged enough to have students who trust me enough to want to share it all with me.

Or at least most of it.

Being around kids for seven years, you get really good at seeing what they show you as well as what they hide. I see the anger when their college

applications get rejected because the mean old lady in the office fails to send a transcript. I see the disappointment when they fail the FSA exam by mere points because they have had a permanent sub for the entire year. I see the embarrassment when the tell me they had to come home on the first day of classes because a counselor with too many jobs failed to follow up. They put up a good front, but I can always tell—the eyes give it away.

I was the same way.

Yes, I am a Black woman, at a Black school, doing critical race work.

Yes, I am a native of the area, raised less than 10 minutes from the school.

Yes, I attended the same school as my students

But this dissertation goes so much deeper than that.

This study allows me the chance to be selfish and find answers that I didn't know were there.

Most importantly, this study affords me the privilege to give my kids something I never got—an opportunity to tell my story, in my own words.

I am the keeper of their stories.

But in order to tell their story, I must first tell my own.

Figure 0.2. *Prologue*

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

From an early age I was made to believe that education leveled the playing field. That if I followed instructions, listened to my teachers, got good grades and worked really hard, I too, could have the "American Dream." Horace Mann's common school movement was supposed to have been "the great equalizer" as Oakes and Rogers (2006) note:

> For Mann, universal schooling was to be… the "balancing wheel of the social machinery," and the creator of wealth undreamed of." Poverty was certain to disappear, and with it the age-old discord between the "haves" and the "have-nots." Horace Mann envisioned public schools as places where students of all backgrounds come together to share fair and equal opportunities for success in the educational system and, as a consequence, fair and equal life chances. (p. 7)

The problem with this idealistic narrative is just that it was too good to be true. The vision for common schools was created on the basis of racist and classist principles that forced believers to assimilate to white and middle/upper class standards and support prevailing structures of power. Since Mann's declaration for education in 1848, contemporary schooling bears "little resemblance to what was promised" (Lasch, 1995 p. 156).

Donaldson and Johnson (2010) explain that students being raised in low socioeconomic (SES) households fare poorly in schools in the United States (US), specifically that low-income students "score low on state tests, graduate from high school at depressed rates and attend college in diminished proportions" (p. 299). Urban schools,

or schools that educate a large majority of Black and Latinx[1] students, have become increasingly segregated, are more likely to be filled with inadequate resources, underqualified teachers and a host of other issues that make academic achievement extremely difficult (Frankenberg et al., 2019; Noguera, 2003). The link between education and class is well documented (Kozol, 1991; Rothstein, 2004; Oakes & Rogers, 2006), so it is unsurprising that "inferior education and too little schooling are perhaps the largest threats to maintain secure middle-class status" and beyond (Orfield & McArdle, 2006, p. 21-22).

Unfortunately, education isn't the only place where the subaltern[2] are getting the shortest end of the proverbial stick. The reproductive rights of women are under attack in Texas where the most restrictive abortion law in the country was approved only a few months ago (as of the submission of the dissertation to committee) (Griffin, 2021). The unprecedented enforcement feature embedded within this law takes the power away from the government and gives it to citizens who are then rewarded for doing the work of local law enforcement (Lindvall, 2021). With the upcoming Supreme Court hearing regarding

[1] Through this work, the term "Latinx" is used instead of "Hispanic", "Spanish", or the more colloquial "Brown". While there is no consensus about the origin of the term (Logue, 2015), the purpose of Latinx is twofold. The term "confronts the namelessness violence of colonization, slavery, and systemic marginalization" (Salinas, 2020), while also recognizing "the intersectionality of sexuality, language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, and phenotype" (Salinas and Lozano, 2019). Given it's symbolism and my aim to be a critical scholar, I thought it would be fitting.

[2] Subaltern is a term coined by Antonio Gramsci in the early 1970s and was originally used as a euphemism for the proletariat or working class (Crehan, 2016). With the help of many different scholars, many of which were a part of the Subaltern Studies Group, the word has since evolved. "As a totality, the condition of subalternity is broadly inclusive, encompassing all those who are oppressed rather than oppressing, ruled rather than ruling" (Crehan, 2016, p. 19). Given Gramsci's intention for the word to represent many groups of marginalized folx, "he does not regard them as a single, much less a homogeneous entity" (Crehan, 2016, p. 20).

the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* quickly approaching, the fate of a women's' right to choose is in grave danger in at least 12 states with trigger laws[3] and 14 more states drafting similar laws to follow suit (Griffin, 2021).

Voter suppression, a major issue in recent elections, is on the rise and racial minorities are the ones being targeted, particularly African Americans. Shah and Smith (2021) make the connection between current voting changes and those of the Jim Crow era by likening current voter ID laws to the reinstitution of a poll tax. The more subtle versions of "race neutral" or "colorblind" policies such as provisional ballots, changes to voter registration procedures, decrease in the number of early voting days, closing of voting sites in minority concentrated areas and disenfranchisement have "all minimized the minority voters" (Shah & Smith, 2021, p. 138).

Further, the novel coronavirus and the lack of a coherent response to the pandemic further illuminated the myriad of preexisting inequities already extant in the system—educational, medical, carceral, class, racialized, gender, etc. By the end of 2020, the United States had more cases than any other country and minority groups "suffered an outsized share of infection and mortality burden" (Holden et. al, 2021, p. 2). This in conjunction with the war on Black and Latinx bodies as seen with the senseless deaths of

[3] "Trigger Law: describes a law that is currently unenforceable because of a key circumstance but may achieve enforceability if that key circumstance changes (Griffin, 2021). In this case, the 12 states in question all have laws that are in accordance with *Roe v. Wade*. This means that if case is overturned, abortion bans would take effect immediately in those states.

folx[4] like Ahamaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless others[5]—amid a global pandemic—suggests the biopolitics[6] of disposability are alive and well—a known side effect of authoritarianism that has since resurged in this country.

Race and poverty have always been crucial to discourses of worth in the United States, but recently, they have been dangerously exacerbated as evinced by ever-expanding disparities in income, wealth, and educational opportunities. As the country continues to move toward new iterations of modernization,[7] waste is no longer only reserved for material goods, as Giroux (2007) explains. Entire subgroups are being evaluated based on what they can contribute and/or achieve without requiring further

[4] To be inclusive to all people, the term folx will be used several times throughout this dissertation when I am not sure of someone's' gender pronoun. Using the term folx is my attempt to include all persons in this conversation—especially those historically omitted from the dominant discourse.

[5] As a scholar who operates within the critical race theory (CRT) framework, I find it necessary to acknowledge the names of those we know that have been killed by police since the start of my dissertation studies in 2018. This list is in no way exhaustive; these are only the names of folx I've become aware of through my research. There are many more we are not aware of for a myriad of reasons. CRT challenges white supremacy while also finding it crucial to give voice to the experiences of people of color. Acknowledging their life in this dissertation is my way of doing both. #Say Their Name
Stephon Alonzo Clark. Saheed Vassell. Antwon Rose Jr. Botham Shem Jean. Anton Milbert LaRue Black. Chinedu Okobi. Charles "Chop" Roundtree Jr. Emantic "EJ" Fitzgerald Bradford Jr. Gregory Lloyd Edwards. Sterling Lapree Higgins. Javier Ambler. Ronald Greene. Elijah McClain. Atatiana Koquice Jefferson. John Elliot Neville. William Howard Green. Manuel "Mannie" Elijah Ellis. Breonna Taylor. Daniel T. Prude. Michael Brent Charles Ramos. Dreasjon "Sean" Reed. George Perry Floyd. Tony "Tony the Tiger" McDade. David McAtee. Carlos Carson. Rayshard Brooks. Dijon Durand Kizzee. Jonathan Dwayne Price. Marcellis Stinnette. Sincere Pierce. Angelo "AJ" Crooms. Casey Christopher Goodson Jr. Andre Maurice Hill. Angelo Quinto. Vincent "Vinny" M. Belmonte. Patrick Lynn Warren Sr. Marvin David Scott III. Daunte Demetrius Wright. Omar Shado Stevens. Ben Fields.

[6] Foucault postulates that life and living being are crucial to political and economic battles (Lazzarato, 2006). "The individual's birth and death do not delimitate but on the contrary mediate and facilitate the activities of modern governing… Modern politics, as Foucault depicts it, consists of a set of government technologies which act upon a target, the biological processes in the population, within which individual life is just a transitory moment" (Braun, 2007, p. 11).

[7] "The overwhelming economic and political forces that drive cultural change" (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, p. 20).

assistance, with evaluations becoming crueler as we step further into the neoliberal era. The institutionalized belief that white people are smarter, easier to teach, and worth teaching compared to others in this country exemplifies a "value gap" (Glaude, 2016) between the lives of whites and non-whites. Policy accommodations that counter the value gap have been made over the years—*Brown v. Board of Education* and the Civil and Voting Rights Acts, for example—but many *de facto* discriminations persist as what Giroux (2007) calls the politics of disposability:

> Those rendered redundant in the new global economy… those who are no longer capable of making a living, who are unable to consume goods, and who depend upon others for the most basic needs… entire populations expelled from the benefits of the marketplace are reified as products without any value to be disposed of as 'leftovers in the most radical and effective way: we make them invisible by not looking and unthinkable by not thinking.' (Bauman, 2004 p. 27 as cited in Giroux, 2007)

The act of making the subaltern invisible by choosing to ignore prevailing social and material conditions, configurations of power, and inconvenient histories is not new. Nixon (2011) suggests that manufactured ignorance constitutes slow violence, or "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction… violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (p. 2). The complex, overlapping historical conditions of possibility that produce and sustain the value gap (Glaude, 2016) are the same conditions that make slow violence so hard to see and address. Acts of slow

violence carry with them the advantage of being spectacle-deficient,[8] which has allowed them to persist for long periods and without public outcry. As a result, slow violence has historically plagued the lives of low-income Black and Latinx folx but sadly, the effects are anything but slow. The effects of slow violence result in trauma that mirrors that of visible forms of violence. Shaw (2004) explains that simply "encountering violence [of any kind] can be a devastating event which leaves victims with lasting emotional and physical scars" (p. 131). Because the trauma of slow violence is interpreted similarly to that of physical trauma, the process to make sense of them or find purpose is similar as well.

The meaning making process that follows a traumatic event is crucial in determining how the victim will respond to future stressors. Thus, Bentley-Edwards, et al. (2019) conclude "violence exposure and victimization (VEV)… as the most serious trauma inducing and life-threatening health risk facing Black youth today… experiences of VEV can alter life trajectories through increases in psychological maladjustment, perpetration and academic failure" (p. 541). Unfortunately, just like the violence that is inflicted on them, Black and Latinx survivors are almost never recognized. Nixon (2011) explains, "causalities of slow violence—human and environmental—are the casualties most likely not to be seen, not to be counted" (p. 13)." Nixon's words would almost be poetic if they weren't so sad.

The remainder of Chapter One, which contextualizes this study in education, provides an overview of school specific slow violence (SSSV) and its impacts on Black

[8] The lack of spectacle associated with slow violence is crucial to its ability to persist unnoticed for long bouts of time. This is key to the accretive nature of slow violence.

and Latinx students. This chapter then explores the processes of meaning making and the potential role activism plays in lessening slow violence effects. The elements described at the beginning of the chapter lead to the identification of the purpose of this dissertation research, the significance of the study and the research questions. The chapter ends with an explanation of study limitations, relevant terms, and an outline for the remaining chapters.

**Statement of the Problem**

As a high school teacher turned high school college advisor, I am fortunate enough to meet hundreds of kids a year on their quest to graduate from high school and start the next chapter of their lives. Being at a majority minority institution situated in a low-income neighborhood, my work has proven to be a constant uphill battle. According to Jacob (2007), "on average, urban students score lower on standardized achievement exams than their suburban counterparts" (p. 122), as well as in ability, intelligence, ambition and other socially suitable outcomes (Fan & Chen, 1998).[9] This depressing rate isn't from a lack of trying on the students' part. A study of urban schools, conducted by Corcoran et al. (1988), determined that even the most basic of materials, like textbooks, were unavailable to teachers. Of the 31 schools included in the study, 25 rated materials less than adequate, with 19 reporting as definitely inadequate. Difficulty accessing adequate materials is further exacerbated when class sizes are much larger than expected

[9] While this is true, it is also important to remain critical of the measures we are using to evaluate Black and Latinx student success. Research suggests that that negative outcomes on standardized tests disproportionately impact Black and brown students (Chambers, 2009; Rowley & Wright, 2011). In an effort to state the problem of school specific slow violence, I would be remiss if I wasn't critical of the false narratives from which the data was purported. I would argue that this very conundrum—the need to rely on student success metrics we know are racially bias but being unable to detach from said metrics—is an act of slow violence.

and support staff is nonexistent (Corcoran et al., 1988). Kozol (1991), discussing a computer allocation by New York's District 10, similarly writes, purported

> The local board decided to give each elementary school an equal number of computers, even though the schools in Riverdale had smaller classes and far fewer students. When it was pointed out that schools in Riverdale, as a result, had twice the number of computers in proportion to their student populations as the schools in the poor neighborhoods, the chairman of the local board replied, "What is fair is what is determined… to be fair." (p. 103)

Likewise, when documenting achievement of English Language Learners (ELL)—another large subset of the urban school population—Gandara and colleagues (2003) discovered that due to a lack of access, "75% of the teachers surveyed said they 'use the same textbooks for my English learner and English only students' and fewer than half reported using any supplementary materials for ELL students" (p. 27). While there are white students who may be "equally unprepared for college" their opportunities are not reduced to the extent of their Black counterparts. Carnevale and Strohl (2013) conclude that not only do white students "still get more postsecondary opportunities," but Black and Latinx students who are prepared for college "are disproportionately tracked into crowded and underfunded two-year colleges and open-access four-year colleges" (p. 8). Education works to reinforce preexisting social and economic inequalities rather than reverse them. According to Carnevale and Strohl (2013), education is sending contradictory messages about equity while schools and universities actively reinforce prevailing social structures.

In addition to the resource deficit in Black and Latinx schools, alternative teacher education has historically been complicit in limiting student success[10] as well. A study that researched student performance as it relates to teacher preparedness shows that students whose teacher was university prepared significantly outperformed students of under-certified teachers (Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002). Laczko-Kerr and Berliner's (2002) research also showed that already low-achieving students, when taught by an under-certified teacher,[11] made gains that were approximately two months less per school year on three different subsets of their standardized test, which equates to 20% less academic growth. Similarly, Donaldson and Johnson (2010), who investigated retention of Teach for America (TFA) teachers, found that teachers with more challenging assignments were at a greater risk of leaving their teaching position after year one. Multi-grade elementary school teachers were more likely to transfer to another school and multi-grade secondary teachers were more likely to resign from the profession altogether (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010). Donaldson and Johnson (2010) also found out that on average, approximately 50% of TFA teacher leave during or directly after their second year, with 1.86 being the median number of years. Since TFA teachers are almost exclusively found in predominately Black schools because of the desperate need for educators in those areas, the turnover and transfer rate directly impact those students. As

[10] Student success is a highly contested term and can mean different things to different people. The very definitions of student success pursued by teacher education programs are faulty and debatable.

[11] Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002) identified under-certified teachers as those who fall in the following three categories: "emergency" (for holders of bachelor degrees from accredited institutions, with little or no educational coursework, who can get clearance of criminal background through fingerprint analysis), "temporary" (a rarely used designation similar to "emergency"); and "provisional" (for those with some, or even considerable teacher education training, who are short certain units or requirements that could earn them a standard certificate) (p. 23).

a result, some students are forced to have a substitute for the duration of the school year, drastically inhibiting their learning even more.

**School Specific Slow Violence (SSSV)**

School specific slow violence (SSSV) are acts of slow violence that are found in the school that inhibit the educational process or impact the ways in which education is used to advance folx in the future. It is not a commonly known concept, in fact, it is one that I have identified over the course of my dissertation coursework. SSSV acts reflect a broader constellation of problems (Koopman, 2013) that have specific historical and institutional conditions of possibility. These are problems that not only impact the student in the moment but can affect them—and their community—for their rest of their life. Rooks (2020) elucidates:

> We have long known that there is an undeniable link between a child being undereducated and her future life chances. Children who live in segregated communities and are Native American, Black, or Latino are more likely to have severely limited educational options that cosign them to the lower rungs of a racial and economic caste system from which the likelihood of escape becomes ever more dim. (p. 3)

The slow violence prevalent in the classrooms and halls of US public schools is the same slow violence that impacts the communities, families and even the health of these students (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). School specific slow violence can't be solved by the racialized and classed bootstrap theory,[12] and it cannot be solved without the input of

[12] Pioneered by Dr. Stephen T. Colbert, this pillar of American mythology states that if a person works hard enough, they can get ahead and thus pull themselves up by their bootstrap (Langston, 2000). This narrative

those most impacted. Unfortunately, those most impacted are also those least likely to be included in the political and policy conversations that directly impact their lives.

With effects that mimic physical forms of violence, meaning making is a customary step in navigating the trauma associated with SSSV. Meaning making literature draws on sociology, anthropology, and other social sciences to understand how humans interpret the world around them (Kurzman, 2008). Traditionally, the focus of meaning making research has been traumatic loss with most participants being folx who are navigating the loss of a loved one. Recently, there has been a push towards acknowledging that all highly stressful or traumatic events require meaning making at some level, hence making it a universal practice (Parks, 2010). A slow violence act, realized or not, qualifies as a highly stressful and/or traumatic event and thus would involve the meaning making process. While most meaning making research tackles the topic from a theoretical perspective, several researchers focus on meaning making from empirical and applied perspectives (Parks, 2008; Cromer & Smyth, 2010).

Resisting[13] educational injustices like SSSV acts are almost as historic as schooling itself. With the earliest written record of educational resistance being in 1892 by a formerly enslaved Black woman named Ana Julia Cooper, the history of US schooling has been notoriously anti-Black (Yang, 2014). Resistance through education

fails to acknowledge the racialized, classes and gendered assumptions that must be true for this theory to be accurate.

[13] Foucault presents another term, critical attitude, as substitution for resistance. What was originally described as counter-conduct prior to 1979, critical attitude is "the form that counter-conduct takes in modern societies, realizing at the same time the necessity to raise the question of the will (to be or not to be governed like that) in order to rethink resistance within the framework of governmental strategies" (Lorenzini, 2016, p. 8).

has presented students and teachers alike opportunities to redefine predetermined social and political roles inherent in predominant configurations of power (Tuck & Yang, 2014). In some cases, resistance to education looks like speaking out against SSSV acts like testing, curriculum, non-inclusive school policies, policing, and even completely rejecting schooling as we know it (Tuck & Yang, 2014; Ginwright et al., 2006). Indeed, "resistance to educational injustices is about demanding more from institutions than they were ever designed to do" (Yang, 2014, p. 2). What is left out of much of this research, however, is the impact *youth* have on acts of resistance.

**Youth Participation**

At every turn in the fight against acts of SSSV and educational injustices, youth have been present and active. Walkouts in major cities like Philadelphia, Chicago, Providence, Seattle, and even here in Miami have been led, organized, and executed by the students in those communities. As Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2017) reminds us, "Rather than allowing adults to dominate narratives on issues facing [youth]… young people today, particularly those from marginalized groups are… [restorying] the popular imagination by shaping it into their own image" (p. 338). There has been a constant increase in youth critical consciousness that challenges governing ideologies and oppressive acts what we have come to accept as normal (Cammarota, 2017). Black and Latinx youth hold first-hand accounts of the impacts of violence, therefore, their participation in the resolution is crucial. If we fail to include them, we will never fix the problems.

**Student Achievement**

Student academic performance remains the basis for most education literature (Odden & Picus, 2007). According to extant literature, there is a positive correlation between student scores and a school's funding. The higher the student achievement, the bigger the budget (Archibald, 2006; Hedges et al., 1994). Some research supports the claim that teachers are the most significant aspect of student achievement (Everson, 1986; Kunter et al, 2013; Ulug et al, 2011). Other researchers claim that student success is primarily intrinsic, and students faced with trauma succeed, despite the odds, through resilience or grit (Condly, 2006; Duckworth, 2016; Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Knight, 2007; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Still other studies have focused on the community as the answer to all student achievement issues (Bowles, 1980; Sanders, 1998), or on parental involvement as the crucial piece of the achievement puzzle (Gonida & Cortina, 2014; Hong & Ho, 2005; Keith & Lichtman, 1994; Wang, & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Past and current studies that conduct research on Black and Latinx students seem to always find a tangible solution that rarely includes the acknowledgement of the racism that allows for these issues to persist in the first place. Nor do they name systemic issues, such as the assumptions that underlie student achievement discourses and the measures of achievement used. The contribution of this study, therefore, is the application of the concept of slow violence, which has previously been associated with environmental activism, to education research. The current study theorizes educational violence in collaboration with the group most impacted by student issues and suggest new ways of discussing educational disparities through students' narratives of survivance.

## Purpose of the Study

This youth participatory action research (YPAR) study investigated how SSSV has impacted the lives of Black and Latinx students who previously attended a low-income and majority Black high school in South Florida. A secondary goal of this dissertation was to explore how my co-researchers,[14] as survivors of SSSV, internalized SSSV acts and made meaning of them. The third objective of the research was to investigate SSSV's influence on youth agency as my co-researchers and I worked alongside each other to create an action plan that mitigates SSSV act(s) currently plaguing the lives of students at our former high school, the research site.[15]

## Methods

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) is the most suitable methodological approach for this study. YPAR is a critical qualitative method that prioritizes youth as experts and their knowledge as valuable and seeks transformative action. The group of ten co-researchers were identified through personal knowledge and recommendations

[14] Throughout the entire research project, I utilized the term as co-researchers. Common research terms such as "Participants" or "Subjects" carry with them a connotation that they (the co-researchers) are being researched "on" as opposed to "with". Additionally, the term co-researcher helps me to navigate the power dynamics that are at play in adult-youth collaborations.

[15] Positionality is very import and must be explicit and not assumed. Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) emphasize the importance of a well-defined positionality, "making positionality clear can provide the reader with the ability to determine whether preconceptions have unnecessarily influenced the results" (p. 71). As a critical theorist, I am a firm believer that I cannot devoid myself of my work. However, as an in-group member I am also aware of potential biases that could have impacted this research. My reflection regarding this struggle can be seen in Chapter 6.

from colleagues. The group's racial and academic[16] demographics mimic that of the research site, although there are more men than women.

There were three parts to this research study. First, my ten co-researchers participated in the first formal, semi-structured interview where I asked them to describe their high school career and experiences. Following the completion of all interviews, the group engaged in bi-weekly YPAR meetings using a YPAR handbook developed by Oregon's Health Authority in partnership with the institute for Community Research (Institute for Community Research [ICR], 2014). These meetings allowed us the space to discuss our experiences with SSSV acts, for example interactions with out-of-touch administrators, the gross lack of resources, the absence of mental health initiatives and more, while attending the research site. Each module included goals/objectives, potential activities, and worksheets that aide in the progression of the cycle. For us, this cycle included choosing a SSSV act to mitigate via a co-created social action plan. Lastly, my co-researchers engaged in another semi-structed interview that served as the exit interview for this project. This interview asked about the entire experience and the social action project. During this time, the co-researchers also completed "I Am" poems[17].

**Significance of the Study**

The findings of the study contribute to a more extensive understanding of slow violence outside of its traditional definition. Nixon (2011) coined the term as way to

[16] Schools in Miami-Dade County identify place students in one of three categories: top 25%, lowest 25%, and bubble. Each category is represented in this study (even though I do not personally agree with the way the district classifies children).

[17] A detailed explanation can be found in a later chapter.

describe environmental racism, but for this research, I applied the concept of slow violence to an educational study. The study also provides insight on the impact SSSV has on student survivors who have recently encountered the slow violence acts, as is the case for most of my co-researchers, as well as those who have been removed from the situation for several years, including myself. By making the community and public aware of the complexity and historicity of these issues, we actually name issues that students often suffer in silence. The study evokes a policy dialogue that could provoke school, community, and political action to prevent future students and their communities from suffering the long-term effects of slow violence. By including the survivance narratives[18] in the form of "I Am" poems, I forefront their voices not through voyeuristic "damage-centered" research (Tuck, 2009), but through the stories of political agency of the "poor" who have always led community-based efforts toward sustainable social, political, and educational reform. Most importantly, the social action project that I co-created with my co-researchers offers a first step into mitigating some of the SSSV acts Black and Latinx students who attend this low-income public school continue to navigate.

This study relies on the survivors of slow violence engaging in processes to reconstruct their world and seek out solutions for the students who will come after them. Too often, students are taught and/or conditioned to be docile and accept their social conditions. To justify associating PTSD with Black and Latinx students, Emdin (2016) explains "that young people experience trauma regularly in ways that go unnoticed or unrecognized (p. 22). He continues, "urban youth are expected to leave their day-to-day

[18] "Survivance stories [narratives] are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victmry" (Vizenor, 2008, p. 1).

experiences and emotions at the door and assimilate into the culture of schools" no matter how traumatic that may be (Emdin, 2016, p. 23). Therefore, by arming this group of researchers with the knowledge needed to question and push back and the 'permission' to do so, I hope other students will follow suit and work together to change their educational experience for the betterment of themselves and students of the future.

This study can inform all. The audience for this dissertation includes all public-school educational stakeholders including teachers, parents, administrators, school board personnel, educational partners, teacher educators, and anyone else committed to the success of public schools. Because slow violence persists for generations, it becomes normalized to the extent that it is considered hegemonic, or "common sense" (Kumashiro, 2004). By making not only educational stakeholders, but community, carceral, food and nutrition providers, and more aware of oppressive acts harming folx, there is less of a chance for these acts to continue.[19] Frequently research that runs "counter to commonsensical ideas of what schools are supposed to be… are often dismissed as biased, as a distraction… as inappropriate for schools, or simply nonsensical" (Kumashiro, 2004, p. xxxiv). Having survivors connected to the research makes it harder to silence and even harder to justify the silencing.

This dissertation is also for the academy. School policy is not traditionally birthed out of research, but by presenting this study, it is my hope that it piques someone's interest and that future research in SSSV, and slow violence, in general, will happen. This study brings a different perspective to longstanding issues and recognizes that "subjective

[19] There are historic intersections between the school and the community, the justice system, food and so many other realms. Violence within one will inevitable spill over to another.

reconstruction requires reactivating the past in the present" (Pinar, 2011, p. 6). The study, therefore, acknowledges histories of systemic racism within school and society seeks to prevent the reinscription of the past on the present and the future.

## Research Question

The broad research question guiding the study is: How do a group of high school graduates from a low-income and predominately Black school describe how they have internalized and made meaning of acts of school specific slow violence?

The sub-research questions are as follows:

1. How does the meaning making process that occurs because of SSSV impact the attitudes, views, and lives of those who experience it?
2. How does perception change as my co-researchers realize their agency (through activism via the social action project?

## Limitations, Delimitations and Assumptions of the Study

### Limitations

There are two limitations to this study that should be highlighted. The first limitation is the way in which the interviews and YPAR sessions conducted. Traditionally, YPAR sessions occur in person; however, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented in-person interviews, so I conducted all interviews and group sessions via a secured and closed Zoom meeting. In addition, many of the activities such as icebreakers, brainstorming sessions, teambuilding, etc., included in the YPAR curriculum (Institute for Community Research [ICR], 2014) were designed for in-person interactions, so I modified them so they could be done virtually. Interviews were also conducted via Zoom

and another recording device was present in the event that the internet connection was disturbed on either end.

Second, there was no way to ensure representation of all extracurricular activities. While there was great care and intentionality taken to make sure students of different graduation years, extracurricular activities, and status—in school, working, military, etc.—were included, I am aware that many of the co-researchers are past students of mine[20]. This is due to the lack of flexibility in the work/school schedules of many graduates and my inability to locate/contact alumni. There is no database for alumni for this low-income, predominately Black school; all connections were made via current teachers.

## Delimitations

The study focused on the SSSV acts in the context of one specific low-income, predominately Black public school in South Florida. Based on the complexity of slow violence and the varying ways in which each school operates, the SSSV acts nor the social action plan to mitigate them cannot be generalized for all schools in the area. Additionally, the sample of ten consisted of only recent graduates of this institution. This means that the views and opinions of students who are currently enrolled and those who graduated six years or more ago are not included in this research.

[20] The goal for this study was to recruit alumni who represented all the tiers previously mentioned equally, however that did not end up being the case. Most of my co-researchers ended up being alumni who had more cultural capital in the school that the average student (participated in multiple extracurricular activities, on a sports team, in an advanced placement course, etc.). A future study that targets alumni and students who were dropped out, pushed out and/or have less cultural capital in the school is discussed in the future research section of this paper.

## Operational Definitions

*Slow violence*: minute acts of oppression that when compounded create a generational effect. Nixon (2011) describes slow violence as "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (p. 2). The impact of slow violence is inescapable and "resonate[s] with Churchman's (1967) notion of 'wicked problems'; they are often attritional, disguised and temporally latent, making the articulation of slow violence a representational challenge" (Davies, 2019, p. 2).

*School specific slow violence (SSSV)*: The acronym SSSV represents an overarching term and is used to describe educational injustices that occur within the confines of the school building. Given the pervasiveness of slow violence in education, SSSV can also be used to describe the entity of schooling as well. I found no term to describe the nuanced violence I aimed to research; thus, this term is one I created.

*Youth*: Category of folx who society has regarded as underdeveloped and not yet ready for "self-determination" (Yang, 2014). For the sake of this dissertation, youth will not denote a specific age group, but rather a salient "category around which social institutions are built, disciplinary sciences created, and legal apparatuses mounted" (Yang, 2014, p. 4).

## Outline of Chapters and Autobiographical Interludes

The dissertation is divided into eleven chapters, five of which are autobiographical explorations that I refer to as "Autobiographical Interludes" followed by a specific title. Grumet describes the autobiographical theory of curriculum, or *currere*,

as the “wrestling of individual experience” (as cited in Pinar et al., 1995). While the foundation for the dissertation comes from an autobiographical position, these interludes illustrate my effort to understand the impact of school specific slow violence as it relates to my community, my students and myself. At some points the interludes will appear clear and decisive, and at other times they will seem, confused, messy, and emotional. Both versions of myself were necessary to work through the more critical sections of the main chapters. In this section, I will summarize the interludes as well as the main chapters.

In Chapter Two, an Autobiographical Interlude entitled “A DAY IN THE LIFE”, I chronicle a fictional day at the research site. While all the situations described are based on real occurrences, they did not all occur in one day. Using my personal experience as a backdrop, I depict the catastrophic ending that is to be expected with SSSV, despite that not being credited as the reason. It is through this reflection that I attempt to illustrate the effects of slow violence to the reader. This reflection also reinforces the need for this work.

In Chapter Three, I explore the history of the literature. I introduce this chapter by providing another example of the ramifications of slow violence, if allowed to endure. The theoretical frameworks grounding this research, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and desire-based framework are introduced. Using Nixon (2011) as the foundational text, I introduce slow violence as defined by Nixon and describe how I apply that concept to several studies investigating the ways slow violence is allowed to wreak havoc in different sectors. Following the works of Noguera (2003), Moskowitz (2018), and others, I analyze the different ways slow violence can materialize within the education space.

Using seven SSSV acts, which were brought up during conversations with my co-researchers, as a guide, I review current literature and discuss the gaps in the research. Chapter Three proceeds with a thorough account of literature concerning meaning making and student agency via activism. Chapter Three ends with a section where I summarize the literature and make appropriate connections to the current study.

In Chapter Four, an Autobiographical Interlude entitled “THE HARD CHOICE”, I examine my decision to employ youth participatory action research (YPAR). I draw on my experiences with youth changemakers to critique my initial feelings of working with young people.

In Chapter Five, I further explain my methodological decisions. The chapter starts with a brief summary of the information provided so far, including the purpose of the study, research questions, aims, and so forth. A deep dive into the research design and methodology is followed by an explanation and rationale for my choice to use qualitative research methods. Highlighting scholars like Rodriguez and Brown (2009), Cammarota and Fine (2010) and Anyon et al. (2018), an extensive introduction to, and justification of, YPAR is provided. Chapter Five also includes a look at the setting, Pride High School (a pseudonym), and my ten co-researchers. It is in this chapter that my co-researchers are introduced. Their pseudonyms and profiles are presented. Information concerning methodological procedures, data collection, instruments and measures, and data analysis is provided as well. Following analysis, there is a first look at the themes that were revealed from the data. A section on ethical considerations and unforeseen methodological issues wraps up this chapter.

In Chapter Six, I present the results of the study. Using Braun & Clarke's (2006) six phases of reflective thematic analysis, I describe the four major themes discerned through analysis of all the data collected and thematized said data as a whole—using exemplars from individual interviews, YPAR discussions, and "I Am" poems. Consistencies as well as inconsistencies are discussed.

Chapters Seven, Eight, Nine and Ten are all Autobiographical Interludes within the Results Chapter. Each interlude serves as a precursor for the theme discussion that follows. The intermissions are in relation to the findings. Chapter Seven, entitled "REFLECTION #1" is a copy of a memo written after a night of analyzing data. Chapter Eight, entitled "WHY AREN'T THEY ANGRY?!" offers my feelings about my co-researchers accepting blame for SSSV that has happened to them. The entirety of this interlude was written in real time. It was typed with no edits, as to help the reader understand my mindset at the time. Chapter Nine, entitled "REFLECTION #2" offers another peak into my memo notebook. This brief interlude touches on the faith my co-researchers had concerning the social action plan. Chapter Ten, entitled "LOOK FOR THE HELPERS", I juxtapose a Mister Rogers quote to the helpers I have identified throughout my years at Pride High School.

Chapter Eleven provides synthetic discussion and implications of the research. This chapter starts with a summary of the research study and the theoretical framework that guided the work. Each theme is presented again, however this time extant research is presented along with the study findings. They are discussed in relation to each other. Next, is a section on researcher positionality and reflexivity, in which I critique the ways in which my identities showed up in this work. Recommendations and suggestions for

future research round out this chapter. The dissertation ends with a conclusion section that brings the work full circle.

# CHAPTER TWO

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INTERLUDE[21]

### A DAY IN THE LIFE

**6:57 AM.**

I pull into the teachers parking lot and find my way to my usual spot. At this time of morning, I can have my choice in spaces, but I never look anywhere else. While collecting my bags from the passenger seat and my keys from the glove compartment, I find myself people watching. From my coveted parking space, I can watch the children make their way to the building; a sea of khaki bottoms with blue jeans and a school sanctioned sweatsuit scattered within. The outliers venture from the pack relatively quickly since they must now devise a plan to sneak into the building. Passing through the parking lot, I find myself crossing paths with the risktakers. I hit a left towards the front entrance. They hit a sharp right to a locked side door. Moments later, the door opens, and they scurry inside. Despite this being a mandatory uniform school, I am confident they will make it through the day without any issues, uniform policy is only enforced when it's convenient—and that's only when visitors are coming.

**1st Block**

I make my way towards the resource center where I am greeted by my usual helpers. As full-time dual enrollment students, their only classes are those from a nearby college. With COVID-19 still a very real threat, and all their classes online, I wonder why they come to school at all. I'm grateful though. What was initially anger because the school deceived them so that they wouldn't graduate early (something about more scholarship money for the school to count), has now been replaced with altruism. I don't think I could handle all my many responsibilities without them. Late bell rings. The halls thin as I settle in my office. No sooner than I start check my email am I greeted by three students with passes.

**Me:** Wait, there's a 30-30 rule, why are you out of class?
**Student 1**: Teacher _____ isn't here yet. You know he's always late.
**Me**: Uh… okay. I'll remind you to head back in 20.

Moments later, I am greeted by two more students.

**Me:** Let me guess, teacher is late?

[21] The 30-30 rule is a rule established by administration that students aren't allowed to leave their classroom, with or without a pass, 30 minutes after the class period begins and 30 minutes before the class period ends. Class periods are approximately 90 minutes long.

**Student 2:** No. Teacher _____ isn't here. Substitute wrote me a pass. *Produces pass from jacket pocket*.

**Student 3:** You know my teacher never came back after Christmas break. They just have us in the gym but there's too many classes in there. Coach _____ wrote me a pass.

Halfway through the block a student who is known for skipping strolls in the center in tights, a sweatshirt, and crocs.

**Me:** Oh, I know they didn't let you in like that.
**Student** 4: No, I snuck in the back. The AP saw me though. He just told me to change my shoes.
**Me:** Wow. Okay, go to class.
**Student:** Already did. Teacher _____ doesn't like me, so when I asked to come down here, he gave me my work and let me come down.
**Me:** Pass?
**Student:** He said he would text you.

As if on cue, my phone vibrates in my slacks pocket, confirming the message from her teacher I allow her to stay.

I look around my office. *How am I out of the classroom and still manage to have a class?*

**2nd Block**

A lull in visitors allows me to get some work done. As the period comes to a close, my office phone rings.

**Me:** Good Morning, Ms. Jones' office.
**Testing Chair**: Ms. Jones, I need you to be a roving proctor.
**Me:** Okay, when?
**TC:** Now. Room 2055 needs to be relived and then 2057.
**Me:** Umm… I have kids in my office. Can this wait until they switch classes?
**TC:** (exasperated sigh) Sure. Just get there ASAP.
Phone clicks.

Within 15 minutes, the center is locked up, and I am on my way to Room 2055. Proctor 1 spots me turn the corner and ushers me in hurriedly. I can tell she has been waiting for a while. Sophomores are testing… again. The actions within the room are split: half the students are tapping away at their laptop, half are unengaged doing everything but the test, but all of them are over it. You can see it in their eyes. I am only able to circulate the room once before Proctor 1 returns. I exit and cross the hall and turn right. I catch a glimpse of the ceiling and let out an audible sigh. *Guess they haven't fixed the black mold*

*problem in this hallway* I utter to myself. I knock on the door of room 2057. Proctor 2 exits with a maskless student in tow.

**Proctor:** Hey, I don't know what to do with this kid. He has a bad cough and he's doing it often. He might need to take the test another day. And, since he doesn't have a mask, other students are getting worried.

**Me:** Uhh….

**Proctor:** Oh, and half my laptops are dead, and they aren't charging. What should I do?

**Me:** Uh…. Let me go ask the testing chair.

I climb the stairs to the testing hub, formerly known as a deserted library, two at a time. As I reach her door, I overhear Proctor 2 relaying her grievances. Testing chair finishes the call, looks around her office, moves towards and unmarked box, reaches in and hands me two masks. I stare blankly. As if reading my mind, she responds *that's all I can do.*

**3rd Block**

As we get closer to lunch, I get an uneasy feeling. There are a lot of students in the hallways. Well, there are always students in the hallways, but this is more than normal. My intuition proves right as a text comes through from a teacher group chat.

HEADS UP! STUDENTS ARE WALKING OUT.

I rush from my desk and head to the entrance. To my surprise, a sea of students, pass the peephole of the center. I step outside and investigate. Hundreds of students are spilling out of their classrooms, coming down each set of stairs and crossing the courtyard heading towards the front entrance. Eager to see how this plays out, I walk toward the entrance. Each administrator is standing outside with a confused look on their face. It's obvious they were caught by surprise as well. Unwilling to cause a scene by locking them in, the gates are opened and students file into the street towards the direction of the closest housing projects. Teachers are encouraged to walk with their students and backup police are called. I quickly collect my phone, lock the center, and join the movement.

School resources officers have the major street near the school blocked off by the time we pull up. From the current vantage point, I could see that the caravan has stopped at the home of one of our students who, along with one other student, was murdered just days before. Students with signs are on the roof of the home of the mother of one of the slain teens. I continue forward, as I have yet to pay my respects to the mother.

For 20 glorious and powerful minutes, the organizers proceed to present the student's mom with a bouquet of flowers. The leader hugged the mother, and,

in that instant, you can see the mother breakdown. I look away as water forms in my eyes.

## Lunch

**Last Block**

Dismissal is near, and yet, the center is bustling. Today, the results from the school day SAT were released. If a student has been unsuccessful at passing the state standardized exam at least four times, then the school day SAT can be used as a concordant score, and they would be eligible for graduation. They need to earn a score of 480, a jump from last year's score of 440. A 480 would make them eligible to walk across the stage on graduation day. A 480 would take them out of the remedial English class they were forced to take at the start of the school year and open their schedule for an elective they actually want.
A 480 would be the difference between applying for college and applying for a minimum wage job.
And yet, as I look around, there are only a hand full of cheerful faces. Having been made privy of our numbers, I know that less than 20% of the 200 students who needed it, earned that 480.

My heart breaks as I look on at a group of girls who, one by one, scanned their results and quickly closed them—no smile in sight. I turn my head in the direction of one of our charismatic football players, only to catch the tail end of him rushing out of the office, his results balled up on the floor near where he once sat. Before I could retrieve his results, I am accosted by a student pushing her 490 in my face. This score meant that she would be the first in her family to graduate from high school. I had never seen that student smile that hard. Her shoulders looked lighter; almost as if she put down the weight of her family's legacy that had been carrying around since she took the exam.

The joy I share with the student is short lived, however. Given the time, student after student enters the center hopeful, and student after student would leave humbled, with their head bowed. Soon, my words of encouragement don't sound so convincing. I can no longer tell if I am trying to convince them that they have more time or if I'm trying to convince myself.

I step in my office to take a moment to regroup. Just outside my door I overhear the voice of a sweet student who frequents the center. In a conversation with what I can only assume is her partner in crime, she loudly proclaims that her scores don't matter and that she has a good job making good money as a manager at Subway. Her companion halfheartedly agrees as they both let out a forced chuckle and walk away. I look up at my water-

stained ceiling as I blink back more tears desperately trying to escape my eyelids. *2:20. Just gotta make it until dismissal,* I remind myself.

***

Slow violence looks a bunch of different ways, but at any rate the damage is still widespread. That's the thing about slow violence, while slow burning, it produces a devastation that spares no one. Sometimes it's the "low" student who is affected; the one who can't pass a test because they didn't have a teacher all year and ends up not being able to graduate. Sometimes it's the "average" student with all the potential whose life is cut short drastically by gun violence. And sometimes, it's the star pupil. It's the student that was labeled gifted their whole life and year after year allowed to slack off. The student that was able to get so comfortable that they were allowed to miss six weeks of Pre-Calculus and not only avoid reprimanding but given a perfect "A" by the teacher because he feared the retribution from the school for being the one "to mess up" her GPA. The student that, upon transferring to a rigorous new school, was given AP Calculus, and discovered that she had no foundational knowledge. The student that struggled day after day, test after test, and was told—by teachers and classmates alike—that if she were smart, she would get it. The student that had internalized the belief that the "F" on her report card was the scarlet letter that sealed her fate. The student that was convinced she wasn't going to get accepted to college and attempted suicide.

Sometimes the effects of slow violence look like my students.

But sometimes, it looks like me.

Schools dismissed.

Figure 1.1. *A Day in The Life*

# CHAPTER THREE

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the course of writing this chapter, a local prosecutor in Orlando filed a motion to clear the names of four young Black men who were falsely accused of raping a white woman over 70 years ago. In July of 1949, Charles Greenlee, Walter Irvin, Samuel Shepherd, and Ernest Thomas were accused of kidnapping and raping Norma Padgett and assaulting her husband (Lawson et. al., 1986). Greenlee, Irvin[22] and Shepherd were rounded up just hours later and charged, imprisoned, and beaten in the basement of the local jail until they confessed, despite insisting their innocence for hours prior to the merciless beatings. Shepherd's home was also burned to the ground by an angry mob of white men (Stewart, 2019). Thomas, aware of the racial climate of the time, ran away, only to be killed "after being hunted for more than 30 hours through at least 25 miles of swampland in Madison Country by an armed, deputized posse of approximately 1,000 men with bloodhounds" (Groveland Four, 2017, para 7). Despite multiple trials and national outrage, Greenlee and Irvin spent most of their lives in prison, only to pass away within years of their release. Shepherd would not survive the 1951 appeal as he was killed by Sheriff McCall during transport back to jail after a day in court. Irvin would survive only by playing dead (Groveland Four, 2017). All four men died before they were cleared.

This is just one example of the impact of slow violence, specifically, the perpetuation of the image of the Black rapist and the 'selective acknowledgement' of

[22] Despite the beatings, Irvin refused to confess to the crimes. This resistance was exemplified by Irvin on several occasions, including his retrial (Schroeder, 1996).

Black accused/white victim rape (Lawson et. al., 1986; Wriggins, 1983). Understanding that slow violence is almost always intertwined with and bears great resemblance to racism in the United States is key to understanding how slow violence can persist. This chapter will provide an overview of this study's theoretical frameworks. This chapter will also explore different aspects of society where the generational effects of slow violence are now becoming more apparent, and the impact slow violence has on the meaning making process as seen in previous studies.

The literature review is organized into six sections. The first section explains the theoretical frameworks that guide this study and the justification for each. The second section offers a deeper understanding of slow violence as a concept and includes studies investigating the historical aspects and current state of several social sectors where the effects of slow violence have become more explicit. Section three focuses on the slow violence within the educational space. It will provide a review of current literature and examine studies surrounding seven specific SSSV acts. Section four covers meaning making and discusses how it relates to slow violence. Studies included in this section explore the impact of failing to make meaning of traumatic events like slow violence acts. Section five includes studies highlighting agency, which in collaboration with collective action could counter slow violence, specifically SSSV acts. Sections one through five also discuss gaps in the current literature and how this study contributes to the field. The sixth and final section of this chapter summarizes the literature review and situates this study in the field

## Theoretical Framework

To investigate slow violence in schools, this study includes alumni from a low-income, majority minority high school. These Black and Latinx youth collaborated with me to identify SSSV acts they experienced and create a social action project to enact change. Because SSSV doesn't occur in vacuum, there was a need for us to explore power structures that allowed these acts of oppression to persist. The present study is, therefore, guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and desire-based research, theoretical frameworks that focus on exposing white supremacy and eliminating it from the marginalized communities it is often un/intentionally ascribed to.

Begun as an analytical framework in the legal profession in the early 1970s, CRT quickly transformed into a multidisciplinary approach that seeks to study and transform the "relationship between race, racism and power" (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017, p. 3). Today, CRT uses race as an analytical instrument "through which to examine and challenge power structures embedded and systemic in U.S. law, institutions, and public policy that marginalizes voices of racial minorities and lead to unequal treatment" (Mack, 2021, as cited in Kaplan & Owings, 2021, p. 3). Being both critical and redemptive in nature, "CRT is a gasp of emancipatory hope that law can serve liberation rather than domination" (Wing, 2003, p. 5).

While there is some debate about primary tenets of CRT, Solórzano (1997) discerns five primary characteristics that inhere in CRT: (1) belief that racism is normal or ordinary, not aberrant, in US society, (2) interest convergence or material determinism, (3) race as a social construction, (4) intersectionality and anti-essentialism, and (5) voice or counter-narrative/counterstorytelling.

**Belief that racism is normal or ordinary, not aberrant in US society:**

Arguably the most important tenet of CRT is the understanding that racism is a constant and normal function of life in the United States. Racism operates at systemic and institutional levels, not solely as individual acts, which purposefully perpetuates racial inequality. Gloria Ladson-Billings, an influential figure in CRT in education explains that "racism operates much more widely, often through the routine, mundane activities and assumptions that are unquestioned by most practitioners and policymakers" (as cited in Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009). The push toward a colorblind position "allows many to see racial discrimination as a collection of individual prejudices rather than officially approved public policies that structurally disadvantage people of color" (Kaplan & Owings, 2021, p. 4). Dismissal of the systemic nature of racism is used by critics of CRT to label people of color working to end racism irrational and to portray those efforts as "reverse" racism (Lopez, 2003).

**Interest convergence or material determinism:** Historically, white Americans have been willing to sacrifice the happiness, lives, and freedom of Black folx and that is being sustained by our current political, economic, and legal structures. The second theme of CRT is grounded in the belief that progressive change will only occur when the interests of those in power and the interests of those being oppressed align. "Because racism advances the interests of both white elites materially and working-class whites psychically, large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it" (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017, p. 9). Late CRT founder, Derrick Bell (1980), was passionate about this to the extent that he argued that Brown v. Board of Education was the result of elite white self-interest as opposed to the desire to help Black youth achieve equitable education.

**Race as a social construction:** This tenant holds true to the understanding that biological races are merely the result of social thought and not of science. They have been created to privilege some races over others and our legal system has bought into and built on that foundation. Many researchers have confirmed this notion (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017; Pollock, 2008; Watkins, 2001). Watkins (2001) clarifies that "scientifically rendering dark people as inferior helped justify and rationalize colonial plunder" (p. 24). CRT is especially concerned with illuminating how societies, choose to ignore the historical production of "race," which perpetuates racial hierarchies and the various inequities that derive from them.

**Intersectionality or anti-essentialism:** CRT's focus is demolishing racial inequality, but that doesn't mean the theorists working within the concept aren't working to demystify other related ideals. No person represents one solitary identity: "Intersectionality… speaks to an understanding of the complex and multiple ways in which various systems of subordination can come together at the same time" (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011, p. 3). Every aspect of our identity factors into the work we do, the research we value/uplift and the causes with take up. Creator of the term, Kimberlé Crenshaw (2015), describes intersectionality as "a way of thinking about identity and it's relationships to power… the term brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them" (para 5). In contrast, essentialism is the conviction that all people who are purposefully positioned within the same group reason, act, and consider all the same things in the same manner/fashion (Ladson-Billings, 2013). CRT scholarship is, therefore, anti-essentialist. This overgeneralization of a group, with no consideration given to the individual life

experiences of those within the group, gives rise to problematic situations such as stereotyping and the more perverse stereotype threat.

**Voice or counter-narrative/counterstorytelling:** Storytelling is pivotal to CRT. According to several critical race theorists, storytelling has always been a cherished way for the oppressed to have their voice be heard. Delgado (1989), for example, explains that "stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset-the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place" (p. 2413). Ladson-Billings (1996) further explains that "the use of voice or 'naming your reality' is a way that CRT links form and substance in scholarship" (p. 13). Counterstories, as an aspect of storytelling, are just as important and effective at building consensus as their counterpart. Some might argue that counterstorytelling is all about learning to listen to the stories of others and "finding ways to make those stories matter" (Bernal, 2002, p. 116). Others believe they hold the ability to tell a story from a different vantage point as a defense strategy and a way to "unmoor people from received truths so that they might consider alternatives" (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 42). Stories, therefore, serve a powerful function for minorities: they allow us the opportunity to be heard and name our experiences.

**Desire-based/centered[23] Framework**: The other framework that guided this investigation is desire-based research. Historically, research on marginalized communities like those in this study has been damage centered. Damage-centered research, as defined by Tuck (2009) is "research that operates, even benevolently, from a

[23] In the research the terms "desire-based" and "desire-centered" are used interchangeable and will be used as such in this paper.

theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation" (p. 413). Damage-centered research often operates from a deficit-model and uses historic colonization and oppression to justify the subpar conditions of the researched population. Despite good faith intentions, damage centered research creates unreasonable and false narratives that define an entire community by the suppression they have been subjected to. In contrast, desire centered research seeks to uplift the complexities present in all individuals and communities as Tuck and Yang (2014) explain: "Desire-centered research does not deny the experiences of tragedy, trauma, and pain, but positions the knowing derived from such experiences as wise" (p. 231). Desire narratives demonstrate survivance.[24] Similar to counterstories, survivance stories "aim to disrupt, decenter and destabilize 'master narratives'" (Sabzalian, 2019, p. 5). Survivance storytelling is writing back. Damage narratives are the stories that told *about* the oppressed, whereas desire narratives are told *by* the oppressed.

## Slow Violence

Slow violence, for the purposes of this study, consists of 'insignificant' acts of oppression that when compounded create a generational effect. Though slow violence is a relatively new concept, which dates to 2009, versions of it date back to 1967 with Churchman's comments of Rittel's seminar on the distinction between social and scientific or technical problems (Skaburskis, 2008). This exchange would later spark

[24] Survivance, a term coined by Gerald Vizenor, is a combination of survival and resistance. Survivance stories are "renunciations od dominance, tragedy, and victimry…. Survivance is resisting those marginalizing, colonial narratives and policies so… knowledge and lifeways may come into the present with new life and new commitment to that survival" (King et al., 2015, p. 7).

Rittel and Webber's (1973) now-famous seminal work on wicked problems (Skaburskis, 2008). Categorizing social problems as wicked problems, Rittel and Webber argued:

> …that social problems could no longer be addressed by assuming, as science does, that they are 'tame' or 'benign', or definable, separable, and solvable, and thus able to be characterized, analyzed and planned for by adopting a rational systems perspective. Wicked problems, which include 'nearly all public policy issues' are indeed the opposite. They are 'ill-defined' and 'malignant'. They cannot be 'solved' but are reliant instead upon 'elusive political judgement for resolution… over and over again' (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 160 as cited in Crowley & Head, 2017, p. 541).

Characteristics attributed to wicked problems such as being unique, without a definitive formulation, and being considered a symptom of another problem set the groundwork for Nixon's (2009) conceptualization of slow violence.

Nixon (2009) offered slow violence as a possible explanation for "novel forms of biological citizenship, as in the long aftermaths of 1984 Bhopal disaster and the 1986 Chernobyl explosion" (Nixon, 2009, p. 445) [25]. Due to its proximity to Western Europe, Chernobyl received more attention. "We" perceived the nuclear accident as a transnational threat that mirrors the dangerous risk communism poses to the West. Conversely, Bhopal, given its lack of connection to the anticommunism/ communism plotline pushed forth by leaders like Regan, was easier for "us" to ignore despite the

[25] Huge chemical poisoning in India

impact being greater than that of Chernobyl (Nixon, 2009). Using the reactions to both incidents as a backdrop, Nixon (2011) argued that slow violence is allowed to persist because of four key factors: time, impact, survivors, and witnesses.

A major aspect of slow violence is the disproportionate power given to spectacular time versus unspectacular time (Nixon, 2009). Instant spectacle and special effects have long captured and maintained the attention of the masses through various forms of media: “Falling bodies, burning towers, exploding heads, avalanches, volcanoes, and tsunamis have a visceral, eye-catching and page turning power that tales of slow violence, unfolding over years, decades, even centuries, cannot match” (Nixon, 2011, p. 3). In contrast, slow violence, with its incremental, accretive—yet cataclysmic—nature fails to gain or maintain the attention of the mass public.

The delayed effects of slow violence pose another challenge. Nixon (2011) explains, “in this cultural milieu of digitally speeded up time, and foreshortened narrative, the intergenerational aftermath becomes a harder sell” (p. 13). The consequences of slow violence could range from “cellular to transnational and… may stretch beyond the horizon of imaginable time” (Nixon, 2009, p. 445). Uncertain timelines are dizzying to the current generation and are grounds for the casualties incurred to go untallied and unremembered. As a result, securing effective legal and policy measures to prevent a repeated event is not only highly unlikely, but, in this era of volatile electoral change, not a concern of politicians.

Typical violence, as we know it, has an obvious crime and a clear survivor. This is not the case with slow violence. What counts as a crime is largely dependent on the accuser and widely subjective. Nixon (2011) writes:

> The representational bias against slow violence has… a critically dangerous impact on what counts as a causality in the first place. Causalities of slow violence—human and environmental—are the casualties most likely not to be seen, not to be counted… light-weight, disposal casualties… (Nixon, 2011, p. 13).
>
> The poor, racialized minorities, the unhoused, the differently abled and anyone else who inhabits the social margins are often those most affected by slow violence. …for it is those people lacking resources who are the principal casualties of slow violence. Their unseen poverty is compounded by the invisibility of the slow violence that permeates so many of their lives. (Nixon, 2011, p. 4)

Being a member of this population not only renders their victimhood lesser than, but it also questions if their pain would be remembered at all. Nixon (2009) clarifies:

> Such people, above all the illiterate poor, are thrust into a labyrinth of self-fashioning as they seek to fit their bodily stories to the story lines that dangle hope of recognition, possibly through elusively, even recompense. In so doing, the poor face the double challenge of invisibility and amnesia: numerically they may constitute the majority, but they remain on the margins in terms of visibility and official memory… whereby a calamity is incorporated into history and rendered forgettably ordinary precisely because the burden of risk falls unequally on the unsheltered poor. (Davis, 1995 as quoted in Nixon, 2009, p. 461)

Discrimination is not new but in the case of slow violence, it is made even more apparent that the subaltern society are disproportionately vulnerable to disaster.

> Prejudice is seen when determining the survivor as well as witnesses to the crime. Contests over what counts as violence are intimately entangled with conflicts over who bears the social authority of witness, which entails much more than simply seeing or not seeing… the story is more likely to be buried, particularly if it's relayed by people whose witnessing authority is culturally discounted." (Nixon, 2011, p. 16)

It's not enough to be impacted, for slow violence, you must have a witness deemed credible enough to vouch and the credibility can only be secured through one's skin color or one's wallet.

Nixon's (2011) claim of slow violence against the environment has sparked research across the world echoing his sentiments. To uplift the stories of those impacted by toxic communities, Singer (2011) uses the words from the residents of Donaldsonville in the Ascension Parish[26] to describe their experience. Using the data from the interviews of 31 local residents, Singer (2011) explains that the awareness of the unhealthy living conditions combined with the lack of action from the government created what can only be described as "toxic frustration" amongst the citizens. Singer (2011) expounds on toxic frustration:

[26] At the time of the study, Ascension Parish was part of a larger area known as "Chemical Corridor" or "Cancer Alley". The area along the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge (approximately 85 miles long), was home to 14 major manufacturing companies. Donaldsonville, located at the intersection between two traversable waterways, was surrounded by sugar cane fields and chemical manufacturing plants. The town's population was approximately "70 percent African American, [where] 73 percent of residents have no more than a high school diploma, the median household income is under $25,000.00… and about one third of the town's families live below the poverty line" (Singer, 2011, p. 142). No data has been found to argue that any of this information has changed.

> Individuals who experience toxic frustration feel reasonably certain that the environment is unhealthy, point to the huge manufacturing plants and agribusinesses around them as the primary causes of their environmental suffering, but also believes there is not much they can do about it given their socioeconomic status and the unresponsiveness of the local or state government. (p. 158)

The sense of awareness and powerlessness described by Singer (2011) was not nuanced, as similar inactions were taken by the people of the St. James Parish. While exploring the interaction between time and living in a toxic space, Davies (2018), describes the impact slow violence, in the form of environmental racism, has on the residents of the St. James Parish in Louisiana. Ethnographic research and interviews allowed Davies (2018) to explain that in addition to feeling hopeless to preventing or mitigating the toxic environment, community members of St. James had the added bonus of watching the changes occur before their eyes. Despite the obvious consequences surrounding this, Davies (2018) argues that slow responses humanize the threats and serve as proof that can contribute to the radical change.

Radical change that was noted by Shamasunder et al. (2020) when chronicling South Los Angeles's triumph over the oil drilling industry. Shamasunder et al. (2020) utilized a combination of community organizing via health surveys and low-cost exposure sensors to paint a picture[27] that mandated the closing of the Jefferson oil field,

[27] The picture painted revealed that almost 50% of the residents living within 1500 feet of active oil development didn't know of its existence due to the extent Los Angele soil industry goes to limit visibility (signs of no trespassing, tall walls, landscaping surrounding all sides, etc.). Survey data also shows that odors from the oil drilling sites prevents daily activities for more than 43% of the sample population and 27% experience asthma symptoms (such as coughing or wheezing) daily. Exposure monitors show elevated

the cleaning of the drill site post closure and replacing it with a park, a library, or something else that will benefit the community. Similar community organizing efforts were reported as Rhodes et al. (2020) describes the battle between the community and North Carolina's hog industry.[28] The groundbreaking study of Community-driven participatory research, which comprised over 100 community members from over 15 communities collectively participating in a two-week sampling effort, a trailer of monitors and tracking devices[29] and semi-structured interviews was enough for a Title VI complaint to be filed against the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality. Rhodes et al. (2020) elucidate the significance of such a complaint:

> The case… is only the second time in the history of the US Environmental Protection Agency where disproportionate impact was confirmed and a settlement agreement was signed, proving discriminatory practices by the government to

methane levels lasting "approximately 10 minutes to up to 3 hours" in addition to "differences in methane between the two sites greater than 1.0ppm… well above the calibration site" (Shamasunder et al., 2020, p. 93).

[28] Duplin and Sampson counties, both located in North Carolina, have the highest density of hogs in the United States. Hog production is a multi-billion-dollar industry and critical to the economy and culture of North Carolina. In order to keep up with need and keep costs low, industry-owned hogs are raised in high-density confinement. According to Rhodes et al. (2020):

> To reduce accumulation of harmful gases from hog excrements as well as animal overheating, barns are often ventilated by exhaust fans or rooftop chimneys. Barn floors consist of tightly spaced metal slates for drainage of hog waste, which is then funneled to uncovered, outdoor cesspools called 'lagoons'… The purpose of lagoons is to treat waste via anaerobic decomposition, however, these lagoons cannot effectively contain and treat the waste without stringent maintenance… hog waste is a major source of greenhouse gases, pathogenic microbes, and nutrient population… uncovered lagoons contain millions of gallons of waste and are vulnerable to overflow during heavy rain events, potentially contaminating nearby environments, as well as ground and surface water (p. 104).

[29] Through air monitors and weather tracking, real-time monitoring was conducted. Through this, an assessment of environmental factors and pollutants were collected such as "particulate matter, hydrogen sulfide, temperature wind speed, humidity and rainfall" (Rhodes et al., 2020, p. 107).

benefit industry. (Julius L. Chambers Center for Civil Rights, 2018 as cited in Rhodes et al., 2020).

All the studies incorporated data from the community, demonstrating the importance of listening to those who are on the ground experiencing the slow violence firsthand. Community organizing efforts and participatory research not only uplifted the voices of the residents, but in some cases, it helped to stimulate the change they wished to see. Unfortunately, none of these cases acknowledge slow violence in any context outside of environmental degradation. Just as it mutated from wicked problems, the concept of slow violence is no longer beholden to what's going on outside.

Researchers across disciplines like Ward (2015) and others have started to apply the concept of slow violence to other types of harm. In an effort to investigate perpetration of racial violence by states and institutions, Ward (2015) describes how much of the violence was out in the open, made possible by white supremist ideology coupled with white domination of the parental state, but almost as much of these crimes were equipped with the spectacle-deficient characteristic that makes them so easy to miss; and those are the instances most likely to stick with the child. Through a historical analysis, Ward (2015) explains that ill-treatment at the hands of the juvenile justice system was not only common, but it was also expected. He illuminates:

> We often think of racial violence in terms of dramatic, isolated incidents… but these are part of the story, a proportionally smaller part. Most common to Jim Crow juvenile justice was the structural violence of systematic malign neglect, a slow violence of individual and group underdevelopment. (Ward, 2015, p. 304)

While the acts may be ‘invisible’, the effects are not only real, but will likely dictate how the survivor proceeds in the future. This is found to be a common thread among slow violence studies with Jones (2019) indicating very similar outcomes. Jones (2019) uses racial surveillance in the food landscape to demonstrate the connection between slow violence and food geographies:

> Black food geographies are geographies of (emotional) slow violence and resilience. Material examples include contamination of soil, air, and water resources required for food production…boutique or ‘sustainable’ food development that promotes spatial injustice in the form of gentrification, forced migration and/or displacement and the systemic lack of fresh food retailers where Black, Latinx, and low-income populations reside. Each of these carry structural social, economic and environmental implications. Their impact… are often delayed and dispersed. They compromise food security and food sovereignty. (p. 1082)

Through a series of testimonials that were drawn from the media, the author’s personal experience and interviews, Jones (2019) explores the trauma that comes along with being a survivor of slow violence and the active resistance/performative survival that one can undertake as strategy of coping.

Both studies explored slow violence in the context of their chosen area. Whether it be slow violence via the harsh and disproportionate consequences for Black juveniles within the carceral system, or through the surveillance of Black and Latinx bodies when navigating Black food geographies, both studies affirm the representational challenge that

slow violence presents. The testimonies presented by Jones (2019) were especially strong because they allowed room for the participant to uphold certain aspects of slow violence while challenging others. People are not a monolith and the nuanced experiences helped to drive that home about slow violence as well. Neither of these studies, however, discussed slow violence in the educational space, nor did they seek out youth as participants, despite one of the studies focusing entirely on the mistreatment of Black youth. Both studies presented meaning making and internalization of slow violence, but the moment was sacrificed by both authors in exchange for further grounding of their respective research areas within slow violence literature.

## School Specific Slow Violence (SSSV)

The term slow violence has been around just over a decade, but precepts of slow violence related to the school extends to the beginning of mass public education. This research contributes to the field of educational research by applying the concept of slow violence to education. Based on the purposes of this study, my interaction with the relevant literature, and my discussions with my co-researchers, I focus on the impact of SSSV.

### Foundation: Location, Socioeconomic Status and Building Upkeep

A review of the literature concludes that a school's location has some impact on the academic achievement of the student, particularly if the student is not white (Fernandez, 1993; Kozol, 1991; Marklund,1969; Poverty & Race Research Action Council, 2020; Reardon, 2016; Rooks, 2017). The foundational assumption in much of the research is that predominately Black/predominately Latinx/predominately

Indigenous/poor/rural neighborhoods have less to offer compared to their white/ affluent/suburban counterparts. This disparity is not accidental.

After the Civil War, the country entered a period of Black liberation known as Reconstruction. This time would come to an end when, to garner the South's Democratic support, the Republicans withdrew the federal troops who were protecting Blacks in the South (Rothstein, 2017). Using the segregation laws known as Jim Crow as justification, local public officials began the process of pushing Black people from towns with space to small, cramped areas, adopting zoning rules that required separate living areas for Black and white folx, and permitting industry and businesses that contributed to degrading Black neighborhoods into slums[30] (Rothstein, 2017). The development of the Home Owner's Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) furthered this notion[31] and reinforced racial segregation. FHA, being especially concerned about school desegregation, "warned that if children are compelled to attend school where the majority…represent a far lower level or society or an incompatible racial element, the neighborhood under consideration will prove far less stable and desirable that if this

[30] "Not only were these neighborhoods zoned to permit industry, even polluting industry, but the plan commission permitted taverns, liquor stores, nightclubs, and houses of prostitution to open in African American neighborhoods but prohibited these as zoning violations in neighborhoods where whites lived" (Rothstein, 2017, p. 50).

[31] In an effort to save homeowners from defaulting HOLC was created and "it purchased existing… and issued new mortgages with repayment schedules for 15 to 25 years" (Rothstein, 2017, p. 63). In order to gauge the risk of the borrower, color-coded maps were created with the safest neighborhoods colored green (meaning no Black people) and the riskiest colored red (meaning Black people lived there). FHA, created to solve the issues of middle-class renters not being able to buy homes, created appraisal standards that included a whites-only requirement, thereby solidifying racial segregation within the housing market. (Rothstein, 2017). Later, FHA's creation of contract sales—agreements that allowed the borrower to own the property after 15-20 years pending no late payments the entire time—prevented Blacks from leaving deteriorating neighborhoods for fear of losing everything they invested to date and few alternatives (Rothstein, 2017).

condition did not exist" (Rothstein, 2017, p. 66). Schools designated for Black students were placed in the middle of the designated Black areas with no transportation for students who did not live in said area. Those schools were often erected near toxic waste or industry, overcrowded, allotted very little money for upkeep, and were the first on the chopping block when the space was needed (Rothstein, 2017).

The effects of *de facto* segregation and redlining continue to impact housing, employment, and schools. In a study linking segregation and academic achievement, Reardon (2016) finds clear evidence to determine that segregation, specifically the disparity in school poverty rates between schools with majority white students and those with majority Black students, is the most powerful correlate of academic achievement gaps. Using state accountability test scores, Reardon (2016) justifies the strong correlation by suggesting that poverty operates as a proxy for overall school quality:

> High-poverty schools may have fewer resources, a harder time attracting and retaining skilled teachers, more violence and disruption, and poorer facilities. Additionally, the parents of students in such schools generally have fewer resources—economic, social, and political—that can be used to benefit their children's' schools. (p. 49)

Housing discrimination is directly tied to educational funding. Poor urban neighborhoods and rural areas have fewer resources because school funding is primarily linked to local property taxes. Lower home values, fewer homeowners, and lower income and wealth mean a lot less in terms of funding for the schools. Several studies reach similar conclusions (Berger, 2017; Ravitch, 2013) With data including the student test scores of 495 Chicago public schools, Berger (2017) finds a connection between test scores and

poverty: “Test scores are significantly lower for impoverished schools, indicating that these schools face higher pressure to meet state standards than neighboring schools with students from higher income homes” (p. 213).

There is growing literature that connects poor physical conditions and poor facilities with poorer performance by both teachers and students (Filardo, et al., 2019; Higgins et al., 2005; Schneider, 2002; Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008; Vincent & Filardo, 2008). Vincent and Filardo (2008) sought to link patterns of public school construction investment to equity and growth. Instead, they show inconsistent construction spending per student with predominately and majority minority public schools receiving the least amount of expenditures per student. In Florida, for example, public schools spent $3,325.00 per student in a predominately minority school (schools with almost all minority students), $6,059.00 per student in a majority minority school (schools with most minority students but some White), and $6,142.00 per student at a majority white school (Vincent & Filardo, 2005). In terms of new construction, high income neighborhoods in Florida “received between two and four times more than nearly all other neighborhoods” (Vincent & Filardo, 2005, p. 17) middle income neighborhoods were second highest. Conflicting literature (Stewart, 2008; Bowers & Urick, 2011) finds no direct effect of facility disrepair on student achievement, but those studies do not discount the possibility of a relationship. In fact, Bowers and Urick (2011) conclude that “adequate facilities are most likely necessary for student achievement, but difference in facility maintenance, which is unequally distributed across students and schools, may not be sufficient to move test scores either up or down” (p. 92). While they may not have

been able to detect a relationship, the research clearly demonstrates that poor conditions and a minimal construction budget have a negative effect.

Furthermore, several studies also reveal the negative impact suburbia has on Black and Latinx students (Diamond et al., 2021; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Tyler, 2016). Vouchers to move to or attend school in suburban areas has been suggested by many studies (Chetty et al., 2016; Chetty & Hendren, 2018) and suburban life has been recommended as a way to "reduce the intergenerational persistence of poverty" (Chetty et al., 2016, p. 39) and to increase "children's opportunities for economic mobility" (Chetty et al., 2018, p. 1159). However, the consequences severely outweigh the perceived benefits. Aside from the drastic increase in poor suburban residents (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012; Kneebone & Garr, 2010; Lewis-McCoy, 2014) and the lack of social services/transportation typically available in cities (Murphy & Allard, 2015; Murphy & Wallace, 2010), research on suburban schools has documented racial inequality in several spaces. Tyler (2016) found that despite a small number of participants acknowledging the systemic issues that impact students of color, a larger majority failed to do the same. In fact, out of the 79 individuals from six suburban school districts

> Nearly all of the interview participants conveyed some sense of a deficit perspective [and] belief that students from low-SES families lacked the important, real-world experiences of their higher- SES peers [to which] they frequently attributed to characteristics of the family or home environment (Tyler, 2016, pp. 297-298).

Studies on suburban schools also often find that teachers express negative impressions regarding motivation, values, and discipline among students of low-income and minority identity (Diamond et. al., 2021; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Tyler, 2016). Tyler (2016) explains:

> Alongside negative impressions of low-income and minority neighborhoods, some teachers perceived cultural deficits in their students' communities, particularly deficits in discipline, motivation in school, and proper values. For example, a teacher… referred to the "gang mentality" that their students pick up in their neighborhoods as a major cause of discipline problems and lack of interests in academics. Several teachers and administrators across the sites stated that because their students' home lives were so disordered, the school had to explicitly teach behavior and provide strict discipline. A teacher also encouraged parents to use more prayer, paddling, and spanking for improved disciple, which she felt was important "especially with the broken homes (p. 300).

Research also illuminates the racism and exclusion of working- and middle-class Black students and families (Carter-Andrews, 2012; Posey, 2017), racialized social and academic boundaries of Latinx students (Rodriguez, 2020), limited resources devoted to ELL students (Lowenhaupt, 2016) and microaggressions directed at Asian students (Dhingra, 2020) from "White families and community members who view their presence in suburban spaces as a threat to white status and dominance" (Diamond et al., 2021, p. 251).

## Lack of Resources

Students and teachers in under-resourced schools also face a lack of resources. Once minority students are in the building, they are faced with significant problems due to lack of resources.[32] One of the first studies on resources and student achievement (Coleman et al., 1996), known now as the Coleman Report, discovered "the impact of school resources on student achievement was modest compared to the importance of students' family backgrounds" (Gamoran & Long, 2007, p. 23). Support for no relationship or negative relationship is found in a number of studies over several decades. Hanushek (1981) sought to support the claim that resources and achievement aren't directly related. Based on analysis of their data, which faced severe methodological critique,[33] Hanushek (1981) concluded that there indeed wasn't a relationship—with "higher school expenditures per pupil bear[ing] no visible relationship to higher student performance" (p. 30). While taking great care not to completely deny a relationship, Hanushek (1986, 1989, 1997a, 1997b) continued to produce more literature that demonstrated no correlation between instructional expenditures and achievement, but a strong link between parental effort and achievement (Houtenville & Conway, 2008; Parcel & Dufur, 2001).

[32] The present study defines resources as supplies within the school. This includes, but is not limited to, books, copies, writing instruments, calculators, curriculum, other instructional materials and technology. Teacher expertise, personnel, and other factors relating to teachers are also considered resources, but they will be discussed in greater detail in later sections.

[33] Some of the concerns surrounding Hanushek's findings include selection rules for the studies included, the number of coefficients selected from a particular study, the variability of additional control variables included in each study, estimations that are concerned with only a specific educational input, and more (Diette, 2005).

In contrast, a meta-analysis of 60 primary research studies conducted by Greenwald et al. (1996) found that increased expenditures and other resource indicators were associated with higher achievement. In fact, the relations are "large enough to be educationally important" (Greenwald et al., 1996, p. 384). Gamoran and An (2016) used longitudinal data from Nashville school district for 1998-1999 to 2002-2003 based on approximately 5,200 students in grades 3-8, to confirm "extra resources were a more effective strategy than school choice for elevating the achievement of Black students" (p. 60). Scholars have concluded by explaining that the data could only be used to determine correlation for elementary students, a commonality shared among many other studies (Condron & Roscigno, 2003; Ilon & Normore, 2006).

In addition to the substantial conflicting data that shows positive and negative relationships between resources and achievement, other research lies directly in the middle. Ludwig and Bassi (1999) offer the possible explanation of studies failing to control for omitted variables that correlate with students' learning abilities and protocols/systems that determine how a student is assigned to a school or a particular classroom. Ludwig and Bassi (1999) explain

> Many researchers assume that omitted variables will produce an upward bias in the estimated effects of school resources on student outcomes because more affluent families are likely to choose higher spending districts and family socioeconomic status is positively correlated with student learning…If this were the only source of potential bias, then available studies could be interpreted as upper bound estimates for the effects of school resources on student achievement. Yet, it is also possible that administrators or parents target poorly performing

> schools or students for compensatory resources. In this case, unobserved variables that affect student learning may lead to underestimates of school resource effects. (p. 386)

Controlling for the omitted variables while using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Ludwig and Bassi (1999) determined that the data is up for interpretation depending on the purpose of the governmental policy being created. Card and Kruger (1996, 1998), who also argue that the strength of expectations impacts how the literature is interpreted, point to researchers drawing causal inferences from observational data as another explanation for the uncertainty.

Another source of confusion in the literature is the lack of a consistent definition for "school resources." Teacher quality is included in the laundry list of variables for some studies, while in others, teacher experience and per-pupil expenditures are added. A common variable in most of the research, however, is class size/student-teacher ratios. Ravitch (2013) explains that class size reduction has a positive effect on minority students in early grades and offers more opportunities for "social cooperation, participating in discussion and debate and developing the sort of critical thinking that is increasingly recognized to be essential in college and most careers" (p. 245). Testing their hypothesis that school spending and achievement are related, Wenglinsky (1997) and others (Dee e. al., 2013; Nyhan & Alkadry, 1999) confirm that an increase in funding means smaller class sizes, which subsequently increases student success. Ravitch (2013) similarly concludes: "Children who are in smaller classes in the early grades get higher

test scores and better grades, behave better in school, are more likely to graduate from high school, and are more likely to go to college" (p. 245).[34]

In addition to human resources, other resources are desperately needed as well. Florida, for example, has a Classroom Supply Assistance Program, which provides teachers with an online wallet preloaded with approximately $300.00 dollars, but the qualifications are exclusionary, rigid, and fail to include all personnel. Classroom resources have become so scarce that teachers, including me, have resorted to crowdfunding to get the necessary supplies to adequately educate students. School districts like Miami Dade County Public Schools actually support this rather than fully funding our needs from federal monies. DonorsChoose, the largest known education-focused crowdfunding platform in the country,[35] has seen 80% of the all U.S. public school teachers post a project on the site "resulting in more than 4.3 million individual donors contributing to almost $1 billion to fund teachers' asks" (DonorsChoose, as cited in Wolff & Carlson, 2021, p. 355). Further analysis by Wolff and Carlson (2021) concludes that teachers at schools with high proportions of economically disadvantaged and non-white students are more likely to post projects for supply needs in core areas—

[34] "Longitudinal research shows that the benefits of having smaller classes in elementary last into adulthood" (Ravitch, 2013, p. 245) because it is in these smaller classes that students hone their non-cognitive skills (self-esteem, confidence, motivation, perseverance) that are crucial for success in college, work and later in life (Ravitch, 2013).

[35] Other crowdfunding campaigns and websites include #ClearTheList, a campaign that encourages donors to buy the items on teachers' Amazon wish lists; AdoptAClassroom.org, where funders are connected to individual teachers who need additional materials for their classrooms (Wolff & Carlson, 2021); and classwish.org, where donors can contribute or fund any K-12 school or teacher in the country (Venturini, 2021).

math and language arts—than their affluent and white counterparts who post projects in peripheral areas (like nutrition, music, and art). This suggests that teachers in high poverty, predominately minority areas are submitting projects to offset the gross lack of funding for students' basic needs.[36] Projects submitted in basic areas are less likely to be fully funded, thereby forcing teachers, whose salaries lag behind similarly educated professionals, to buy basic supplies (Morris, 2020; Wolff & Carlson, 2021).

The rapid move to remote instruction wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic further illuminated the gross disparities in access to technology long suffered by impoverished communities. Students from low-income homes and who attend low-income schools are less likely to have the high-speed internet or device needed to continue online instruction (Lee et al., 2021; Stelitano, et al., 2020). In fact, Lee et al., (2021) reported that in one New York City region "as many as 300,000 students did not have internet-connected devices at home" (p. 2). Students at low-income schools are also less likely to have supplemental resources that will aid teachers in providing online instruction as well as the discretionary income to switch to a private school that can better handle the stressors of the pandemic (Diliberti & Kaufman, 2020). Examples of technological struggles can be seen nationally as well as locally. In Miami Dade County, the district partnered with K12, Inc. to manage virtual teaching and learning (Hill, 2020). Within one week, students and teachers encountered connectivity issues, flimsy security, and a platform that was not populated with lessons or as user friendly as it was advertised

[36] Wolff & Carlson (2021) also discovered that the time spent developing and submitting a project on DonorsChoose is time a teacher could have spent preparing to teach. Since this disproportionally concerns teachers of low income and minority students, "…these efforts may also reify existing disparities because teachers in more advantages environs have the luxury of focusing almost exclusively on instruction, rather than procuring materials" (Wolff & Carlson, 2021, p. 366). And the cycle of inequality continues.

(Hill, 2020). The $15.3 million dollar no-bid contract was terminated soon after, which exacerbated the educational the pandemic-related educational crisis for the country's fourth largest district (Hill, 2020).

**Lack of Access and Racialized Tracking**

It's not enough for students to have the supplies they need if they are still excluded from opportunities that would positively impact their educational experience and/or successfully prepare them for post-secondary plans. Starting as early as kindergarten, drastic differences are seen in the way classrooms of lower income students and those of higher income students are run. Engel et al. (2021) explored how kindergartens spent their time and the results suggest that schools serving lower income (SSLI) students devoted more time to core subjects like reading and mathematics (spending more than one-third of the school day) and less time to peripheral subjects like science, art/music, and social emotional learning. They also found that schools serving higher income (SSHI) students spent 44 minutes per day on gross motor skills compared to SSLI students who engaged for 18 minutes per day "with 32% of SSLI observations including no time on gross motor" (Engel et al., 2021, p. 408). SSLI students spent no time in centers, about 33% of the day on noninstructional activities[37] and a large portion of the day as a whole group or engaged in individual seatwork (Engel et al., 2021). The lack of physical activity and lack of agency-building activities in SSLI vs SSHI classrooms was found to be consistent with prior research arguing that non-white students

[37] Noninstructional activities did not include instructional content. Instead, it represents time spent on starting and ending the day, transitioning to specials, lunch, transitions between lessons and one-off event like students standing in a line or sitting in an auditorium waiting (Engel et al., 2021).

have less access to hands-on experiences and center-based instruction than their white counterparts (Bassok et al., 2016; Engel et al., 2016).

The transition to elementary school proves to be just as depressing. Kozol (2005) documents the conditions of a makeshift elementary school, filled with predominately Black and Latinx students, that was housed in a former skating rink and right next to a funeral home. The setup, which included classes of 30-40 students per class, also included no playground or indoor gym of any kind (Kozol, 2005). Kozol (2005) also spoke of inner-city schools that had no library, arts/music programs, or on-campus physician,[38] all of which were present and in abundance at schools in more affluent neighborhoods. Inside the elementary classrooms, Black and Latinx students are reduced to busywork that includes large amounts of coloring. Schmoker (2001) describes his observations,

> Students were not reading, they weren't writing about what they had read, they weren't learning the alphabet or it's corresponding sounds; they weren't learning words or sentences or how to read short texts. They were coloring. Coloring on a scale unimaginable to us before these classroom tours. The crayons were ever-present. Sometimes, students were cutting or building things out of paper (which they had colored) or just talking quietly while sitting at "activity centers" that were presumably for the purpose of promoting reading and writing skills. These centers… they were great for classroom management—and… tragically counterproductive (para 4).

[38] The high school in which I work has not had a librarian since 2016 and no in-house doctor since I have been an educator there (seven years). The library is closed to students unless there is testing.

Haberman (1991) describes a series of teaching acts,[39] a menu of functions for urban teachers, that not only don't work, but would prove to be unacceptable at a school filled with predominately white or affluent students. The atmosphere created by the list of 14 teacher acts (with the exclusion of other acts) is one filled with animosity and boredom that eventually "bubbles up into overt resistance. Teachers burn out because of the emotional and physical energy that they must expend to maintain their authority every hour of every day" (Haberman, 1991, p. 291).

Over the past few decades, students in high-poverty schools have seen a rise in career and technical education (CTE) and school-to-work programs (Kozol, 1991, 2005). Programs that train Black and brown students for entry-level jobs argue that all children should be ready to meet marketplace demands, while also recognizing that the even handedness is in theory only:

> In most suburban schools, the school-to-work idea, if educators even speak of it at all, is little more than seemly decoration on the outer layers of a liberal curriculum. In many urban schools, by contrast, it has come to be the energizing instrument of almost every aspect of education. (Kozol, 2005, p. 99)[40]

As a result, children from urban neighborhoods are forced to apply to middle schools based on career, take career ready courses such as "business math" instead of higher-level

[39] "The teaching acts that constitute the core functions of urban teaching are giving information, asking questions, giving directions, making assignments, monitoring seatwork, reviewing assignments, giving tests, reviewing tests, assigning homework, reviewing homework, settling disputes, punishing noncompliance, marking papers and giving grades" (Haberman, 1991, p. 291).

[40] "Future service workers need a different and, presumably, a lower order of investment than the children destined to be corporate executives, physicians, lawyers, engineers. Future plumbers and future scientists require different schooling—maybe different schools. Segregated education is not necessarily so unattractive by this reasoning" (Kozol, 1991, p. 91).

math needed for college and job-specific classes such as cosmetology that would be viewed as insulting by suburban parents without college being even offered as a possible path (Kozol, 2005).[41] Even here at home the inequity is obvious. The CTE program is in 57 high schools in Miami Dade County; however, certain career pathway clusters like Agriscience, Architecture and Construction, Engineering and Technology, Finance, Information Technology, Transportation, Distribution and Logistics and Law, Public Safety and Security Management are only offered at schools serving primarily white students[42] or in areas with predominately middle- or upper-class constituents (Department of Career & Technical Education Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2021). Schools in poverty-stricken areas have Business Management, Education, Health Science, Hospitality and Tourism and Arts and Communication career pathway clusters (Department of Career & Technical Education Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2021). Almost every urban high school does, however, have the On-the-Job Training (OJT) program (Department of Career & Technical Education Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2021). This allows students the chance to leave school at midday and go to work. Unfortunately, this program is not recognized outside of Florida, so if a student in this course is interested in pursuing college, their options are severely limited.

[41] "The evolution of two parallel curricula, one for urban and one for suburban schools, has also underlined the differences in what is felt to be appropriate to different kinds of children and to socially distinct communities" (Kozol, 1991, p. 92).

[42] In pathways like Finance, Transportation, Distribution and Logistics, Law, Public Safety and Security Management there is one or two low-income schools listed officially; however, proof that these programs are still in existence at those schools is unreliable.

Another issue of SSSV within the educational space is track placement.[43] Track placement, known by some researchers as racialized tracking or second-generation segregation, severely hinders minority students from achieving post-secondary success. Several studies have determined that gifted, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and Dual Enrollment (DE) are all overly assigned to white students compared to their Black and Latinx colleagues (Blau, 2003; Diamond, 2006; Diette, 2005; Gamoran, 1992; Gamoran & Mare, 1989; Lewis & Diamond, 2017; Lucas, 1999; Oakes, 1985; Oakes, 1986; Price, 2021; Redding & Grissom, 2021; Staiger, 2004; Tyson, 2006; Tyson, 2011).[44] In a case study on elementary schools in North Carolina conducted by Tyson (2006), schools with 74% and 87% Black, the gifted programs were 100% and over 50% white respectively. In another study on gifted programs, Redding & Grissom (2021) leveraged data from over 18,000 students to determine that not only are Black and Latinx students still underrepresented in gifted programs, but even once they gain access, the benefits are not equally distributed. These findings amplify "questions raised by other scholars about the capacity of the typical gifted program to support and enrich the increasingly diverse students who receive gifted services" (Redding & Grissom, 2011, p. 539).

[43] This is considered slow violence because it is rooted in other historical problems like the legacy of the old Black and Indian boarding schools which began in Florida.

[44] There are several tracks where Black student are overrepresented: the school to prison nexus and remedial class. "Black males are more likely than any other group to be suspended and expelled from school… Black males are more likely to be classified as mentally retarded or suffering from a learning or emotional disability and places in special education" (Delpit, 2012, p. 15). The student is not only stuck with the label most likely for the rest of their educational career (children who are racial minorities and poor are almost never retested), but any learning difficulty they may have is chalked up to them being "less capable than others" (Delpit, 2012, p. 15).
Discipline will be discussed in later section.

AP enrollment is overall bleak, but the inequity along race and class lines is still apparent. Price (2021) found that 30% of all American students attend a school that offers AP or IB courses, 18% of those students take at least one, but the demographic gap is broad (20% of white students to 11% Black, 13% Native and 15% Latinx). In the findings, Price (2021) also uncovered the inequality around passing the AP exam. About 55% of white students achieve a passing score of 3 or higher, compared to 39% of Latinx and 30% of Native and Black students (Price, 2021). The lack of access seems to be especially clear in mathematics courses. Diette (2005) explored the disparity of resources available across schools, with a specific focus on Algebra 1 offerings. Results reinforce the underrepresentation of minority students and students from low-income households in Algebra 1 programs. Additionally, Diamond (2006) conducted research on a suburban school district where Black students made up 40% of the school population but only 9% of the students in AP calculus. In contrast, white students made up 50% of the student body and 82% of the students in AP calculus (Diamond, 2006). Thus, not only is there an access issue, like in the case of the gifted program, schools seem to be ill-equipped to teach diverse students once they are allowed into these coveted spaces.

Overrepresentation of Black and Latinx students in regular and remedial classes and white students in gifted, honors, AP, IB, and DE courses have translated into those spaces belonging to those racial groups. As Tyson (2011) concludes, “Over time, community members come to generalize the fact that white students are more often in high tracks to those being white tracks, tracks where white students belong and deserve to be” (p. 97).

A troubling consequence of racialized tracking is the domino effect it starts. Success in these sought-after programs[45] increases the likelihood that a student is accepted to a selective college and excels in their post-secondary career. Exclusion from college readiness courses forces minority students to play a losing game of catch up. Carnevale and Strohl (2013) explain, "African-American and Hispanic students not only have less access to post-secondary education in general, but in addition less access to the 468 elite colleges, less access to Bachelor's degrees, and less access to graduate degrees" (p. 29). [46] The benefits of these programs are seen throughout college and afterwards as well. Students who attend selective colleges are more likely to pay less for their education relative to students in community colleges and in less prestigious universities (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010). Students who attend selective colleges are also tracked into better jobs, "professional and private sector managerial careers that bring high earnings, as well as greater autonomy on the job and in society" (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010, p. 79).[47]

[45] Success in these programs looks like passing AP and IB scores (can be used in place of a college class), passing DE course (college credit that is accepted at majority of American colleges and universities), or a bump in the GPA (all these programs come with a significant grade weight). Demonstrated success in any of these programs increases the likelihood of elite college acceptance.

[46] Compared with equally qualified white students.

[47] "Student in less-selective four-year colleges are tracked into the rank and file professions such as K-12 teaching, health care technician jobs, and state and local public administration. Students tracked into the two-year college system become more narrowly skilled workers in technical roles in the middle-range of earnings and autonomy on the job" (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010, p. 79).

## Teacher Mindset

The Coleman Report (1966) was polarizing, not only because it seemingly disproved the notion that more money equals higher achievement,[48] but it introduced the idea that teachers don't really make a difference when it comes to the academic success of students. Research studies like Hanushek (1986), which found no evidence that teachers have a positive effect on student achievement, cemented this ideology. Coupled with the negative representation of Black people in media, television and news, a deep-rooted bias of equating blackness with inferiority in education morphed.

This bias is ever too present in conversations of Black student academic ability. A study by McGrady and Reynolds (2013) determined that white teachers perceive Asian students more positively than white students and Black students more negatively than their white counterparts. Using a national data set of over 15,000 participants, McGrady and Reynolds (2013) discovered that Black students were 17% less likely to be evaluated as attentive by their white teacher and had 23% lower odds "of being rated as using good grammar… [and] clearly organize ideas in their English classes" (p. 13). A similar study produced results that declared that on average, Black Caribbean and Black African students are underassessed relative to their white classmates, while Chinese, Indian, and mixed white colleagues are over assessed (Burgess & Greaves, 2013).[49] Qualitative studies with students as participants verbalized the impact of what many call deficit thinking (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Gorski, 2011; Valencia, 2010). A study exploring

[48] A claim that has since been disproven itself. Refer to the section on resources.

[49] The over assessment of other non-white ethnic groups eliminated the idea of blanketed racism against all non-white groups.

teacher expectations that interviewed 48 Black students reveal that students were very aware of what their white teachers thought of them. Pringle et al. (2010) conclude: "Generally speaking, the students perceived that teachers knew who was going to graduate [from high school], but the ones that they were not sure of, they did not encourage them or pull them to the side to help them" (p. 36). As Delpit (2012) communicates observations from her visits to local inner-city schools, she recalls blatant examples of teachers allowing Black students to operate well below their potential:

> In a classroom of over-age high schoolers who had recently switched to a new schedule, the teacher told me that the periods were too long, and the students got tired, so she allowed them to take naps if they chose to take a break from doing their assigned seat work … In a Florida high school that has been designated as "failing" for several years in a row, the students were primarily low-income Haitian immigrants, many of whom were from Haitian Creole-speaking families. Many of those teaching in this school were substitutes or Spanish-speaking new immigrants… A district math supervisor told me that she once visited the school and had to hold back tears when the students in one class looked at her pleadingly and said "Miss, can you please teach us something?" (p. 74-75)

Latinx students suffer the consequences of deficit-oriented classifications as well. Studies show that the English learners (EL) classification can carry with it destructive educational outcomes like being stereotyped as underachieving, lower-level tracking and placement into classes with less experience instructors (Umansky & Dumont, 2021). In a longitudinal study by Umansky & Dumont (2021), —which included a federally collected and nationally representative data set of approximately 2155 students—

coarsened exact matching and several sensitivity checks were conducted. The findings show that EL status in kindergarten has a negative effect on the teachers' perception of the student academic ability (Umansky & Dumont, 2021). This contributes to prior literature that says teachers "are more likely to underestimate the abilities of students who already face societal and educational discrimination and unequal opportunity" (Umansky & Dumont, 2021, p. 1021).

This mentality isn't equally harmful though. White students, affluent students, and those of favorable ethnic identities[50] seem to acquire benefits with long-term effects. Studies on class-selection report that students are willing to yield course selection responsibilities to school personnel (Kubitschek & Hallinan, 1998; Tyson, 2011). As a result, teachers and counselors can steer gifted students and those they hold higher expectations for towards advanced classes (Tyson, 2011).

Teacher perception bleeds into every aspect of the student-teacher interaction- especially when it comes to discipline. Goldstein (2014) explains how teachers'[51] lack of relevant experience or training in working with students of color results in the (over)use of disciplinary systems in an effort to 'control' them. It also ignites an ever-present anxiety that Black, Latinx and poor students are to be feared. Intense "watchfulness, … low-level fear of potential violence, and for white teachers, the fear of confrontation with a black student, these fears mix with normal fears teachers have, and produce a constant low-level fear" (Taubman, 2009, pp. 132-133) that can only be quenched by policies and

[50] According to literature, favorable identities include Asian and Indian students who are consistently favored more than white students.

[51] White teachers

practices that are associated with “the war on crime” and eerily resemble those of a prison.[52]

**Teacher Shortage/Teacher Turnover/Teacher Distribution**

Menial pay, COVID-19, disciplinary issues, poor organization, unsupportive administration, standardized testing, overall diminished interest in teaching and a host of other things has pushed the teacher shortage to a devasting place. More than ever before, teachers are opting to retire early and leave the profession in search of better, less taxing, days (Walker, 2022). Fewer teachers mean larger classes, more permanent subs and more novice teachers taking their place. Unfortunately, much of this burden is placed on students at inner-city schools all over the country. Research shows that students attending schools in high-poverty areas or schools comprised of majority minority are more likely to have a class with a long-term substitute or no teacher at all (Aragon, 2016; Boe, 2006; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Jacob, 2007; Kozol, 1991; Levin & Quinn, 2003).

When an urban school *is* able to recruit teachers, the chances of the teacher being inexperienced or uncertified increase significantly. Jacob (2007) analyzed data from the federal Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and discovered that over 20% of the teachers in urban districts had three years or less of teaching experience and many of the teachers were teaching in areas that they were not certified in. Like Jacob (2007), Lankford et al. (2002) used data from seven databases to assess teacher distribution across New York public schools. They concluded that urban schools have teachers with lesser

[52] Further explanation on the inequities of school disciplinary policies in a later section.

qualifications than suburban schools. In fact, "ten percent of New York City urban schools have an average teacher quality measure that is five standard deviations lower than the state average" (Lankford et al., 2002, p. 44). Miami Dade County's numbers mirror that of prior research as well. A study conducted by Kumar & Waymack (2014) in collaboration with the National Council on Teacher Quality determine that a significantly higher proportion of first-year teachers hired in Miami Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) for the 2012-2013 school year, taught in District 1 and District 2.[53] These districts also welcomed a lot of teachers who were prepared by teaching programs that "received very low scores in training teachers on math content and elementary content, subject matter essential to meeting the state's college and acer readiness standards for students" (Kumar & Waymack, 2014, p. 15). Therefore, not only are students in inner-city schools being taught by novice teachers, but the traditionally trained teachers they do have come from below mastery education programs throughout the state of Florida.

Slow violence is seen in the teacher assignments as well. There is a growing body of literature that seeks to examine the link between teacher assignment and teacher retention and so far, the data demonstrates that new teachers are being assigned lower performing students, mixed-grade classes and classes outside of their certified area of expertise (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010; Kalogrides et al., 2013a; Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013b; Kumar & Waymack, 2014; Lankford et al., 2002). With the natural struggles that come along with teaching, the added stress of Title I constraints that come with teaching

[53] District 1 has the highest percentage of Black students (approximately 80%) with District 2 close behind (approximately 75%). Additionally, over 80% of the schools in both districts have greater than 80% poverty rate. Poverty rate is determined by a students' eligibility for free or reduced lunch (Kumar & Waymack, 2014).

at a low-performing school, little pay and a difficult teaching assignment, the research clearly connects teacher turnover rate with high need areas (Boyd et al., 2005; Donaldson & Johnson, 2010; Frank et. al., 2021; Grissom et. al., 2017; Guarino et. al., 2006; Hughes, 2012; Kozol, 1991; Kumar & Waymack, 2014; Ronfeldt et. al., 2013; Viano et. al., 2021). Of the 500 Miami-Dade teachers who resigned in the 2012-2013 school year, a staggering 36% were from District 1 and 2, where "the number of resignations represents 5 percent of the entire teaching force in those schools as opposed to an overall district average of resignations of 2.6 percent" (Kumar & Waymack, 2014, p. 9). This consistent teacher turnover results in "significant and negative impact on student achievement in both math and ELA" (Ronfeldt et al., 2013, p. 30).

**Teach for America**

In order to keep up with teacher vacancies and turnover, alternative teacher certification programs such as Teach for America (TFA) have become a pillar in inner-city communities. The product of Wendy Kopp's undergraduate thesis at Princeton, TFA quickly snowballed into one of the leading organizations of the educational reform movement (Rooks, 2020). TFA recruits recent college graduates and professionals looking to switch careers to undergo five weeks of summer training called Institute[54] before being placed in high needs schools in major cities across the country with the understanding that they commit to the program for at least two years. According to Ravitch (2013), Kopp claims, without evidence that

[54] Institute is located on a college campus. TFA corps members spend one class period every other day in the classroom during the 5-week program. The students they are "teaching" are students who are not representative of the population they will encounter in the school year. As a result, once the school year begins, corps members often express frustration because they don't feel prepared.

> TFA's recruits, fresh out of college and with only five weeks of training, get better result than new teachers who spent a year or more in teacher education programs, and that "a significant body of rigorous research" shows that they are "on average, equally or more effective than veteran teachers". (Ravitch, 2013, p.137)

Kopp's claims, however, are misleading. The "significant body of rigorous research" Kopp references is met with considerable conflicting data that argues that TFA hurts inner-city schools. Darling- Hammond (1994) concludes that "evidence now shows that TFA has fared no better than past emergency routes to teaching and much worse than many of today's alternatives" (p. 22). Glazerman et al. (2006) investigated achievement test scores for schools in six of the TFA regions. The scores from the pre and posttests reveal that TFA's statistically significant impact on math scores equates to about one additional month of instruction. The impact on reading scores was not statistically different from zero (Glazerman et al., 2006).

Research also shows that TFA corps members enter these classrooms filled with predominately Black and Latinx students with a deficit mindset that proves to be damaging for the children. Through coded language on the website and the explicit working belief that "poverty… is something that capable young people can overcome with the help of dedicated TFA corps members" (Anderson, 2013, p. 38), TFA capitalizes on the metaphor of the (white) teacher-as-savior. Anderson continues,

> TFA is able to frame teaching, not so much as a calling for dedicated individuals willing to put in the time and effort required to achieve full teacher certification,

> but a sort of recuse mission designed to save students from the deficiencies of their unique backgrounds (p. 40).

The deficit mindset not only robs the communities where the schools are located of their agency, but when met with a reality that differs from the fantasy sold by TFA, corps members demonstrate their lack of culturally relevant pedagogy in seriously harmful ways. Glazerman et al. (2006) concludes that "While 17 percent of the control teachers said that physical conflicts among students were a serious problem, more than a third of the TFA teachers said they were a series problem" (p. 92). TFA teachers also reported significantly more class interruptions, verbal abuse from students, and student absenteeism (Glazerman et al., 2006). Given the disproportionate rates in which Black and brown students are disciplined and the harsher punishments they receive compared to their white counterparts (Elias, 2013; Hines-Datiri, 2015; Moody, 2016; Skiba et. al, 2009), these exaggerated accounts by TFA teachers increase the likelihood students are subjected to the school-to-prison nexus.

Whether TFA teachers significantly impact the students at their placement school or not, they don't stay long enough for the effects to create sustainable change. Over 50% of TFA teachers left after their second year and only 22.5% remained at their placement school after year three (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011). Even if they stayed in the profession, most TFA teachers transferred to a school with little to no poverty soon after their commitment ended (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011). High attrition and turnover are not uncommon as TFA contends that the high turnover rate is irrelevant because "it's long-term goal is to increase the number of influential people who care about education and who become transformative education leaders" (Ravitch, 2013, p. 138). The

revolving door of educators in low-income schools further exacerbates the teacher shortage and widens the gap TFA's mission aims to close.

**Mental Health and The Discipline Gap**

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, inner-city schools have been in desperate need of additional mental health providers. Rossen & Cowan (2015) elucidate that about one in five students in inner city schools will experience a serious mental health disorder, not including those who are "struggling with problems that don't warrant an official diagnosis" (p. 9). This equates to about 10 million students who need professional help in the K-12 public school system nationwide (Rossen & Cowan, 2015). According to a recent report conducted by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) (2019), during the 2017-2018 school year, the ratio of school counselors to students in Miami-Dade County was approximately 462 to 1 with 89 schools having no such provider. The recommendation by the American Counseling Association is 250 to 1. The ratio of social worker and school psychologist to students of 2190 to 1 and 1718 to 1, respectively, are far worse (ACLU, 2019). At the first public budget hearing of 2019, superintendent Alberto Carvalho[55] argued that student services personnel were more than what school board data claimed: "School board data indicates that Miami-Dade public Schools currently employs 627 school counselors… Carvalho said the total number… is close to 800" (WLRN, 2019). To include all student services staff is misleading because the

[55] At the time of this writing, the Superintendent formally accepted the role of Superintendent of the second largest school district in the country (LAUSD). His successor is Jose Dotres, who was appointed by the school board on January 25th and assumed office on February 14, 2022.

department includes school counselors,[56] TRUST[57] counselors, CAP[58] Advisors, success coaches as well as certified mental health professionals. As a CAP advisor for a high school of over 1600 students, I do not deal with the mental health matters of student. In fact, all faculty and staff are instructed to notify the TRUST counselor if a student has a mental health concern. With this understanding in mind, for our particular school, our TRUST counselor to student ratio is about 1600 to 1.

In the same school year, however, the number of school resources officers (SROs) increased.[59] In 2018, Miami-Dade County hired 60 new officers and were on track to hire another 200 in 2019 (WLRN, 2019), although data confirming the success of this effort is unavailable.[60] School resource officers have been the subject of many conversations surrounding the school-to-prison nexus (Boucher Jr, 2020; Cruz et al., 2021; Goodman,

[56] "School counselors promote achievement through an annual comprehensive school counselor program that incorporates academic, career, and social emotional activities and resources" (Division of Student Services, 2021, para 2).

[57] "TRUST (To Reach Ultimate Success Together) Program is a comprehensive student assistance program designed to provide presentation, intervention, referral, and follow-up services to students and their families who may be experiencing mental health issues, substance abuse and other self-defeating behaviors" (Division of Student Services, 2021, para 1).

[58] "College Assistance Program (CAP) is a postsecondary advisory program in all public senior high schools in Miami-Dade County….CAP advisors help students secure information for the selection of appropriate colleges, universities, vocational and/or technical schools; obtain and complete college admissions applications; and complete financial aid applications" (Division of Student Services, 2021, para 1).

[59] In response to the Stoneman Douglas Tragedy, former Governor Rick Scott signed the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Act which mandated districts hire more school resource officers.

[60] This is telling given that everything else in a school (teachers, students, etc.) are required to demonstrate success. Currently, the SRO program does not have anything close to a measurable goal as is required by everyone else.

2008; Hirschfield, 2018; Love, 2019; Shedd, 2015). Kupchik and Ward (2014) analyzed data from the School Survey on Crime and Safety and the results suggest that "racial/ethnic minority youth are exposed at greater rates to a practice that seeks to identify offending youth and divert them to a criminal justice system" (p. 348). In a 2017 ACLU report titled *Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff Is Harming Students*, data from a nationwide survey found Latinx students were arrested at a rate 1.3 times that of white students, Pacific Island/Native Hawaiian and Native students were arrested at a rate 2 times that of white students, and Black students were arrested at a rate 3 times that of white students[61] (Mann et al., 2017, p. 5). In the ACLU's (2019) report, *Miami-Dade School-to-Prison Pipeline*, data suggests that 277 students were arrested at school, another 187 were given citations, and 3 were arrested for disorderly conduct. While race was not given, the statistics on students most likely to encounter SROs in Miami-Dade County schools and where they are stationed suggests that the majority of these students were non-white and of a lower SES. When there is a gap in the support for students, SROs must operate as behavioral management specialists and the effects are seen across the country and in Miami-Dade County.

## Gaps in SSSV Literature

A comprehensive review of the literature shows considerable research on the impact the location of the school and the physical school building have on students. There is significant trauma associated with poverty, and school location in relation to poverty-stricken neighborhoods and school facilities. Additionally, the literature shows a

[61] In some states, Black students were 8 times as likely to be arrested than white students (Mann et al., 2017).

wide array of research on other SSSV acts such as access, the teacher shortage, and TFA. A characteristic of slow violence is the ever- present condition it possesses that have complex histories that have become normalized over time. And thus, the sheer amount of research being conducted on these specific topics demonstrates that more people are questing the status quo and hopefully bringing us one step closer to a solution that mitigates school-specific slow violence for some.

There are also many conflicting conclusions in educational research about lack of resources, teacher mindset, and mental health, which show that a conversation is happening around these topics. Like wicked problems, there is no one perfect solution for slow violence; sustainable solutions depend on the group being impacted at that moment. A constant conversation is key to prevent slow violence from returning in a different version of itself. This continuous fact-checking is also necessary to ensure that we aren't relying on decades-old data. With every generation, slow violence can look different and depending on older research to determine next steps for current students is a guaranteed way to ensure slow violence persists.

However, a gap persists in securing the input of those most affected by SSSV—children. Very few studies incorporated youth in their data collection or suggestions for future research. Even the studies that did include student data, most of it was based on test scores or teacher/ administration perception of what students are experiencing. Test scores are not holistic, and to base policy suggestions on things that will increase reading and math scores will fall short of catering to the whole child every time. As adults who are on the outside looking in, even myself as an educator in a low-income and predominately Black and brown school, evolution in research suggests the need for more

active participation from students and youth who experience these SSSV acts first-hand. The current study is important and necessary because it underscores youth as purveyors of knowledge and experts in their field.

There exists a gap encompassing desire. Most of the research conducted *on* any marginalized group (Black, Latinx, Indigenous Poor, Disabled, etc.) is done at the hands of white folx who (un)intentionally incorporate white supremacy back into the community. Damage-centered research—the traditional framework used when investigating marginalized communities—uses the past and oppression to write the story of those they study. The problem is, you can never completely capture the full story without hope or a nod to the future. Desire-based research incorporates the past as well as the future, the oppression and well as the triumph, acknowledgment of pain and hope for better days to come. To be longstanding and impactful, the research must produce counterstories of desire and optimism. The marginalized communities must feel that their voice isn't only requested to speak of pain, but of love and survivance too.

## Meaning Making

As humans, we constantly try to understand the world around us. Meaning making is inherent in that process. According to Park (2010) meaning making is the process in which an individual attempts to deal with the discrepancy between their global meaning and the appraised meaning of an event. Global meaning refers to a set of preconceived goals and beliefs about self, the world and others, emotions, motivations and self-purpose (Park, 2010). Kurzman (2008) argues that our global meaning includes

> moral understandings of right and wrong, cognitive understandings of true and false, perceptual understandings of like and unlike, social understandings of

> identity and difference, aesthetic understandings of attractive and repulsive, and any other understandings that we may choose to identify through our own academic processes of meaning-making. (p. 5)

Our global meaning operates as our guide when navigating life. However, when an individual experiences trauma that is inconsistent with/challenges their global meaning, a new sense of meaning, an appraised meaning, is developed (Park, 2010). Meaning making occurs when there is a perceived incongruity between individuals' global meaning and their event-appraised meaning thus resulting in internal confusion and subsequent distress.

If the process of meaning making happened occasionally, there would be very little literature exploring this phenomenon. Unfortunately, humans experience considerable trauma. Bride (2007) suggests that "in the United States, the lifetime prevalence of exposure to traumatic events ranges from 40 percent to 81 percent" (p. 63). These numbers are even higher among children and adolescents of color. A study conducted by Hatch and Dohrenwend (2007) suggested that traumatic events tended to be more frequent in racialized minority and low SES groups. Upon a review of relevant studies, Hatch and Dohrenwend (2007) concluded that Black men and women, those with lowest education and lowest income, were more likely to experience almost every type of traumatic and stressful life event, compared to their white counterparts.[62] A possible explanation for this is racial stress and trauma (RST). Although racial trauma shares some of the same characteristics as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the ongoing injuries

[62] In the case of interpersonal trauma, white females reported more instances of victimization of self/family and physical assault than their Black counterparts, however the data only consist of 1300 women from California, Ohio and Maryland (Hatch & Dohrenwend, 2007).

from constant exposure and re-exposure set it apart[63] (Saleem et al., 2018). Different forms of RST have been linked to "physiological problems, conduct problems, and negative psychological symptoms, including trauma symptoms" (Saleem et al., 2018, p. 3). Anderson et al. (2019) echo similar sentiments and include addition effects such as "hyper-vigilance, diminished self-esteem, symptoms of depression, impaired academic self-concepts, decreased school engagement and lower academic performance" (p. 22). Additionally, studies like that conducted by Bor et al. (2018) discover that exposure to racially motivated violence on electronic devices like cellphones and computers is linked to trauma symptoms as well. This includes the viewing the killing of unarmed Black and Brown children at the hands of police.

To work through the cognitive dissonance brought on by RTS and other traumas, one must successfully undergo the meaning making process. According to multiple theorists (Douglas, 2014; Davis et al., 1998), the two most common ways to make meaning are "benefit-finding"—also known as silver linings—and "sense-making." Benefit-finding is the ability to see the good in the trauma. Davis and colleagues (1998) describe benefit-finding, in the terms of meaning making, as a person's ability to set new goals, develop a new appreciation for life, change aspects of their life for the good, place greater value on relationships, and overall use the event as a catalyst for positive change in their life. Sense-making is attributing the trauma to the lifestyle/behavior of the victim,

[63] In addition, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) 5 has strict parameters for what can be considered PTSD. According to DSM-5 Criterion A, PTSD is limited to traumatic events to "direct exposure to physical and sexual violence up to and including actual death, repeated exposure to traumatic information in a work setting, and indirect exposure by way of receiving news of a traumatic event involving a close friend or loved one" (Williams et al., 2018, p. 246).

personally assuming some of the responsibility, or fitting the traumatic loss into ones' spirituality (Davis et al., 1998).

The meaning making process is messy, random, and varies depending on the individual. For some, this process includes mourning. Mourning is a way for some to recognize the trauma and experience the pain that comes with it. No matter the trauma, "grieving has the potential to emotionally reverberate to the core of one's humanity" (Podsiadlik, 2020, p. 97). For minorities however, grief is often political. Rankine (as cited in Ward, 2016) recalls a friend's comment, "the condition of black life is one of mourning" (Ward, 2016). Be it SSSV, or another RTS, knowing that systems in place aided in the trauma one is experiencing does a number an individual. Using the words of Paul Rosenblatt and Beverly Wallace, Ewing (2018) explains that meaning making can be impacted and exacerbated by the involvement of racism. Understanding a trauma "as occurring within the shadow of a larger act of injustice renders mourning at once personal and historical" (Ewing, 2018, p. 142).

Coping is also a possibility throughout the meaning-making process. Coping is "the process of reappraising a situation and thinking through its implications" (Park, 2013, p. 305). Coping can serve as a way to focus directly on problems that arose as a result of the trauma or to regulate the emotions tied to the stressor. Sliter et al. (2014) explore how humor operates in the coping phase, and through a survey of over 100 people, they learn that humor acted as buffer between exposure to trauma and PTSD. In agreeance, Solomon and Rankin (2019) postulate that "humor is among our toughest suits of armor against White supremacy" (p. 55). Although humor as a coping strategy is heavily researched, it is important to understand that with both cognitive and behavioral

efforts and problem-focused and emotion-focused aspects, coping is a complex process (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988).

## Gaps in Meaning Making Literature

A review of the literature reveals a widening of space within the meaning making and trauma community. For decades trauma and meaning making surrounding trauma was reserved for individuals who experienced grave loss. Times have changed, however. Studies being conducted for the purpose of investigating meaning making, coping and mourning are now including traumas that would have otherwise been excluded. Additionally, there is substantial research on and by people of color that come to the same conclusion: we are experiencing trauma at disproportionate rates, as compared to our white counterparts. The research also mentioned the effects of consistent re-traumatization, so I look forward to future projects that aim to mitigate this fact.

Gaps in the research can be seen in the types of participants and the methodologies used. Most of the research focuses on adults only. While I understand the potential ethical implications that come with studying trauma on youth, how are we ever going to help them if all we ever know of their experience is what they relay to their guardian or what their parent observes? Also, surveys and literature reviews are almost exclusively used in this research area. Writing and storytelling are valued in the trauma recovery process, as well as in the meaning making process, which strongly suggests their use to understand the experiences of trauma survivors.

## Agency and Activism

Agency[64] is frequently wrapped into the meaning making process as a coping strategy for trauma survivors. As articulated by Thelma Bryant-Davis (2005) in *Thriving in the Wake of Trauma,*

> while oppression has the power to enforce a particular worldview, to deny access, and to physically, emotionally and mentally harm, the survivor has the power to risk, to resist, to love, and live, with a fierceness of integrity and dignity despite and (unfortunately) at great costs. It is important for survivors, beneficiaries of oppression, and bystanders to be empowered and motivated to work for change in society. (p. 148)

Agency depends on the individual believing that they can *eventually* best the structural obstacles oppressing them (Kundu, 2020). In a study that looked at Black students' personal agency, Parker et al. (2021) interviewed 16 Black high school students who attended a public high school dedicated to supporting youth who are disadvantaged by environmental and structural obstacles. The qualitative data suggests that because the students believed that they would overcome their current situation and had faith that their future would be better, "students believed in their capacity to change their circumstances and they made a conscious decision to act on this belief by making good choices, advocating for themselves/expressing their preferences to receive support, and regulating their behaviors" (p. 19). Despite the nuanced topic, other researchers have conducted research that rendered similar results. In addition, there is also extensive research on

[64] In the present study, agency is considered "the defining and redefining of identities, relationships, and histories and is gained by (re) defining and dismantling structures of power" (Muhammad & Gonzalez, 2016, p. 443).

political agency that seems to come to the same conclusion: people are more inclined to put their agency into action if they know they have support and if they feel they can create change (Gorzelsky, 2009; Graves, 2021; Seider & Graves, 2020a; Seider & Graves, 2020b; Watts et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2020;).

Then comes activism.[65] Activism is action that comes after individuals have decided that not only is change possible, but it's also necessary; it's the voice of the oppressed. Activism takes on many forms. It sometimes looks like the fight for a community school in Chicago as was the case for the members of the Little Village community. After fighting for decades to get a community school for their 4000 high school aged residents, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) agreed to allocated $30 million dollars for the new school project. Unfortunately, the money was spent, and the agreement was broken on the side of the state. Refusing to accept the status quo, 14 members of the community, ages ranging from elderly to high school, engaged in a 19-day hunger strike. Stovall explains,

> During the 19 days, the community staged related theater events, community rallies, and prayer vigils…Within this time period the strikers forced CPS to the negotiating table, resulting in the approval of the high school …which opened September 6, 2005. (Stovall, 2006, p. 100)

In a similar fashion, Jitu Brown and 11 community members decided to fight back against the closing of the last open-enrollment high school, Walter H. Dyett High School, in Bronzeville by engaging in a 34-day hunger strike. This form of activism was only

[65] In the present study, activism is "acts aimed towards social change" (Muhammad & Gonzalez, 2016, p. 443).

after exhausting all the traditional avenues to being heard and understanding the need for a school that focused on global leadership and green technology in their neighborhood. Their activism resulted in not only a reversal of the schools' closing, but $15 million dollars in new investments (Ewing, 2019).

Activism can also look like the video product of a group of high school students participating in a summer program in Los Angeles. During a racially tense season, Duncan-Andrade (2006) recalls the groups' final video that discussed, and in some places criticized, the social context of urban schools, the local context of South Central High School, citizenship and authority, conditions in schools, the deficit models of a culture of poverty, and the community's responsibility to each other.

Activism can be national like The Black Lives Matter movement, which "can be read as an attempt to keep mourning an open dynamic in our culture because black lives exist in a state of precariousness" (Ward, 2016, p. 150). It can also be localized like the thousands of student-led walkouts, die-ins, and protests across the globe in response to standardized testing fatigue, anti-Milosevic government, gun violence, climate change, the senseless killings of Black and brown folx at the hands of police, sexual freedom, war, white supremacist vigilantes or something else completely[66] (Forney, 2018; Ginwright et al., 2006; Goodman, 2018; Kundu, 2020; Rooks, 2017; Soloman & Rankin,

[66] At the writing of this chapter the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and Chicago public school students are resisting against Mayor Lightfoot and the lack of safety precautions in place to protect teachers and students from contracting COVID-19. CTU's resistance has resulted in a city-wide school closure until an agreement can be made. Students are resistant in the form of a letter of declaration sent to the mayor on behalf of the newly formed Chi-RADS (Chicago Public School's Radical Youth Alliance) #IStandWithCTU #IStandWithChi-RADS

2019; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Activism wears many faces, and the literature proves that all those faces are singing the same song: enough is enough.

## Gaps in Agency and Activism Literature

A review of the literature reveals extensive research on agency in students. A great deal of research has been done on the effects of different types of agency on students and the conclusion is resoundingly positive. Agency is linked to positive self-esteem, academic success, and many other benefits. The literature also shows us that agency is positively linked to action and activism. The more a student feels the world can change for the better, the more likely they are to do something about it. The literature also alludes to the idea that support plays a major role in the action taken by individuals as well. Reminiscent of developmental psychology ideology, if an individual feels secure and supported, they are more inclined to go out into the world, explore, and do challenging things (in this case, the challenging thing is action/resistance/activism). Despite the small sample sizes, the sheer number of studies with similar finds makes it hard to dismiss.

A review of the activism literature reveals that youth play an extraordinary role in the transformation of oppressive spaces, policies, and the creation of their anti-racist replacements. An extensive amount of the literature used a participatory action research methodology that allows youth, as well as members of the community to have a say in what happens in their environment—a concept that seems rational is still considered nuanced in many academic spaces. Additionally, activism research confirms that there is no specific profile for an activist, nor is there a particular way activism is done or how it looks.

A gap in the research is found regarding post action. A lot of the literature explains the activism and the immediate success, but what about weeks, months and years later? In a world where oppression is interwoven into almost every aspect of life, I find it hard to believe that every win demonstrated in literature was truly a win. Another gap is seen in activism in schools; there is very little literature surrounding policy changes in schools despite the efforts of several groups like The Algebra Project and the Black Lives Matters in Schools movement. Since systems are the upholder of injustice and racism, the literature could benefit from research spotlighting the policies, groups, and movements that have changed as a result of youth activism. If only for current and future leaders to follow in their footsteps.

## Chapter Summary

Chapter Three provides a critical analysis of literature that is relevant to the study. In this chapter, I explained the origins of slow violence and the logical progression that is school specific slow violence (SSSV). I highlighted how "invisible" acts of oppression have worked together to contribute to the systemic oppression Black, Latinx, and low-income students experience daily while at school and how that could spell disaster and trauma for the students long after they leave the K-12 classroom. The literature review started with a widespread overview of the frameworks that guide this study, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Desire-based framework. The five tenets of CRT guide how the study was conducted as the methodology chosen to explore the research questions. Desire-based framework will assist this study by ensuring that the counterstories and survivance narratives are from a place of hope rather than despair.

The review of literature also looked at how seven different SSSV acts work to oppress and traumatize Black, Latinx and low-income students. It was evident throughout the literature that the students being impacted the most are not included in the data collection. Also, because of the nuanced nature of SSSV, no research has been done on the persistence of seemingly invisible forms of violence on this population and the impact of such. The literature on meaning making has not been done on trauma that is outside of the DSM-5's purview of PTSD signifying that trauma that does not look a certain way is not important. Youth were involved in these studies but not in a holistic manner. The methodological choices of many of the studies in this section did not lend themselves to comprehensive outlook of the impact of trauma on children. The final set of studies reviewed discussed agency and activism. While youth—especially youth of color—were undoubtably involved, very little research has been done on the systemic changes brought on by student activism work. The system that has oppressed minority and poor children for years works so well because of the systemic aspects. To only address the blatant acts of oppression fails to get to the root of the problem. Not much literature is dedicated to this aspect of the conversation.

The current study seeks to contribute to the literature by expanding the understanding of the concept to include slow violence acts committed at the hands of educational professions and the educational system itself. It also seeks to contribute to the literature by initiating the conversation of relaxing the terms and conditions by which we define traumatic event. Lastly, this study seeks to continue to the conversation by demonstrating a way to involve alumni youth in school-based activism work and

following up on student-led initiatives in a way that does not rob youth of their agency but also attacked the systems that allowed SSSV acts to persist in the first place.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# THE HARD CHOICE

Moment of transparency: during the process of contemplating my methodology, working with young folx was at the bottom of my list.

> Kids are unpredictable, what if they don't show up?
> Will they even talk to/with kids they don't know?
> Working with youth is HARD. So many hoops to jump through.

These are just some of the excuses I mustered up as I ruminated on my options. On one of the many nights, I spent preparing my proposal, I remember staring at my bulleted list, staring at my laptop, and back again at the list. I remember a wave of guilt washed over me like a waterfall. In that moment, I couldn't believe I was really thinking about leaving students out. Suddenly, community participatory action research, or working with teachers didn't make sense anymore. Here I was, preparing to make bold statements about the way Black and brown students were being impacted by public schools and the only Black person I was including was myself. No brown people in sight. I was ready to make policy recommendations about schooling in low-income areas—but I hadn't been a student in such a school in almost 10 years. In an effort to right the wrongs I had experienced, I was willing to take on the role of spokesperson for a group I hadn't been a part of in a long time.

*Who the fuck did I think I was?*

I was doing, to my kids, the exact same thing every politician, every schoolboard member, every administrator had done numerous times before. Except I wasn't doing it from an office in Tallahassee, or a dais in Downtown, or a principal's conference room; I was doing it from the comfort of my dining room table. By not including youth, I would have been

cancelling them out before they even had a chance. All because I thought it would be hard. That wouldn't have been my intention, but I learned a long time ago about intention vs impact; just because I don't mean harm, doesn't mean people won't be harmed.

Looking back on my teaching career, I don't know how I could've ever doubted youth being the right choice knowing students like Ashley. I can recall a time during advanced placement (AP) testing that I was called to the AP holding room for students who would be testing in the afternoon. Upon my arrival, I find out that the students have joined together to protest an AP exam. Ashley, the vocal leader of the group, explained that the students didn't feel like they were adequately prepared and refused to have failing scores show up on their permanent academic record. Seeing that she had the attention of all the administrators, the other AP teachers, and fellow classmates, she went as far as to list the unsatisfactory actions of her teacher (a list I later found out was a collaborative effort of many) and demand that he be held accountable for his subpar teaching. Having never been faced with such an outspoken and lively bunch, the other teachers and myself stood there stunned and administration allowed the large group to forgo testing—even though that meant the school would have to eat the costs. That teacher was let go shortly after. Do I think it was solely because of the student uprising? No. But I have a strong feeling that their agency made for one heck of a compelling argument.

Or knowing students like Rashad. After the tragic shooting of multiple classmates, Rashad noticed that no one was acknowledging the pain of him and his fellow classmates. Seeing the outpour of love, support, resources, and policy changes for the community of

Parkland after the shooting, Rashad thought his classmates and friends deserved just as much. So, he staged a walkout to commemorate their honor. Something as big as a school-wide walkout would have surely fell into the laps of a few educators, but in this case, the students banded together to create an impact that drew national attention. In synchrony, thousands of students flooded the streets of Liberty City and made their way to the nearby housing projects where the shooting took place. Signs acknowledging those who were lost found their way to the roof of the home of one of the victims, and posters demanding an end to gun violence could be seen from the ariel view of the helicopters that circled above. I followed the group in pure astonishment at the fact that a student could put all of it together without the help of an adult. Walking up on the vigil, I distinctively remember stopping short to stand with a kid who, out of gang ties, couldn't step foot on the avenue, but wanted to show his support and give respect. Knowing the potential ramifications of being in that area, this kid was willing to take that risk for the sake of change. I'll never forget the chills. Rashad didn't let the nasty comments of citizens and negatively spent media portrayal intimidate him. Instead, he applied even more pressure. He would go on to organize more walkouts, spearhead a social justice club and even travel to speak to Congress about the gun violence in his neighborhood and the effects on his high school—all before he turned 18. His efforts garnered statewide recognition and pushed the hand of many school board members. Rashad made his struggle—and that of his classmates'—something our district could no longer ignore.

Or students whose names were never known but managed to collectively organize a walkout this year. The walkout was in response to gender-biased uniform policies that many

students felt reinforced rape culture. I remember being called into a mandatory leadership meeting to help devise a plan to minimize the impact of the student resistance. I remember being disgusted at the lengths adults were willing to take to silence student voices. The plan of the walkout was foiled but their consolation prize was grade-level meetings with administration that allowed them the opportunity to let their voices be heard not just by school-level leaders but district personnel who came to quell the "uprising". Deputy superintendents brought along with them dozens of cops because they knew the power the students held and were willing to interfere by any means necessary—even if that meant a few students had to be sacrificed to the school-to-prison nexus in the process. The conversation surrounding respectability politics would be one that would not end at the meetings—no matter how hard administrators tried. The unreasonable uniform policy no longer exists, and the leader who attempted to enforce it was unceremoniously fired.

Or the student government officers (past, present, and future) who speak up for their fellow classmates. Students who stand up for their classmates on issues that matter to them. Be it technology during the height of the pandemic, lack of edible lunch options, overwhelming presence of permanent substitute teachers in core classes, access to the locked bathrooms or something else, student government association (SGA) and class officers take their oath to serve their constituents seriously. I witness students being overtalked and their concerns trivialized constantly, and yet, they come back for more each and every time.

It's because these young people trust that their voices and actions can move mountains. They just need adults to take the chance; take the hard way out versus the easy one. So, for my dissertation, I did just that.

Was working with youth unpredictable? Yeah. There were times when folx didn't show up until 15-20 minutes after the meeting started and sometimes not at all. Several meetings had to be rescheduled because things came up and kids tend to not tell you as far ahead as adults do.

Were there times when I had to fill the silence because no one wanted to talk? Yep. The age gaps weren't too wide, but there was no shortage of awkward moments where I had to talk until others felt comfortable enough to jump in. There were many times when my tactics didn't work at all, and I just had to pull out the cold-calling trick from my teacher bag.

Was it hard? Absolutely. Navigating IRB as it relates to students versus newly graduated alumni was hard. Being ever conscious of not just ethical implications, but moral implications of our discussions on my co-researchers was hard. Trying to find meeting times that worked for ten different people was hard. Factoring in work schedules, mid-terms, finals, babysitting, class, chores, and my own personal commitments was hard. Explaining slow violence to people who had never heard of it was hard. Turning around and asking those same people for their input was even harder. Making youth feel comfortable being critical about their beloved alma mater was hard. Being vulnerable about my own qualms surrounding urban public school education and school specific slow violence was hard. Constantly reminding young adults, whose voice hadn't mattered much in the past, that I wanted to hear

what they had to say was hard. Finding a social action plan that we all agreed on was hard. Listening to students make justifications for a jacked-up system that failed them was hard. EVERYTHING ABOUT THIS WORK WAS HARD! But who said it was supposed to be easy? Nothing groundbreaking ever is.

My co-researchers added authenticity, rawness, and vulnerability. They validated my experiences and helped me to make amends with emotions I had long since buried. My co-researchers made this work more meaningful and worthwhile than I ever could alone. So, when I think back to that time when I was unsure of having young people as co-researchers because there were obvious easier choices—I relish in knowing that I didn't take the easy way out, because the harder choice helped me to create a piece that's gonna change the world.

The harder choice was worth it.

**Note to Reader**:

The names of students mentioned in this interlude have been changed to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. All the events mentioned have, unfortunately, occurred several times throughout my time at this low-income public school. Therefore, the chances of lay individuals identifying the youth activists mentioned are slim.

Figure 4.1. *The Hard Choice*

# CHAPTER FIVE

# METHODOLOGY

The research study explored the effects of school specific slow violence (SSSV) on the internalization, meaning making and perception of alumni from a low-income and predominately Black school. The current study aimed to uplift the voices of those who are directly impacted by the acts of oppression occurring daily in classrooms in low-income neighborhoods. With this in mind, I put forward the following overarching question and two sub questions:

1. How do a group of high school graduates from a low-income and predominately Black school describe how they have internalized and made meaning of acts of school specific slow violence endemic in the historical and material conditions of structural racism?

The two sub questions are:

1. How does the meaning making process that occurs because of SSSV impact the attitudes, views, and lives of those who experience it?
2. How does perception change as my co-researchers take agency (through activism) via the social action project section of the study?

This chapter reiterates the purpose of the study and explains how the chosen research design effectively answers the questions guiding this work. The research methodology, as well as the rationale are discussed. Moreover, this chapter introduces the setting, my co-researchers, and the YPAR curriculum that guided the sessions. Data collection, data analysis, and instrumentation are described as well. An explanation of ethical considerations taken and unforeseen methodological issues conclude this chapter.

## Research Design

This project was designed to allow recently graduated alumni of a low-income, predominately Black high school the opportunity to tell their own education journey. My co-researchers opted into the project with the knowledge and understanding that I could not offer them any tangible incentive and yet the majority[67] of the group actively participated until the last meeting. Youth who chose to participate and I discussed our experiences with slow violence at that specific school, which yielded similarities and differences. Together, we reflected on which SSSV act we felt had the biggest influence and which act we thought we could impact as a group of folx who operate as outsiders. Using this information, we co-created a social action plan that we submitted to current insiders, specifically the current Student Government Association.

Additionally, this research explored agency in a group that has been brainwashed to believe that activism and/or agency was an act of defiance. Historically, students are taught to not challenge authoritarian practices in school, so any criticism of educational authority is not only vehemently disapproved of but, in most cases punished (Martin-Sanchez & Flores-Rodriguez, 2018). Through casual conversation and the exit interview, I was able to gauge the effects of folx realizing their own power.

## Research Methodology

The questions posed in this study required the use of a methodology that allowed for flexibility and was grounded in social justice. One that was rooted in the critiquing

[67] While all my co-researchers expressed great interest, circumstances beyond their control prevented a few folx from continuing until the end. These circumstances will be explained further in the chapter.

and overturning power structures that historically favored one group and oppressed another.

A methodology rooted in the constant exposing, addressing, and overturning of power structures that historically favored one group, while oppressing another. Given the context of the study, I chose YPAR because it is designed to bring attention to insidious educational practices via youth. Moreover, I chose the research methods because they provided the blueprint for presenting the voices of those often regarded as subjects, but seldomly as credible knowledge purveyors.

**Qualitative research methods**

Since the beginning of social research, positivist ideas monopolized inquiry. As Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) note, positivists would lean heavily on quantitative methods because it perpetuates the falsehood that every problem in the world can be solved by following the scientific method and/or manipulating variables. As the field of research evolves, the flaws of solely quantitative research become more apparent. Expecting numbers and scientific facts and figures to account for "human phenomena fraught with complexity, uncertainty, uniqueness, instability ambiguity and value-conflict" (Kim, 2015, p. 4) seems like a tall and unfillable order. Qualitative research offers room for grappling with all that comes with research into the existence of live, imperfect beings, and seeks to "understand human knowledge and experience" (Savin-Badin & Howell Major, 2013, p. 5). Additionally, qualitative research allows space for context to be included with the understanding that knowing context may shed new light on the research question at hand. Instead of seeking to generalize findings and fit them

into a box, qualitative research accepts that there might not be a box at all. Wertz et al. (2011) propose:

> Qualitative research addresses the question of "what?" Knowing what something is entails a conceptualization of the matter under investigation as a whole and in its various parts, the way these parts are related and organized as a whole and how the whole is similar to and different from other things… Knowledge of the "what" may be implicit or explicit, uncritically assumed or carefully established, and informally or formally acquired. (p. 2)

And yet, educational research is still dominated by conversations laden with positivist assumptions surrounding "data, analysis, representation and knowledge production that serve to constrain methodological imagination and perpetuate the inequitable status quo in our schools and communities" (Brown et al., 2014, p. 2). Thus, while participating in this research, I focused on amplifying the complexities within my co-researchers as we journeyed to answer the ever evolving "what".

To develop a holistic picture of myself and my co-researchers, I selected qualitative methods. The term slow violence was developed as a concept regarding environmental racism, so this study's application of that concept to education research significantly contributes to the field. Due to its complexity, understanding the true effect of the negative lifelong impact of slow violence can only be conveyed through the words/stories of survivors. In addition, Corbin and Strauss (2008) emphasize that a benefit of qualitative research is the various data sources available. Employing qualitative methods allowed me to include many forms of data such as: semi-structured interviews, field notes and "I Am" poems, all of which I will elaborate on in a later section.

The sample of this study also helped to solidify qualitative methodological approach as the right choice. The focus of this research is Black and Latinx folx who attended a low-income and majority minority secondary institution. The research questions justify the method., I also used a YPAR methodological approach; it is my hope that this study adds to the collection of educational research that decolonizes and transforms.

**Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)**

Qualitative research is a way to understand the lived experience of the participant[68] from an "insider's point of view" by removing the distance between the researcher and the issues in question (O'Day & Killeen, 2002, p. 10). This study is grounded in the lived experiences of youth[69] as well as transformative activism, which justifies the YPAR method.

YPAR involves identifying, researching, and addressing social problems through a partnership between youth and adults (Anyon et al., 2018). Grounding YPAR in critical pedagogy, it is a critical form of qualitative research that "carries specific epistemological commitments toward reframing who is 'allowed' to conduct and disseminate education research with/about youth in actionable ways" (Caraballo et al., 2017, p. 313). As a form of participatory action research (PAR)[70] informed by Freire's concept of praxis (Glass,

[68] While most qualitative research denotes active members as participants, because of the paradigm I subscribe to, CRT, and the nature of the proposed study, members providing data will be known throughout this research as co-researchers.

[69] And adults recollecting experiences of their youth; this is the case for me.

[70] Participatory action research (PAR) was developed as a response to traditionally positivist research that defaulted to deficit approaches when marginalized people were involved (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). PAR, being political by nature, not only depends on the knowledge of locals, but validates said knowledge and the communities "authority to determine truth" (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009, p. 23). In all PAR research,

2001),[71] YPAR calls for rigorous participation on the part of the co-researchers, reflection, and action. As with most critical methodologies, YPAR is rooted in the understanding that to solve issues involving young folx, they must have an equitable seat at the table. However, it moves beyond the traditional critical pedagogy; Guishard and Tuck (2013) conclude that YPAR forefronts "young people's viewpoints, their critique, their ideas about possible actions are respected and change the very methods and directions of research, throughout the life of a research project" (p. 187). According to Rodriguez and Brown's (2009) seminal text in YPAR, there are three key principles that drive YPAR work: inquiry, participation, and activism.

**Inquiry:** The first guiding principle of YPAR is that the topics of inquiry should reflect the "needs, desires, and experiences" of the youth participants (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009, p. 25). This is paramount because YPAR aims to engage and validate the entire person, not just what they can offer the adult researcher collaborating with them. Likewise, the research must be situated in the real life of the youth researcher. The research should be driven by their personal, political, and intellectual interests, which honors their knowledge and expertise as legitimate and real.

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the local co-researchers are the experts because they have everyday interaction with/participating in the topic under investigation. As a result, PAR is often active, critical, and liberatory knowledge that seeks to interrogate power relations and their intersections with identity in an effort to move towards a more progressive future (Cammarota & Fine, 2010).

[71] Established out of his work on adult education projects in the 19050s and 1960s, Paulo Freire's notion of "education as a practice of freedom" insinuates that praxis is "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Glass, 2001, p. 16). In our quest to be free and humanized in this world, we must always be aware of the possibility of being dehumanized. Freire suggest that his notion of praxis helps us to remain vigilant in an effort to prevent the latter.

**Participation:** Genuine collaboration is the second principle of YPAR. Youth researchers participate in all stages of the research with an emphasis on "soliciting, contributing, and incorporating knowledge within a group" (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009, p. 27). Capitalizing on youth competencies in an effort to foster participation is not only common but encouraged.

**Activism:** The third principle of YPAR is the obligation to actively engage in practices that improve the lives of young people—Black and Latinx youth in this case. Rodriguez and Brown (2009) further explain:

> We believe that in order to transform the structures and cultures of U.S. intuitions that marginalize people of color, people must be engage in understanding and deconstructing how and why injustice exists…youth have well-articulated critiques of school and society, but they often lack the opportunities to share their ideas and concerns. We intentionally engage youth in processes that both foster and capitalize on critical analyses of the world. (p. 30)

**Rationale for YPAR method**

Employing qualitative methods allowed the study to use different pieces of "data" to get a whole picture of my co-researchers, but YPAR, being "explicitly pedagogical" has "implications for education and youth development" (Cammarota & Fine, 2010, p. 6). YPAR methods are necessary in cases of inquiry surrounding the (mis)education of marginalized folx because dominant paradigms have permitted the experiences of our communities to be (re)written by those furthest from it. I designed this study to explore the meaning making process as it relates to SSSV. This study requires acquisition of knowledge from the source, not a second or third party. YPAR allows my co-researchers

the opportunity to tell their story while also addressing "how valued/social goods are thought about, argued over, and distributed in society" (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009, p. 24). Further, I chose YPAR because of the action aspect of the method. Through a compilation of YPAR studies, Cammarota and Fine (2010) revealed that YPAR projects of all variations were successful in creating transformational change for the youth researchers and the adult researchers alike:

> Through participatory action research, youth… study problems and derive solutions to obstacles preventing their own well-being and progress. Understanding how to overcome these obstacles becomes critical knowledge for the discovery of ones' efficacy to produce personal as well as social change. Once a young person discovers his or her capacity to effect change, oppressive systems and subjugating discourse no longer persuade him or her that the deep social and economic problems he or she faces results from his or her own volition… allowing him or her to realize the equal capabilities and universal intelligence in all humans, while acknowledging the existence of problems as the result of social forces beyond his or her own doing (p. 6-7).

A major aspect of this study is the social action project that was birthed out of many group discussions. As a collective, we isolated SSSV acts that we felt were most troubling and created a plan to mitigate those acts. By engaging in YPAR, we were able to deliver a plan to the current student government association executive board that addressed the needs of our community, while also recognizing that the systemic acts of oppression that allowed the SSSV acts to persist were not our fault.

## Setting

According to Miami-Dade County, there are over 334,000 students attending approximately 396 K-12 schools, which makes Miami-Dade County Public Schools the fourth largest district in the country (DadeSchools, 2022. The specific institution from which I recruited my co-researchers is one of the county's 129 high schools. This school has a minority enrollment rate of over 99% and a Free and Reduced Lunch rate nearly as high. Despite the district's proclamation of being an "A" rated district two years in a row, this high school has never earned an "A" or "B" school grade. In fact, the most recent data for this school showed that English language arts (ELA) proficiency is less than 30%, with math proficiency at approximately 10%. Filled with a rich legacy of pride, tradition, and excellence since its inception, this school is one of the few historically majority Black high schools in the city. The school has advanced placement (AP), dual enrollment (DE), career technical education (CTE), Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC), and specialized magnet course offerings, which aims to include something for each student., This school is substantial in size, with about 70% student capacity being approximately 1500 students. It's also big in alumni pride and national notoriety as well.

This school, known as Pride High School (a pseudonym) from now on, is in a severely under-resourced, primarily Black neighborhood, although those demographics seem to be on the verge of a drastic shift as the current public housing units nearby have been vacated and demolished. The vacant lots, apartment buildings, fast food eateries, rundown mom and pop stores, single-family homes, and brand-new gentrified housing that surround the secondary institution make for a very complex story. I chose to focus on

Pride High School for two reasons. First, as a member of the teaching faculty for several years, I have witnessed many acts of slow violence that have troubled me greatly, with some of these acts impacting my co-researchers. This study serves as my opportunity to understand the impact of those SSSV acts, even if years later. Second, I was once a student at this school. As a scholar I fell victim to SSSV acts that almost changed the trajectory of my life. Selfishly, I wanted to conduct research with this school in mind to prevent any other students from suffering the same fate or a worse one.

## Co-Researchers and Selection of Research Group

As a teacher in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, I gained access to the research site. Months prior to the study (but after IRB approval), I collected a list of co-researcher recommendations from colleagues. The initial list of recommendations was based on perceived interest in social justice, current/future schedule demands, and their history with follow-through. Volunteers were welcome at any point. I identified over 30 Black and Latinx youth as potential co-researchers. Due to conflicting work schedules, disinterest, and uneasiness with criticizing their alma mater, I reduced the list to ten. Despite intentions of gender equality, to ensure voices of all groups are adequately heard and represented in the space, the sample included more youth who identified as men. Most of the co-researchers (eight) identified as Black with the remainder identifying as Latinx. In addition to racial and ethnic demographics, there was great effort on my part to ensure that all groups were represented in the study. Members of different athletic groups, clubs, extracurricular activities, such as the band, academic standing (top 25%,

Bubble,[72] middle, and lowest 25%) are all included in the sample. To ensure that the views on what is going on in Pride High School were not outdated, the SSSV acts still relevant to current students, and they would still fall under the "youth" category, variation in graduation year was important. The sample was limited to folx who became alumni within the last five years, from 2017 to 2021.[73] Table 5.1 summarizes the demographics of my co-researchers. A detailed description of each member of the team will be given in a later chapter.

Table 5.1

*Summary of Co-Researchers' Demographics*

| **Pseudonym[74]** | **Graduation Year** | **Gender** | **Race/Ethnicity** | **Current Occupation** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ace | *2019* | *M* | *Latinx* | Student at a PWI in the Northeast. |
| Al | *2017* | *M* | *Black* | Student at a HBCU in the Midwest |
| Bass | *2021* | *F* | *Latinx* | Looking for work; Works with family part-time |

[72] In schools, "bubble" students are those that, when tested, land right on the cusp of passing the standardized test. Great attention is paid to these students, because "data" shows that they have the highest chances of moving up and raising the overall score/grade of the school.

[73] Age was not asked in this study. For a myriad of reasons students ages vary upon graduation. To prevent co-researchers from feeling to need to disclose said reasons, only graduation year was asked. Since the slow violence acts experienced depended on the timeframe in which they attended the school and not how old they were, age was not deemed necessary.

[74] There is a growing amount of literature criticizing the pseudonymization process as one that embodies oppressive culture and stripes participants in research of their identity. Kesewaa Dankwa (2021) argues that "... the process of name re-assignment is rarely reported, discussed with participants, or seen as a negotiation of identity and power dynamics occurring between the researcher and the researched" (p. 2). To ensure my co-researchers connected with the name they are addressed as in this study and keep the power associated with all that naming represents (race, religion, gender, ethnicity, intrinsic and extrinsic relations, society, etc.), co-researchers picked their own pseudonyms. There were no parameters. Co-researchers were just asked to explain the reasoning behind their choice. Their responses are described over the next few pages.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Britney | *2019* | *F* | *Black* | Works full time for a remote company while also going to school full time |
| Dre | *2019* | *M* | *Black* | Working in the Midwest |
| Favorite<br><br>Student | *2019* | *F* | *Black* | Working full time with plans to start trade school |
| FLASH | *2021* | *M* | *Black* | Military |
| Jahmez Rodriguez | *2018* | *M* | *Black* | Student at a PWI in the South |
| Leon | *2019* | *M* | *Black* | Student at a HSI in the South |
| Lion | *2019* | *M* | *Black* | Working with plans of going back to school |

**Ace**. Ace is a junior at a large private university in the Northeast on a pre-med track. He proudly proclaims his Nicaraguan and Dominican roots, while also showing reverence to the local Miami neighborhoods that raised him and helped to mold him into the man he is today. A first-generation college student, Ace has had to navigate the college process alone, but instead of complaining, he relishes in the opportunity to be a role model for his younger siblings.

As a self-proclaimed jack of all trades, it's not surprising to know that he was a member of one of the school's most coveted programs, Medical Magnet, as well as the varsity basketball and baseball teams simultaneously. Sadly, he was forced to quit sports after only two years because for a "student athlete student comes first, and the student wasn't recognized as much in that school." Unable to rid himself of his social nature, Ace spent the latter part of his high school career in leadership roles in several clubs, a voice

for his fellow advanced placement classmates, a tutor, and a permanent fixture on the superior honor roll list. It's these efforts that earned him nationally recognized leadership-based scholarship and magna cum laude graduation distinction. During our sessions, Ace maintained perfect attendance and often took lead in discussions and made sure to call folx in if their voice wasn't being heard. How fitting that he decided on his pseudonym because he considers Ace "like the number one, a term that means leader, somebody that takes charge and looks out for the group… the number one person people can go to and depend on for any kind of responsibility."

**Al.** Al is currently a senior at a historically Black college and university (HBCU) in the Midwest, where he also interns at the Chamber of Commerce. Earning a degree in communications, Al has hopes of continuing the work he has done assisting the mayor and other positions of power over the duration of his college career. Often forced out of his demure comfort zone at work, Al took a different approach during meetings. He operated in a facilitator role, like me, allowing all the other co-researchers to state their feelings before offering his thoughts. As the oldest co-researcher, the similarities between Al's experiences with SSSV and those of co-researchers who had recently graduated emphasized the necessity of our work.

Based on his high school record, Al has never been afraid of trying new things. Having been a member of the volleyball team, the basketball team, several honor societies, community service clubs and the fraternity Epsilon, Al was well-known throughout his high school career. Despite his popularity, Al was not easily trusting, and his circle of friends remined the same over the course of his four years; his pseudonym is even a nickname of one of his closest friends.

**Bass.** Bass is a recent graduate who works part-time with her family. Unsure of what she wants to do with the rest of her life, Bass is currently enjoying the calmness of just going with the flow of life. A lover of the simple things in life, Bass opted to have her pseudonym be a representation of her favorite pastime with her partner (fishing) and her most proud ability (clarinet, which she has played for 13 years). Bass played a vital role during our YPAR sessions. During our second meeting, when the group's task was to identify acts of slow violence they remembered, Bass was the first one to be critical of the school, breaking away from the niceties that had taken up half the time allotted for the task. She later explained that "when you love your school enough you see what's good and wrong about it so you can change it for your experience, your peers experience."

From the beginning of her high school career, Bass recognized the power of changing the system from within and ran for (and won) a top student government association position reserved for freshman. For the duration of her high school career, she opted out of elected roles, but still managed to voice her opinions and assist those who were trying to change the school for the better. As a fixture in the schools' superior rated band, Bass led the clarinet section of marching band, symphonic band and jazz band until her graduation day.

**Britney.** Britney is currently working full time for a remote technology company while also attending school full time. When I inquired as to why, she let me know that when she wants something, she is all in. After observing her throughout this process, I can attest to her all or nothing attitude. Being unavailable for our first group meeting due to a family emergency, Britney contacted me several times before the next scheduled session for a recap and the takeaway assignment. Every session afterwards, Britney was

among the first to join and was everyone's biggest cheerleader. Despite her relatively young age, Britney understood the economy of words and only spoke when she felt strongly about what she had to say.

Britney's love for poetry and spoken word was recognized by the school soon after she matriculated. As a member of the school's poetry club, Britney had the privilege of performing at school events and for dignitaries when they visited. While other students relished in the prominence of the group, Britney maintained that she did it for the love of the art. As a former student of mine, when she wasn't performing or writing, Britney would enjoy spending time talking to teachers. Always curious, Britney spent time in each of the career and technical education (CTE) courses offered at the school, learning new skills and trades.

**Dre.** Dre is currently working in the area of community engagement in the Midwest. Post high school, Dre took approximately three weeks off before heading to a local university. He admitted that he wasn't ready for school at the time and dropped out. Not one to spend time feeling sorry for himself, Dre traveled to the Midwest for an Ameri-Corps program and fell in love with education. This passion was apparent in our sessions as he constantly pushed the group to think of all the ways we could better the scholastic journey for those who have come behind us. Dre is on a personal growth journey as he works to learn more about his history and share with others. He believes that the past helps us to realize our strength and greatness and his name, "a combination of [his] grandfathers name and [his] uncle's name" is a nod to this.

Dre entered high school during a tumultuous time in his personal life and as a result his grades suffered greatly. By his sophomore year, things had taken a positive turn

which allowed him to focus on school and community service where he discovered his love for advocacy work. As a response to what seemed like monthly killings of classmates, Dre devoted all his time to social justice work and founded a club at the school. His newfound popularity took him to great heights, notably a high court, where he spoke about gun violence in his community and its impact on himself and his fellow classmates.

**Favorite Student.** Favorite Student is currently working two jobs with plans to start cosmetology school in the future. An outgoing, straight shooter, Favorite Student has never minced words about the slow violence she has experience at the hands of the school. In every session she participated in, Favorite Student dominated the conversation with real-life accounts of SSSV. She volunteered her experiences to the group in a way that gave others the strength to be vulnerable as well. Unfortunately, personal obligations prevented Favorite Student from continuing the study past the halfway mark.

Favorite Student was a student of mine all four years of her high school career. What started off as a tumultuous relationship her freshman year, quickly blossomed into the indestructible bond we have today. At the school, because of its rarity, it is common for students to show signs of possessiveness over teachers that they have built a strong rapport with. This is evident by her choice of pseudonym. A star pupil, Favorite Student was destined to attend college and major in psychology. Sadly, a huge error ignored by the CAP advisor at the time resulted in her having to go back home on the day classes started. Once home, she had to help with the financial responsibilities and returning to college was no longer feasible. In her own words, “I entered adulthood which I was not prepared for… I didn’t want to be prepared for it because like, I grew up faster than I

wanted to." Because of my proximity to Favorite Student, I was able to witness first-hand the impact SSSV had on her life and trajectory. Because of Favorite Student, I requested to be the CAP Advisor the next year. She is one of many driving forces behind this research.

**FLASH.** FLASH is currently serving in the United States Army. Prior to leaving for bootcamp, FLASH was an integral member of the group. With perfect attendance, even if that meant joining while he was still at work, FLASH was 100% dedicated to the research project and the social action plan we were set to create. He was always there to offer suggestions that were a compromise of multiple ideas and cheer folx on. Regrettably, he was unable to complete the research project as he was sent to bootcamp prior to us working on the social action plan.

The true definition of a Basketball player, FLASH ate, drank, and slept the sport. He dedicated all his free time to the sport, and it showed. As one of the star players of the team, FLASH would radiate pure Black boy joy whenever he was on the court. I have no doubt that he was a contributing factor in the team's winning season during one of his varsity years. When he wasn't playing Basketball FLASH was one of the cool kids. FLASH'S sense of style matched perfectly with his self-confidence. His reasoning for his pseudonym— "just because I'm feeling extra flashy and the letters gotta be all caps so that they can feel me [two of the emoji with the shades]"—corroborates this fact as well.

**Jahmez Rodriguez.** Jahmez Rodriguez is a senior Journalism major at a large public state school in the South. He has a goal of going to law school, a goal that he hopes to start working on achieving during the gap year he plans to take after graduation. The epitome of a self-assured, cool kid, Jahmez opted to have a first and last name as a

pseudonym. When asked why, he responded “it's another way to pronounce my name, but it's a whole different name [emoji with the shades].” Jahmez brought this level of smooth-talking confidence into each meeting he attended and made sure he was seen and heard. His outgoing nature filled many awkward silences. The jokester of the group, he reminded all of us that transformative work doesn’t always have to be serious.

An easy-going student, Jahmez recognized that there were glaring issues with his school but decided to make do with what he had. With most of his teachers not challenging him, Jahmez spent a large part of his high school career cultivated an image that rivals that of most social media stars today. Although he dabbled in almost every extracurricular from basketball to National Honor Society, Jahmez kept his academics first, graduated summa cum laude and earned a scholarship to the school he is set to graduate from in summer 2022.

**Leon.** Leon is a third-year engineering major at a large public research institution in the South. After my first interaction with Leon when I introduced him to slow violence, he came to our first meeting having researched the concept on his own, ready to discuss. His inquisitive nature was seen throughout our sessions as he was never short on hard-hitting questions that pushed us to be more specific and focus with our social action plan.

Leon has been a quiet yet powerful force since the start of his high school career. Being a member of the wrestling and track team, Leon’s stature, booming voice and standoff-ish demeaner often gave off a misleading depiction. A follower of the ideology that everyone has something to teach you, he spent a lot of his free time in high school soaking up the knowledge of teachers and staff members alike. A teddy bear at heart,

Leon never missed an opportunity to show his appreciation to those he felt deserved it and honor folx he held in high esteem. As a matter of fact, his pseudonym came to be as a nod of gratitude to his mother. He explained, “my mom didn’t have much of a choice in naming me and my siblings. Leon was a name she wanted to choose for one of us.”

**Lion.** Lion is currently working as a sales associate and a flag football coach for a little league team. Lion is working on getting back in school after he was kicked out of a small, Midwest university for multiple infractions. Lion isn’t one easily deterred, however. Since he has been back, he has split his time between working, completing his Associates of Arts degree and applying for college. As a result, Lion was unable to participate in the research project in its entirety. When he was in attendance, he provided a friendly disposition, straight and to the point answers and an agreeable nature, which all made for easy decision making. Lion was a straightforward man and his rationale for his name— “Lion…because I’m a Leo”—confirms that.

In high school, some might have considered Lion a disruptive student, but what others described as disruptive, Lion justified as merely boredom. An extremely gifted student, Lion passed standardized tests in the top 10 percentile. Unmotivated by academic success however, Lion racked up absences, suspensions, and strikes until the school eventually kicked him out. He was eventually allowed to return, where he would graduate in the top 50 percent of his class.

**The Collective**

As a group, we opted out of creating a name. There was a collective consensus that a name was not necessary—especially since our social action plan would not be presented by us, but by the student government association currently on campus. A lack

of name added to the mystic of what we were attempting to do and lessened the opportunities for folx to be connected to the study. In addition to naming, during the first meeting, I explained the goals of the research and together, we cultivated a list of agreements that would ground participation in the study. To kickstart the conversation I provided a general list of pledges adopted from the *Anne Frank Project's Story-Building Process Rules,*[75] from which we edited to make our own. Table 2 presents the goals of the intended research. Table 3 highlights the commitments that were agreed upon for the duration of the study[76].

Table 5.2

*Intended Goals of the Research Study*

| **Intended Goals** |
| --- |
| • Start the conversation about school-specific slow violence<br>• Put the voice of those impacted (you/us) at the forefront of the conversation<br>• Collaborate with co-researchers to develop an action plan to mitigate slow violence act(s) chosen by the group. |

[75] These commitments are a living document that has shifted over time. While it is based on the work of Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed,* the group commitments were adopted from those used by Dr. Rebecca Christ is all her classes and thus homage to Dr. Christ is made in this footnote. In the DNA of these commitments lie years edits and revisions that will continue to morph as new groups require new expectations from their spaces.

[76] Commitments were introduced during the first meeting but revisited during the second meeting to give everyone a chance to think about them and determine if anything was missing.

Table 5.3

*Group Commitments*

| **Commitments** |
| --- |
| • We agree that we respect each other as collaborators and as people. We agree to show that respect in word and action.<br>• We agree to have conversations that are respectful and tolerant of all groups. If there is a need to challenge, we will do so in a way that doesn't attack the person, invalidate their statement or make conclusions.<br>• We agree that discomfort comes before growth. We agree to lean into that discomfort, while also taking care of ourselves.<br>• We agree to create a safe space within these sessions. We trust that anything said in these meetings (of a personal nature), stays here.<br>• We agree to work to the best of our ability to be the change we want to see for [redacted].[77] After all, once a [redacted], Always a [redacted] |

It is important to note that many of the co-researchers were aware of other members of the team prior to the study. This familiarity allowed my co-researchers to call in one another and ask difficult questions with the assumption that everyone was operating with the best of intentions. Many of my co-researchers also came into the study with an activism ethic that helped to keep the groups' momentum; their cultural capital in

[77] The words redacted from the commitment would disclose the identity of the setting of this study.

Pride High School made them feel obligated to do all within their power to make it a better place. This commitment is what held the group and our mission together.

## Procedures

### YPAR Modules

Informed by the curriculum developed by Oregon's Health Authority in partnership with the Institute for Community Research (2014), this YPAR project was initially separated into 12 modules as outlined in Figure 5.1. While some modules required long periods of critical thinking and reflection time, some were short enough so that we could complete them in a single meeting.

However, as time went on, and the demands of the social action plan became clear, it was apparent that we could not achieve all 12 phases of the modules by the last scheduled meeting. We were not able to personally present our findings, nor see the social change realizes. We did, however, craft a plan to re-assemble if the social action plan required further conversation.


Figure 5.1 *YPAR Modules*. Grounded in work done by the Institute of Community Research (Institute for Community Research [ICR], 2014), this figure outlines the 12 modules of a YPAR project.

During phase one, using a purposive/selective sampling technique, I recruited for the study. I described the research aims and asked teachers to recommend youth they thought would be interested in participating. My co-researchers were selected solely based on their graduation year and their willingness to participate in the research project. Prior to our first group meeting, I contacted each of my co-researchers' multiple times. It

was during these moments that I attempted to start or strengthen my relationship with them. In our first group meeting, I emphasized the importance of a horizonal hierarchy by having each of them call me by my first name.[78] During phases two and three, I explained action research to the team and provided key examples. A few members of the team were familiar with action research, so I allowed them the opportunity to expound in needed moments. Phase four was conducted over multiple group sessions. This process started in session one when I explained slow violence, school specific slow violence, and provided examples in society as reference.[79] Phase four continued in session two as that time was largely spent recounting SSSV acts we witnessed in the research setting. Because I created this YPAR group to seek out experiences surrounding a particular issue and research question, phases five through seven were not applicable to group sessions (as I completed them on my own). I did, however, spend time explaining them to the group and explained activities that would typically happen during each phase. During phase eight, my co-researchers and I invited key stakeholders, such as the school's current student government association president, to one of our meetings to solicit her views on the SSSV acts on which our group had decided to focus.

During phase nine, we used the data collected to formulate our social action plan. Once we collectively felt comfortable with our social action plan, we delivered it to the

[78] Calling a teacher, especially a teacher that taught you, by their first name is considered disrespectful in many urban school districts. This is especially true in the district where this research study took place and even more so for me. To maintain a form of "social distance" (McAteer, 2010) from students, I have strictly enforced the idea of calling me Ms. Jones. By breaking my own rule and allowing former students and student-adjacent folx to call me Kala, I relinquished the authority and began leveling the playing field.

[79] I was intentional to provide non-school related examples as to not influence their interpretation of SSSV acts they experienced.

current student government association members to pass along to administration. [80] This was the choice of the group, given our current role as outsiders relative to the school.

Steps nine-twelve were not completed during this study. Contrary to a traditional YPAR study, my co-researchers were not a part of the data analysis process. This was my personal decision. The effects of SSSV are great (as evidenced by the research in the chapter three) and I did not think it was appropriate to have my co-researchers navigate the groundswell of emotions that can possibly come with navigate SSSV. I, myself was not prepared as a researcher to deal with the aftermath, nor did I think retraumatizing my co-researchers was necessary for this project to be effective. As a critical researcher, I also did not think it was ethically appropriate to engage the rest of the team in the data analysis process, knowing I was not equipped to offer adequate debriefing/counseling services. Any other choice would have constituted as slow violence itself.

Step ten was not completed because of ethical reasons as well. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of my co-researchers, we were not able to present our findings as a team; although, this dissertation, in its presentation of key findings, is an effective workaround for that phase of the YPAR framework.

Phase eleven is underway as the social action plan is still with Pride High School administration. I did, however, conduct an exit interview with each member of the group to explore how they felt our social action plan would create social change. Their reflections are presented in chapter six.

[80] Our SGA contact agreed to keep me updated on the progress of the action plan. I would then use those updates to keep the rest of the group informed.

## Data Collection

This study sought to learn how Black and brown students from a low-income, majority-minority high school internalized and made meaning of acts of SSSV. Additionally, it sought to gain a better understanding of the meaning making process of those who experienced SSSV and how participation in a YPAR project impacts the agency of the participants. To accomplish those goals, I conducted interviews with my co-researchers before and after[81] the project and recorded our group sessions via the Zoom platform. I maintained a research journal throughout the project to document my reflections and observations. The study is grounded in Critical Race Theory and desire-based frameworks, so counterstories and stories of hope and happiness were valued greatly throughout the project. That said, my co-researchers and I also created individual "I Am" poems.[82] At the conclusion of the project, I juxtaposed with the data gathered from my journal reflections with information from our group sessions, interviews, and the narratives to better describe the experiences of my co-researchers and me and answer the research questions.

**Data Sources**. The primary qualitative data collection instruments included semi-structured interviews, group sessions, "I Am" poems, and my journal of observations and

[81] Since the social action plan has not been enacted at the school site yet, the YPAR project is still underway. The "after" referenced here represents time after our last group meeting in December.

[82] An activity typically used to deepen literary understanding (Kucan, 2007) is also used to explore how they see and have made meaning of experiences related to their community, their childhood and other aspects of their life and identity.

reflections. The methodological, within-method[83] type of triangulation employed in this study assured its credibility/verisimilitude, trustworthiness, and completeness of the findings. "Researchers use triangulation to increase their in-depth and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by combining multiple methods and theories… it is important in conducting researchers since it allows for recognition of multiple realities" (Hussein, 2009, p. 8). Being of different graduation years, my co-researchers expressed truths that varied based on their personal experience. Multiple forms of rich data allowed for all their truths to be expressed in way that felt authentic to them. Additionally, through the counterstories described in the "I Am" poems, we were able to open a window into the lives of those most marginalized and show possibilities beyond the master narratives most commonly associated with our population, thereby rejecting the monovocals[84] that blame people of color for their educational failure. Lastly, the data collected elevated the voices of those who are often used for research but disposed of before their voices are acknowledged—youth (Tuck, 2014). Having youth voices at the foundation of this study is a political stance that contributes to the conversation surrounding youth as knowledge purveyors.

**Interviews.** Prior to the first meeting, each of my co-researchers participated in an individual semi-structured initial interview (Interview 1, see Appendix A) that asked

[83] "Within-method type of triangulation implies that multiple complementary methods within a given single paradigm are used in data collection and analysis" (Hussein, 2009, p. 4).

[84] Also known as master narratives, standard stories, and majoritarian stories, these stories privilege "Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p.28).

approximately ten questions and lasted between 30-55 minutes. During these interviews, I explored my co-researchers' high school experiences. I asked how they would describe their high school, a typical high school day, and their teachers. Maintaining a desire-based research mindset, I asked about specific times when they felt angry/frustrated with their school and times when they felt happy/proud.[85] The purpose of the initial interview was to reactivate the past. My oldest co-researcher was approximately five years removed from high school, with the groups average being about 2.2 years. By asking clarifying questions about different high school experiences, I attempted to reactivate their memories of the past prior to our first meeting.

The second interview occurred no less than a week after the final group session. This was intentional, because it allowed my co-researchers and me time to reflect on the entire research process, what we set out to do at meeting one, and what we were able to produce for our social action plan. This semi-structured interview (Interview 2, see Appendix B) included approximately eight questions, with interview times spanning between 10-45 minutes. The protocols were loosely organized to allow for clarifying questions. This set of questions asked my co-researchers to reflect on the YPAR process and our social action plan (see Appendix C). One of the research questions guiding this study broached the topic of agency, so there were questions surrounding that topic as well. Furthermore, there is a question that asked my co-researchers to think back to their

[85] "… desire-based research neither be viewed as an antonym nor polar opposite of damage-based research. That is, damage and desire are not mutually exclusive… research should not forget or negate the historical and continued trauma inflicted by colonialism… researchers must be discerning, circumspect, and deliberate about avoiding the pathologizing tendencies that arise in research which focuses on damage" (Gahman et al., 2020, p. 629).

personal high school experience and critique it.[86] During the debrief of the exit interview, I provided the opportunity for my co-researchers to add or strike anything from the record that they no longer felt comfortable being repeated. Each interview was recorded on two separate devices,[87] uploaded to an external hard drive, and transcribed by me.[88]

**YPAR Sessions:** Regularly scheduled group sessions were held via the online platform Zoom. All my co-researchers consented to the meetings being recorded. During and after each session, I wrote memos, some of which are included in the results section.[89] After all the sessions, I listened to the recordings again, and in the same manner used to organize the interviews and poems, I coded the data and categorized into themes. Furthermore, I identified moments where the statements of co-researchers supported the chosen themes, research questions, and grounding frameworks. Some of those statements were chosen to further explain one of more of the themes presented.

**"I Am" Poems:** Prior to the second interview, I asked my co-researchers to complete their own "I Am" poem. Created by George Ella Lyon (Noenickx, 2020), "I

[86] The grounding frameworks encourage the critiquing of all systems that negatively impact marginalized groups—even if those systems are controlled by other marginalized folx. Using Eve Tuck's (2009) ovarian text, Gahman et al., (2020) explains that "Tuck notes that priority given to desire does not shy away from wrestling with pain but take action against it by highlighting the intricacies and nuances of social action, empowerment, self-determination, sovereignty and agency—as complex and paradoxical as all of these things can sometimes be" (p. 629).

[87] COVID-19 had peaked at the time our group sessions were being held, so Zoom was the only option to connect us all. Interviews were conducted via Zoom as well. Internet connection was a concern for many members of the group, so to prevent interviews being lost because of internet connection, I recorded audio on a handheld device as well. Upon the completion of the transcription, the second audio was promptly deleted.

[88] Given the popularity of the school setting, as well as the zealousness of the alumni, fear of retribution or future blowback was a concern for some members of the group. In order to maintain complete anonymity and confidentiality of my co-researchers, I opted to transcribe all the interviews personally.

[89] As is the case for chapter seven, an autobiographical interlude entitled "Why aren't they angry?!"

Am" poems (also known as "Where I'm From poems) originated as a reply to a poem in a play (Noenickx, 2020). Lyon created his first "I Am" poem in 1993 and the magnitude of asking such a deep question ("where you are from") made the exercise both unique and wildly popular. Being that the frameworks that grounded this study prioritize folx telling their own complicated and redemptive stories, I thought it was necessary—crucial even—to have my co-researchers talk about their experiences with SSSV in their own words. There were no limitations or restrictions on the type of information they could include in their "I Am" poems. Because of identifying information in several poems, none of them are included in the dissertation.

**Social Action Plan:** A guiding principle of YPAR lies in its critically transformative nature. YPAR's roots in Freire's critical education pedagogy[90] and dialectical materialism[91] serve as rationalization for the critical dialogue and action that are central to its foundation. Traditionally, youth are often not valued or regarded as purveyors of knowledge, and thus excluded from the change agent role. YPAR, in contrast, repositions youth as knowledgeable by "elevating student voice… taking young people seriously and treating them as knowledgeable contributors to conversations about

[90] At its core, critical education pedagogy seeks to educate students to become analytical and question all aspects of learning and social change. Giroux (2010) postulates "critical pedagogy opens up a space where students should be able to come to terms with their own power as critically engaged citizens; it provides a sphere where the unconditional freedom to question and assert is central to the purpose of public schooling and higher education, if not democracy itself… As a performative practice, pedagogy takes as one of its goals the opportunity for students to be able to reflectively frame their own relationship to the ongoing project of an unfinished democracy" (p. 717).

[91] "Dialectical materialism provides a framework for analyzing objectively existing conditions in the world (i.e., various forms of oppression), for understanding that humans can become actively conscious of both the conditions themselves and their sources, and for changing these conditions through human (social) intervention and action" (Au, 2007, p. 3-4)

their experiences in schools and society more broadly" (Marciano et al., 2020, p. 165). A key component of this study was the development of a social action plan that could mitigate SSSV in the research setting. This social action plan was a collaborative effort of the entire group and focused on lessening the lack of resources and lack of exposure to opportunities—acts of school specific slow violence still rampant at the research site. The social action plan is currently under administrative review; however, this is explored more in a later chapter.

**Data Analysis**

In contrast to a traditional YPAR project, my co-researchers were not a part of the data analysis process. Once the data was collected, I analyzed the findings using the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Upon the completion of the transcription process, I conducted several rounds of coding. During the first round, I coded by jotting down initial ideas on the transcript. I conducted the second round of coding through the lenes of the Critical Race Theory and Desire-based frameworks grounding this study. I then organized the codes based on preliminary themes and data relevant to each code was organized. In the context of this study, a theme was considered an idea (or set of ideas) that answered one or more of the research questions. There were codes that were salient; however, if they veered too far from the research focus, they were deemed extraneous.

Reflexive thematic analysis prioritizes themes, so multiple rounds of thematization, and theme checking were completed. I reviewed codes to ensure that all potential themes were discovered. I, then, systematically ordered the data relevant to each theme. Following, I reviewed the themes twice. Themes were checked to ensure that they

applied in the context of the coded excerpts (part one) and that they were relevant in the context of the entire data set and the study's research questions (part two). Additionally, there was continued analysis of the themes when deciding the names, specifications, and definitions for each theme title. The research questions, study's purpose, and theoretical frameworks were constantly revisited during this process to ensure that the themes were germane and told the overall story. To conclude, captivating excerpts were chosen, and a final analysis of selected themes and excerpts was conducted.

Although there were approximately seven themes identified, the themes chosen for explanation in a chapter six were determined based on a combination of factors: group salience, relevance to research questions, grounding in theoretical frameworks, and ethical concerns.[92]

## Ethical Considerations

Over the course of the research study, I maintained transparency, credibility, and integrity as follows. Prior to any extended data collection, all my co-researchers signed informed consent forms via DocuSign. I reiterated in every session that participation in this study was voluntary. Given my relationship with many of my co-researchers,[93] I went to great lengths to assure them that our dynamic would not change if they chose to

[92] Several themes identified required the divulgence of information that would jeopardize anonymity and confidentiality of some of my co-researchers. Once I realized this, I opted not to include them.

[93] Several of my co-researchers were my former students who I have an established, friendly rapport with.

opt out. All the co-researchers knew me through a student-teacher lens, so to reduce hierarchies, all titles (e.g., Ms.) were removed for the duration of the study.[94]

Topics such as race, oppression, and racism were explored, but co-researchers were made fully aware that they would not be forced to speak at any point during the study, but the value of their contributions would be respected. Because all data collection was virtual, I reminded co-researchers during each interaction with me that at no point would they be forced to turn their cameras on. It was their choice to use their real name or their pseudonym. The only time pseudonyms were mandated was in the presence of our one and only guest.[95] I encouraged sharing personal experiences, but only if the co-researchers felt comfortable discussing them. If anyone was triggered by any conversation, all my co-researchers had access to my personal email and personal phone number. There was also a list of mental health providers available if requested.

To maintain credibility, I kept a memo notebook over the course of the study. I wrote in the notebook during each meeting and as a reflection afterwards.[96] Another way credibility was maintained was through my constant member checking. During lulls in

[94] The specifics surrounding this were mentioned in an earlier section.

[95] After we did our research and chose the SSSV acts for focus on, we invited the current student government association president to a meeting where we discussed our position/choices and solicited suggestions, comments and concerns. The notes from that meeting helped to shape the finalized social action plan.

[96] One of the rants inscribed in the notebook transformed into chapter seven, an autobiographical interlude entitled, “Why aren’t they angry”?

the conversation, I reiterated the consensus to ensure my own understanding and provide clarification for those who needed it.[97]

## Methodological Issues

Over the course of conducting this research study, I was met with some difficulties that I hadn't foreseen. Well before the start of this project, the entire world was met with a global pandemic. Aside from shutting the country down, COVID-19 drastically modified the logistics of this study. Due to the pandemic and school officials operating virtually, the IRB approval for the study was delayed, which pushed the research from a summer YPAR session to a fall YPAR session. Many potential co-researchers who were available in the summer were no longer available in the fall, which reduced the potential participant pool. Moreover, YPAR sessions are traditionally done in person and given the uncertainty of times, we were forced to meet virtually. As a result, the bond usually developed through YPAR participation[98] was not as strong and, in some cases, nonexistent, as some of my co-researchers did not interact with each other directly at all. Several technological issues impacted my co-researchers' participation and in some cases, prevented them from actively participating in a session as much as they wished.

Another unforeseen circumstance came in the form of co-researchers unable to participate in the study in its totality. For a host of reasons, three of my co-researchers were unable to participate in drafting the social action plan, and they were unable to provide an "I Am" poem or participate in the last meeting. As a result, I was unable to

[97] For the sake of fluid and natural conversation, member checking was not conducted after each statement.

[98] Between co-researchers

conduct the second interview with these co-researchers either. FLASH mentioned in his initial interview that he would be heading to bootcamp soon, however the estimated date the military gave him was earlier than he had anticipated, and toward the end of the study he was sent to basic training. Both Lion and Favorite Student are primary breadwinners in their households and were forced to take up second jobs and extra hours. As a result, their schedules no longer permitted hour-long Sunday sessions. After high school, both Lion and Favorite Student headed off to four-year institutions, but as a result of separate SSSV acts that I am not at privy to explain, they were forced to come home and help provide for their families. The realization that slow violence was the reason they could no longer participate in a study on slow violence was not one that was reached lightly, however, it does further emphasize the long-term effects of SSSV.

## Chapter Conclusion

To conclude, this YPAR underscored the experiences of alumni from a low-income and predominately Black school as they navigated their internalization and meaning making of school specific slow violence. By providing space for my co-researchers and I to critically analyze the past and use personal knowledge to guide transformative action, it was the aim of this research project to uplift the voices of those often erased from educational research conversations. Furthermore, the social action plan generated by the collective tackles SSSV acts experienced by current students of the research setting, which hopefully lessens their influence on future alumni and incoming students. Additionally, I utilized both critical and desire-based frameworks to explore the effects of slow violence from a place of triumph instead of shortfall. Ultimately, this youth participatory action research project led to personal growth in all of us and an

increased desire for more community advocacy work that focuses on a more equitable educational journey for Black and brown students in low-income schools throughout South Florida.

# CHAPTER SIX

## RESULTS

The following section is a discussion of four themes that were salient in the data. Before each theme is discussed however, an interlude related to the theme will be presented. These essays are not directly inspired by the findings but are in relation to the findings. Because of aesthetic choices, there will be a blank page before each interlude, following each thematic discussion. Please take these commercial breaks to reflect on the interludes, the thematic analysis, the ways in which they are in conversation as well as at odds with each other. Use this space as reflection time and feel free to note your reactions and feelings, either physically on paper or mentally on the blank pages within the section.

This chapter reports the findings that emerged during my analysis of the data collected for the research study. This qualitative study was designed to facilitate a youth participatory action research (YPAR) project that examines the internalization and meaning making processing of school specific slow violence and agency. To effectively answer these questions, I employed YPAR methodology via Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Desire-Based frameworks to facilitate a four-month long research project conducted with a team of recent—five years or less—graduates from a low-income and predominately Black high school, known in this study as Pride High School. The chapter presents my co-researchers experiences, words, and understandings as they participated in the bi-weekly zoom sessions and developed the social action plan.

## A Study of a YPAR Project

This project took place at Pride High School, a medium-sized, majority low-income, predominately Black high school in an urban area of the Miami-Dade County school district. To gather authentic data and prevent the study from focusing on outdated SSSV acts, this four-month YPAR project engaged ten co-researchers. Given the nature of the research and potential ramifications, no group name was selected. The untitled group of Pride High School alumni and myself were tasked with understanding and making visible slow violence in the school through identification of SSSV acts present during our tenure, sharing our own stories and experiences, and developing a social action plan that will mitigate the impact of a particular SSSV act plaguing current Pride High School students.

After the initial 30-minute interview (see Appendix A), bi-weekly zoom meetings commenced. During these one-hour meetings, we built relationships, as I explained the YPAR process and the concept of slow violence and SSSV. It is also during these meetings that my co-researchers and I shared our personal experience with SSSV as we sought to identify an act of school specific slow violence that could be influenced by outsiders. Halfway through we came to a crossroads: unable to choose between SSSV acts 1) lack of resources and 2) lack of exposure to post-secondary plans outside of college—and aware of the many ways they are interconnected, we decided to create a social action plan that lessened both at Pride High School. For the duration of the meetings, we collaborated on a social action plan. The social action plan development process also included meeting with current insider stakeholders such as a member of Pride's Student Government Association (SGA). Based on the sessions and meetings

with stakeholders, the group focused on one area in particular—the College Resource Center (CRC). This decision was made because it is the only designated place for students to access computers and printers at Pride High School. Unfortunately, resources in the CRC are either currently outdated or malfunctioning. This proposed plan (see Appendix C) includes the following:

- The creation of an automated protocol that ensures the printers in the College Resource Center are always fully functional and equipped with adequate printer paper and ink/toner.
    - Written explanation of the protocol and distribution to all stakeholders associated with the space.
- The creation of streamlined set of procedures that allows students access to the CRC during school hours.
- The creation of a database of Pride alumni who have successfully navigated the college space as well as those who have successfully navigated technical/vocational space.
    - Assurance that this database is easily accessible to Pride students and alumni past, present and future.

At the conclusion of the project, my co-researchers engaged in another semi-structured interview (see Appendix B) where I inquired about their experience in the study. In total, six YPAR sessions, 17 individual interviews, eight "I Am" poems, and a social action plan were completed. The social action plan was given to Pride's SGA; however, no administrative feedback nor action has yet occurred as of this writing.

This chapter began with a brief overview of the four-month research study, which includes the YPAR project. Next, I present the results from the analysis of the qualitative data collected for the study (interviews, "I Am" poems, and YPAR meeting sessions). The findings also include my reflections based on my observations, research memos and notes to illuminate my own critical insights. Review and analysis of these data sources provided insights into answer the following overarching question and sub questions:

1. **Overarching Question:** How do a group of high school graduates from a low-income and predominately Black school describe how they have internalized and made meaning of acts of school specific slow violence?
2. **Sub- Question:** How does the meaning making process that occurs because of SSSV impact the attitudes, views, and lives of those who experience it?
3. **Sub-Question:** How does perception change as my co-researchers realize their agency (thorough activism) via the social action project developed?

Three themes emerged in the data analysis that served to answer these questions. An additional theme emerged, not as an answer to any of the research questions, but to highlight an important and overlooked characteristic of SSSV. Each theme includes several theme-related components that help to provide as full and complete a story as possible. Each name is a significant reflection of the theme that emerged during data collection and analysis. The first theme addresses the overarching belief, amongst my co-researchers, that trauma and triumph and inexplicably linked: "No Pain, No Gain". The second theme, "It's Us, Never Them" illustrates the power of the system in the case of delegating blame for acts of SSSV. The third theme, "Still Hopeful" focuses on the co-

researchers' belief in their ability to enact change over the course of the development of the social action plan. The fourth theme provides a contradiction to the notion that dispossessed communities are without helpers, happiness, or pride: "What They Don't Show You".

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INTERLUDE

## REFLECTION #1

**February 21st 9:13pm**

This culture that has normalized suffering as an inevitable part of everyone's success story is FOR. THE. BIRDS.
On the quest to "make it", will you have to work hard? YES
Will you have to be disciplined? YES
You might even have to push yourself to limits unreached.

But, to imply that every aspect of your life will be peppered with suffering and trauma? Nope, I do not receive that.
I will not adopt a mindset that without suffering the success isn't as sweet.

That is all.
Thank you for coming to my TEDTalk.

Figure 7.1. *Reflection #1*

### Theme 1: "No Pain, No Gain"

Theme 1, as shown in Figure 6.1, provides an interesting explanation as to why most of my co-researchers believe that pain/trauma is a prerequisite to happiness/success/abundance. Figure 6.1 displays the theme-related components, and the research question this theme corresponds with.

| **Theme 1: NO PAIN, NO GAIN** |
|---|
| Research Question 1: How do a group of high school graduates from a low-income and predominately Black school describe how they have internalized and made meaning of acts of school specific slow violence? |
| **Theme-Related Components** |
| • Black and Latinx students are expected to experience some level of suffering during their educational journey.<br>• Black and Latinx students take the ability to navigate SSSV as a sign of strength and resilience.<br>• Black and Latinx alumni believe that the challenges brought about from SSSV helped them to develop skills and shape them into the people they are currently. |

Figure 6.1. *Theme 1: Data and Theme from Data Analysis*

This theme engages with Research Question 1: How do a group of high school graduates from a low-income and predominately Black school describe how they have internalized and made meaning of acts of school specific slow violence? Data collected from interviews, zoom sessions, and "I Am" poems reveal that many of my co-researchers justified the slow violence they experienced while students at Pride High School as normal and to be expected given that the school's status as a Title I[99]

[99] Title I is an act "passed in 1965 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty" (Title 1 Administration, 2022, para 1). It supports schools that are above the 75 percent poverty threshold with a goal to improve learning for children from low-income families (Title 1 Administration, 2022, para 1).

institution. Data also shows that my co-researchers attributed at least some part of their skillset and identity to the acts of slow violence they were exposed to in high school. Although no co-researcher explicitly attributes their current status to the trauma they underwent while at Pride High School, the ability to find the "silver lining" aligned greatly with the meaning making work of Davis and colleagues (1998) as described in chapter three.

**Suffering is Expected**

Data revealed that over the course of their high school experience, my co-researchers encountered a myriad of acts of slow violence, with the lack of resources being a consistent theme over the years. Each member of the team—including myself—recalled an instance when the scarcity of resources impacted our ability to take full advantage of their/our learning experience. When asked about resources, almost all my co-researchers attempted to soften their response with a deliberate choice of words; however, the verdict was still the same. Lion stated, "The resources were *[pause]* when I went to other schools, I would see way more resources, so I would say not great" (Initial Interview). Jahmez responded in a similar fashion:

> Based on my knowledge, our resources were, I feel like they were good enough but, they could have been better. Like now that I go to [current university], and I see the different resources and like how people came from different high schools and they had different technology and stuff like that, I feel like we should have had better resources. We had those little tablets that didn't always work and stuff like that. If we had better technology, it would probably have had us more entertained and wanting to actually learn (Initial Interview).

Jahmez, took every chance he could to highlight the positive aspects of Pride High School, however, from his own response, it clearly failed in some of the high need areas. A very vocal Favorite Student opted for a more unashamed approach. She explained:

> We barely had resources, everything we did, like I wouldn't say people who took like the basic courses, I don't think they needed much resources, they still had textbooks, but people taking AP classes, everything that we needed for resources we either had to buy a book online or print something out. We had to go the extra mile just to be able to participate or like be able to do a lesson in school. Like for instance, [teacher's name] class. We always needed books and needed to do research and stuff. Doing certain things in school was not possible because not everyone had computers at home. The tablets they provided barley worked, so it's like you had to either find a way to do it, cause the phones only let you do so little, so you had to go the extra mile out of school to do research… So, like the resources were very limited, like very, very, very, very, very limited at my school (Initial Interview).

Despite her sobering outlook, Favorite Student's tone wasn't one of sadness, but rather matter of fact. As if it was to be expected. This was the tone of many of my co-researchers as they rattled off the areas in which their former school lacked. Brittany spoke of the lack of computers, Dre spoke of the lack of basic writing utensils and feminine products for AFAB[100] students (issues he took up in his senior year through a club he started), and Bass spoke of the lack of personal resources (resources she

[100] AFAB: assigned female at birth

explained were those that didn't involve academics). Furthermore, when discussing things we wished we could change in one of our zoom sessions, the absence of a library was brought up as evident in the following excerpt:

> **Favorite Student:** If students had more access to resources, printers, computers, tablets, you know, even the smallest things, even somewhere to sit and study—a quiet place to study—cause we didn't even have that. Cause a library... do we even own a library?
>
> *(Several members nod yes)*
>
> **Favorite Student:** We do? Wow. The place where you're supposed to do it, you can't do it.

Despite all their valid grievances, my co-researchers never gave the impression that they were angry or resentful about any of it. In her interview Brittany gave current and future Pride High School students advice telling them "It's only temporary" (Second Interview). Bass's advice seemed to follow the same trend, "Be patient. The better days do come. I'm not talking about personally, I mean like, school-wise" (Second Interview). This notion of accepting 'less-than' came up in several other interviews as well. Based on the data, their acceptance of acts of SSSV as normal or expected gives the impression that they don't believe they deserve better.

**A Sign of Strength and Resilience**

Over the course of the research project, many of my co-researchers explained instances where they spun a situation from negative to positive. The stories differed, but the framework was comparable. During yet another conversation concerning resources at Pride High, Ace explained how he navigated the deficit:

> You know like the resources, we made the most of it, that room[101] didn't have the best MacBook's, or iPads. We had a few computers; one printer and we made the most of it. That was like one of the biggest things—the few resources we had; we took advantage of. It's one of the prime examples of how we made limited resources come to life. (First Interview)

The smirk and chuckle that accompanied this response further confirmed how proud of himself he (Ace) was for overcoming such a feat.

In his initial interview, Jahmez chose to credit the struggles he endured as a result of SSSV as one of the reasons why he continues to persevere, as seen in the excerpt below:

> I also learned to always be strong and being a [Pride School mascot] you always gotta be strong. You gonna go through a lot… regardless, so you just gotta thug it out – I learned that too. (Initial Interview)

To the group, to persist or "thug it out" is an automatic reaction that does not often end in regret. In session two, Bass talked about having to retake the Algebra I test (a graduation requirement) multiple times, with little to no help from her instructor, before finally conquering it. In his initial interview, Leon talked about his constant struggle to find resources, a struggle that ended in defeat many times until "connecting with the right people". When speaking about his post-secondary life in his second interview, Dre freely talked about his dropping out of college, his move to the Midwest, and now his current

[101] The room being described here is a space that would act as a study hall for students in advanced placement (AP) and other academically rigorous courses. Ace and a few of his classmates fought for several years to secure this area.

role in community engagement. As illustrated by the examples, slow violence has helped my co-researchers further develop survivance that has yet to fail them.

**School Specific Slow Violence Shapes Character and Identity**

On several different occasions, my co-researchers rationalized SSSV as a necessary evil that helped to get them where they are today. During our first session, I showed a picture of Pride High School and asked what came to mind. For most, it was pride or a variation of the emotion. Pride High School is a very infamous school, so I expected that response. Seeing Favorite Student noticeably quiet, I directed the question to her.

> **Kala:** What comes to mind?
>
> **Favorite Student:** Anything I went through made me… helped me to be who I am, as I learn who I am and grow to be somebody.

While I initially thought the response, an obvious example of the meaning-making process was peculiar, over the course of the research study, other co-researchers would justify the SSSV or express appreciation for the skills they learned as a result of slow violence and the trauma it caused.

Brittany was one of the first to rationalize this outlook when she explained some of the lessons, she learned being a student at Pride High School. Brittiany articulated her thoughts:

> Like a lot of things that I wanted to happen or wanted to experience, I didn't get to, and I think that was maybe for a reason. Versus just getting everything, I wanted and being 'Oh high school was great for me, high school was a whole bunch of successes for me' then once I left and got into the real world and felt

> what failure was like, my whole life would crumble. So, I'm glad that my high school didn't give me everything I wanted and dreamed of, even though I had some really great experiences there, it taught me that life isn't going to be always easy (First Interview).

These thoughts are echoed again in her "I Am" poem,

> I don't know whether to feel cheated by school
> For keeping me on the path of unpreparedness
> Or be thankful that it showed me the ropes first hand
> Taught me how to learn what works for me and my life
> How to not depend on the same system
> I was trained to believe in.

For some, SSSV was met with sheer gratefulness—as was the case with Leon. Throughout the research study he maintained that had he not suffered at the hands of slow violence, he wouldn't have been helpful in this study. Leon explained:

> I feel like it was for a reason. Like, I feel like we was all out through our various trials for this specific reason, to be honest with you. Cause if we didn't go through any of this—the things we went through—we wouldn't be able to come up with any of this at all… I always looked at my high school journey as a good thing in every way. I never saw it as bad, but now I feel like it was for a greater purpose (Second Interview).

He mentions that he always saw his high school journey as a good thing, but by his own admission, there were trails. The work of Parks (2010) demonstrates that when we experience something that differs from our global assumption of the world, meaning

making must occur. This process is crucial to prevent cognitive dissonance.[102] It is evident, based on the excerpt that Leon opted to integrate those experiences in a positive manner.

For others, like Favorite Student, this belief colored the way she interpreted the traumatic experiences of others, as was the case in the next excerpt. Leading up to this commentary from Session three, to demonstrate vulnerability, I shared my experience with SSSV at Pride High School and the ramifications.[103]

> **Favorite Student:** So, the situation you explained to us with the pre-calc teacher, you know, letting you pass when you shouldn't have, there's actually benefits to that for your future—well now, what would have been your future back then—because now as a teacher you DO NOT,[104] you DID NOT allow us to pass a class for no reason. When I say the work ethic for you has to be like above and beyond, even if it was the smallest thing, you still made sure we earned our grade. Like you never gave us grades. So, it was a plus for you right?
>
> **Kala:** Cause I didn't want y'all to go through what I went through.
>
> **Favorite Student:** Yeah, so I'm saying, your experience—that's the benefit of it. Cause you could've turned out to be a crappy teacher, but I guess you going

[102] Cognitive dissonance is when you are straddled with inconsistent thoughts, beliefs or attitudes. Thoughts that differ from your global assumptions.

[103] The story I shared is touched on briefly at the end of chapter two.

[104] All capital letters denote emphasis Favorite Student made during this statement.

> through that experience and actually being handed something, you didn't want to do that to us. You showed us that you had to work to get what you want in life.

Although Favorite Student alludes to the SSSV I experienced being beneficial, she seemed to ignore the effects this situation had on me. Instead, opting to only see the redemptive nature of the trauma. By her own cost-benefit calculation, the standards I developed as an educator were worth the pain and suffering, I experienced at the hands of SSSV at Pride.

According to the data, my co-researchers and I internalized SSSV in a few different ways. A major consensus among the group, however, was that SSSV was to be expected when attending a low-income, predominately Black school. A blatant lack of resources that transcending class years was not only identified by the group as an issue but normalized amongst them and their peers. This SSSV act and others aided in the development of the idea that SSSV did more good than bad. Each of my co-researchers found positive meaning from the negative instances of SSSV and have continued to hold on those notions years after graduating. This is seen in the rationalization of my experience by Favorite Student, and in the lack of outrage displayed throughout the research study. A real-time reaction to the absence of anger is seen in the following chapter.

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# CHAPTER EIGHT

# AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INTERLUDE

# WHY AREN'T THEY ANGRY?!

I USUALLY WAIT UNTIL THE SESSION IS OVER TO REFLECT, BUT THIS TIME I COULDN'T WAIT. ARE THEY REALLY SITTING HERE, ON AL GORE'S INTERNET, ATTEMPTING TO JUSTIFY THE BS THEY WENT THROUGH? BRAINWASHING IS REAL. I CAN'T WITH THESE FOLX RIGHT NOW! LIKE MY BLOOD IS BOILING! KNOWING SOME OF THEIR ENTIRE STORY MAKES ME WANT TO HATE PRIDE HIGH SCHOOL. LIKE, I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO SLEEP IF I SCREWED OVER A CHILD TO THE LENGTHS THAT SOME OF THEM WERE SCREWED. LIKE, MY HAND IS LITERALLY TREMBLING. OKAY, KALA, TAKE A DEEP BREATH. THE WORST PART IS THEY DON'T EVEN SEEM ANGRY. ALL THESE INSTANCES OF SLOW VIOLENCE AND THERE IS NOT EVEN A SMIDGE OF BITTERNESS IN THEIR VOICE. I'M ANGRY FOR THEM! THE FACT THAT SO MUCH CAN HAPPEN TO THEM, AND THEY STILL FIND A WAY TO BLAME THEMSELVES LETS ME KNOW TWO THINGS: 1) THEY REALLY BELIEVE THEY GOT WHAT THEY DESERVED OUT OF A HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE AND 2) THE SYSTEM IS WORKING EXACTLY AS IT WAS DESIGNED TO.

Figure 8.1. *WHY AREN'T THEY ANGRY?*

### Theme 2: "It's Us, Never Them"

My analysis of the data sources engages with Research Question 2: How does the meaning making process that occurs because of SSSV impact the attitudes, views, and lives of those who experience it. As shown in Table 6.2 below, Theme 2 explicates the co-researchers beliefs surrounding SSSV acts and their continued existence. It also exposes the lengths to which co-researchers went to partake in such blame or refuse to assign blame altogether.

| **Theme 2: It's Us, Never Them** |
|---|
| Research Question 2: How does the meaning making process that occurs because of SSSV impact the attitudes, views, and lives of those who experience it? |
| **Theme-Related Components** |
| • Black and Latinx folx misdirect blame for SSSV to other victims.<br>• Black and Latinx folx blame themselves for SSSV happening to them.<br>• When faced with an obvious perpetrator, Black and Latinx folx justify the SSSV.<br>• Black and Latinx folx refuse to allocate blame to anyone, thus creating the illusion that there was no wrongdoing. |

Figure 6.2. *Theme 2: Data and Theme from Data Analysis*

One of the goals of this research study was to create a social action plan that would alleviate the effects of school specific slow violence, instances of which the co-researchers frequently discussed instances. Data from "I Am" poems, individual interviews, and multiple group discussion sessions revealed that when discussing the root causes of SSSV, many of my co-researchers blamed their community, parents, fellow

classmates' mindsets, and a host of other actors who had no direct role in perpetrating SSSV. Data also shows that when co-researchers were not blaming others, they were taking on some of the blame themselves. Moreover, in many of their stories in which they reference acts of school specific slow violence they experienced the co-researchers did not identify the perpetrator or perpetrators.

**Misdirected Blame**

My co-researchers articulated an understanding of slow violence before they named it. They recognized injustices in their educational experience at Pride High School and were vocal about those injustices from the beginning. However, despite their acknowledgment of the prejudices they encountered, they directed blame at fellow victims and pawns instead of the rightful perpetrators, whether systemic, institutional, or individual. From school personnel to the culture, parents, and even fellow classmates, my co-researchers blamed everyone except systemic racism and those in power for the SSSV they faced.

**School personnel.** My co-researchers encountered several acts of SSSV, which directly impacted their interactions with Pride High School officials and their perceptions of authority. Their experiences led them to believe that folx at the school level dictate rules as they see fit. This was evident during the first set of interviews. When asked to recall an instance in which the school, or someone connected to it, frustrated him, Al eagerly described his frequent run-ins with the school security guards:

> I'll say it every time, like, it wasn't mainly the teachers, but it was mainly either the administration or security. I feel like it's always different types of students in the school and the type of student I was and the types of students my friends was,

> we didn't skip class. If we were outside of the classroom for some reason, it was actually to do something and they tried to lump everybody in like one category, one box saying 'oh we was just skipping class, just walking in the halls'. So, whenever we would have to do something then we would have to deal with them.

According to his response, Al believed that security had a choice in how they interacted with students in hallways during instructional time. Not only that, but he also believed that they were deliberate in their mindset and actions of assuming the worst in all students—thinking they are all skipping—and governing themselves accordingly—fussing at him and his friends to go to class. More fundamentally, Al also discusses the racialized carceral assumptions that underlie the institutional surveillance over and policing of Black men's bodies.

Leon, equipped with a similar mentality as Al, answered the same question with a story about the previous CAP advisor. Graduation rehearsal, a tradition in most high schools, requires that the graduating seniors practice their entrance, figure out seating, and familiarize themselves with the graduation program. At Pride High School, this is multi-day event. On one of those days, Leon had college orientation, and when he asked to leave early, the CAP advisor told him no. Leon believes that the CAP advisor not only created the rule arbitrarily but understood that resulting consequences of him missing freshman orientation. During that part of the interview, Leon never gave me the impression that anyone else, including the system that prioritizes optics and obedience of children, may have played and influential part in the former CAP advisors' decision.

Towards the end of the research study, Bass relayed comments made by friends regarding issues with the physical condition of building. She commented "Like whenever

the power went out, people were like ‘oh this school is broke’” (Second Interview). While I am confident that Bass’s friends were talking in jest and didn’t believe that the school was literally bankrupt, their reply implies that they believe that the school and its administration have some control over the building’s power supply and that each school is autonomous and not a subset of a much greater machine. Furthermore, Bass’ nonchalance in delivering her statement alludes to power outages occurring frequently at the school, a truth to which I can attest as a member of the Pride faculty. Her experience supports extant literature that posits a connection between poorly maintained facilities and student performance. Bowers and Urick (2011) argue that differences in facility management may not be enough to sway scores either way, however, anecdotes such as this one, would argue otherwise.

**Culture.** In his first interview, prior to the start of our group sessions, Dre professes that he believes his friends have changed. When he attempted to introduce the new hobbies he acquired while away assisting in classrooms in the Midwest, he encountered great resistance from his friends. Dre explained:

> It goes back to culture. It was always a push back, it's always a barrier, because of their environment and what their used to. I feel like there is just so much out there that kids don’t see because the environment was just trash. I feel like nobody cares about nothing down here.

In this passage, Dre places blame for his friends’ unwillingness to engage with something different on the culture of the community; however, their reactions are more than likely the result of years of lacking resources and experiences. Lafer (2012) would argue that

this encourages a "revolution of falling expectations" and this case would be no different. Lafer (2012) describes this concept below:

> When people come to feel lucky just to have one job with health insurance (and then just a job even without health insurance, so as long as they can pay rent); when 25 or 35 kids in a class comes to seem fortunate because others are in classes of 50; when retaining fully funded Social Security and Medicare even without a pension from one's job seems lucky—all these shifts serve to lower peoples expectations of the economy… (p. 7).

Instead of with the community or the culture, the blame lies with the institution that his friends and other SSSV survivors are being ascribed to.

**Parents.** Not much later in the same dialogue, Dre stressed the importance of including parents in the conversation. He remarked:

> We are talking about slow violence acts and the lack of resources in our schools and for our students, but most of it has to start with the parents and them understanding group economics and them raising their gross income…

Though the statement is brief, one can deduce that Dre trusts that parents have 100% control over how their children are educated. However, this statement fails to account for the struggles of the adults as well as outside forces that indeed impact school-aged people. Dre also seems to place blame on parents whose incomes are currently low—through employment, housing discrimination or a number of other systemic issues—for their inability to have the income to provide their children with more opportunities and resources. While this might not have been Dre's intentions, his victim blaming individuates complex long-term issues of discrimination. Unfortunately, due. To the

complexities of the conversation, this is a common occurrence when discussing slow violence.

**Classmates**. From the moment I met Favorite Student, she let her qualms with Pride be known, and this research study was no different. During the first interview, through a series of digressions we ended up on the topic of athletes. Favorite Student immediately revealed her acrimony toward athletes:

> Athletes got away with like 90%, 99.9% of the crimes they committed in that school versus like the regular students. So, mainly the football players and the track team and stuff like that. Like they got away with not wearing uniform, skipping class, graduating and they barely attended school, you know, stuff like that—things that I just didn't agree with.

Knowing Favorite Student on a personal level, she is aware that the athletes of Pride High School didn't choose to give themselves the allowances she described. She is also aware that students cannot dictate the actions of the adults leading the school. However, those pieces of information do not stop her from placing the blame of being given special treatment solely on the backs of her fellow classmates when the blame should be placed squarely on the institution that has chosen to commodify this subgroup of students. Instead of providing avenues for Pride student athletes to excel that don't include preferential treatment, the institution has found a way to use the bodies of these students to bring more 'pride' to the school. In doing so, the school further perpetuates stereotypes about the bodies of Black athletes, another racialized historical trope that exemplifies slow violence. The athletes Favorite Student is blaming, like so many others, are merely victims of a system working impeccably well.

**Blaming Themselves**

When my co-researchers were not blaming folx with little or no control over the perpetuation of SSSV, they spent some time questioning their own actions and how they might have contributed to the trauma they suffered at the hands of the educational system. Lion admits that he was not the most cooperative member of the Pride High School community. By his own admission "I was not a good student *[laughs]* I just came to class, that's it. When I wanted to. And did some work" (Initial Interview). During this interview he tells anecdotes of him ditching school to go get food, sending administration on a hunt for him as he hid in a teachers' class under her computer table, without her permission, and being kicked out of the school multiple times, only to be allowed back soon after. He later referenced these stories when he described his transition to college. "Leaving high school, going to college was like a completely different thing. So, it changed my mindset completely. Cause I had to sit down and focus and actually dedicate myself to the class" (Initial Interview). Lion also took full responsibility for being kicked out of college a year later. The interview data show that he never questioned the possibility that a precedent of lack of accountability, set by Pride, may have factored into his mimicking high school behaviors in a post-secondary institution. It also illustrates how individuals are blamed and blame themselves for the consequences of slow violence. While assuming all responsibility is admirable, research shows that reinforced learned behaviors are not easily altered (Jones et al., 1977; Reinke & Herman, 2002).

Similarly, Bass shared feelings of accountability as it related to how ready she felt for the real world:

**Kala:** Do you think your school prepared you for the transition?

> **Bass:** Umm… not really, but I think that's just—I'm just an emotional person. If I had, you know, just understood that life changes it would have been easier (Initial Interview).

The passage indicates that Bass did not feel like Pride prepared her, however, in the very same breath, she immediately took the responsibility and blamed her emotional nature for her lack of preparedness. This is yet another example of the individuation of one's own "shortcomings" that fail to acknowledge the long-term effects of the institutional forms of slow violence.

**Justifying the Slow Violence**

In some instances, when it was clear that a SSSV act occurred, my co-researchers attempted to accept responsibility for the individual consequences of those acts rather than pointing to the institutional factors that created the conditions of possibility for acts of SSSV in the first place. This was evident from the start of the research project. The conversation about the lack of resources was a common one, and each of my co-researchers broached the subject in their own way. The excerpt below shows how Ace explained the shortage and its connection with school athletics:

> Sometimes we weren't given those resources we wanted, like they didn't try hard enough to give us those books or those extra loads of paper we needed to print. Just giving those resources to those kids who brought spotlight to the school. Our school is a big football school, so you know all the energy and attention was on the football team and the sports of our school and you know, they had every reason to because they were great. But at the same time, academics is number 1; student athlete, student comes first, and the student wasn't recognized as much in

> that school…. And that was a frustration that was common throughout all my years that I was there—having support and getting resources from administration and those above us in order to continue and just barely making it (Initial Interview).

Based on the data, there was a noticeable difference in the way Ace and his classmates were treated versus the football players. Ace knew that fundamentally the hierarchy was wrong and admitted that it was often a source of irritation. And yet, in the middle of his comments about the mixed messages he received about the value of students and athletes, he deemed it necessary to compliment those benefiting from the lopsided treatment. Ace's response suggests that while he would have appreciated having adequate resources, he could understand why athletics were the focus of the school and academics played second fiddle.

Being the oldest in the group, I noticed that Al was more intentional with his words than many of his younger counterparts. From his interviews, I interpreted Al's intentionality as part of his connection to Pride High—being a second-generation alumnus and the second of three children to attend—which made him hesitant to criticize the school. For example, during the initial interview when I asked him about resources, Al made sure to highlight the computer labs that were completed his senior year and downplay the resources to which they lost access around the same time. The interview data show however, that Al's hesitance to critique the school proved harder during the second interview. When asked to reflect on his high school experience after having gone through the research project, Al answered "It was things open to students, we just didn't

have the resources for it. The library got cut out after my year. Not completely, but we didn't have a library my senior year" (Second Interview).

The lack of resources was not the only SSSV act my co-researchers attempted to justify. When asked if she felt there were a lot of people who genuinely cared about her success, Bass replied "I can say most teachers, I'm not really sure about staff, besides like the principal, but I understand that they're busy people" (Initial Interview). Sacrificing protentional connections with students for the sake of running a school was more than reasonable to Bass.

During our second group session, we engaged in an extensive conversation about things we wish we could have changed about Pride High School. This conversation was instrumental in choosing the SSSV acts on which our social action plan focused. The excerpt below represents some of the commentary from that discussion.

> **FLASH:** You already know I wanna say lack of resources, but then again, it's like, the way they staff taught at Pride, we ain't really use resources, if that makes sense. But I know personally that there's stuff, different things that could help us learn such as computer lab, books…
>
> **Brittany:** There's a good amount of teachers I had at that school that were literally there for a check. I didn't learn anything while I was in their class.
>
> **Bass:** Some people are there just for paychecks, but I understand why people would be there just to get money.
>
> **Brittany:** Anyone who went to Pride High School and been there multiple years have seen and heard a lot of stuff that goes on that has hit us directly or people

around us and when was the last time you heard someone go to an emotional counselor?

**Ace:** Yeah, I feel like that's disregarded in schools like that, like Pride. The emotional part of a student. Like a student can't be emotionally unstable, or in a bad place, they be like 'oh get over it, this and that". Mental health is not a thing at Pride High School.

**FLASH:** I can't say that either cause they definitely tried to step in on that what, the past two years now? With the online thing they had us do, watch a bunch of videos.

**Bass:** Yeah, but a lot of kids didn't really pay attention. It was more of a thing we had to do cause it was mandated. Nobody wants to be forced to take care of their health. They want it to be like a safe space, they just wanna go when they need it.

The students touched on several topics in this extract—lack of resources, substandard teaching, and emotional wellbeing—and for each, they attempted to excuse the institution for they problems they articulate. This section begins with FLASH demonstrating how he has internalized this specific SSSV act by critiquing the lack of resources while minimizing the issue at the same time. Teachers have been making do with less for so long that it doesn't seem like a pressing issue. Brittany discusses ineffective teachers, but Bass attempts to sympathize with the mindset of those same teachers. Although she didn't say much, the lack of push back amongst the group suggests that other members of the group understood how hard it was for teachers at Pride. Brittany spearheaded the conversation on mental health, bringing to the attention of the group the lack of

TRUST[105] counselors available for Pride students over the years. Ace echoed her sentiments, but FLASH pushed back using a state-mandated initiative[106] as evidence that the school did care about the social emotional health of students. By FLASH's logic, something was better than nothing—even if that something was the bare minimum.

**Blameless Acts of Slow Violence**

Over the course of the research study, the group was faced with countless SSSV acts where the culprit was never acknowledged. Many of the slow violence acts at Pride have become so engrained in the culture of the school that, we as a group didn't stop to question who's to blame. Students skipping in the hallways was mentioned by almost every group member at one time or another, a constant at Pride that even I found myself normalizing. Another instance of this is the lack of a rigorous curriculum as seen in the exchange below between Brittany and me:

> **Brittany:** I would describe my high school as a lot of caring people, a lot of caring teachers but, the learning curve is very uh... it was lacking at some point. Thankfully I had certain teachers.
>
> **Kala:** What do you mean?

[105] "The TRUST (To Reach Ultimate Success Together) Program is a comprehensive student assistance program designed to provide prevention, intervention, referral, and follow-up services to students and their families who may be experiencing mental health issues, substance abuse and other self-defeating behaviors" (Division of Student Services, 2022, para 4)

[106] FL Rule 6A-1.094121 mandated that school districts must annually provide a minimum of five hours of required instruction related to mental and emotional health education. This rule went into effect in December of 2020, and Pride High School's plan to satisfy the requirement included stopping instruction for several days to have students watch a series of videos created by an outside company, K12, without further discussion or time for questions. In some cases, students were told to have the videos playing in the background as they continued their daily lessons (Fl Department of Education, 2022).

> **Brittany:** I noticed that a lot of the time when I would go into different classrooms, I would get a way different education, or I would learn way different things that I should've been learning. If it wasn't AP or advanced, they would be learning something I learned back in middle school, you know like a commonsense kind of course. It just seemed like they—for lack of a better term—babied a lot of students not in my AP or any advanced kind of class (Initial Interview).

If the class was not taught by a select group of teachers, the group's consensus was that the class would be taught well below grade level and in a fashion that only encouraged skipping or cheating.

While my co-researchers discussed the lack of resources at length, they never gave their opinion about who was at fault for those deficiencies. During the initial interview when Dre spoke about the lack of school supplies, nutritious food, and feminine products, his response never placed specific institutional blame, but rather a simple "nobody chooses poverty, you know what I mean?" Ace, on the other hand, knew someone was to blame but failed to explicitly say who he thought that was. "You know, I come from somewhere different where we didn't have all these resources, we struggled to just study, sit and be able to do work—who knows why…" (Initial Interview). A reoccurring theme for Ace, which he expressed in his poem, was feelings of deception, "I'm from where the water hose hydrated us to distract us from the lack of knowledge that we suffer from". Ace knows that he has been wronged; the culprit, however, remains nameless. Failure to even attempt to name the guilty party(ies) illustrates the insidious

nature of slow violence, which becomes normalized in the ways that institutions that are already predicated on whiteness continue to operate.

Even in cases where the culprit is known by me and the co-researcher, neither of us directed blame. When Favorite Student talked about her transition to the real world, she mentioned explained "I didn't go to school cause we know that was a long story. I help my mama with bills now. I have to like basically take care of myself now. I just grew up too fast. I don't know…" (Initial Interview). What Favorite Student didn't mention was the oversight of a former CAP advisor that resulted in Favorite Student going out of state to college, only to be forced to pack up and leave on the first day of classes. What she also failed to mention was the system that authorized one CAP advisor per school, with Pride having over 1500 students and other schools with as many as 3000 students. FLASH mentioned his college application journey:

> Going through my college application process, when it came down to getting transcripts in time, when it came down to getting stuff to colleges on time and dealing with the school, my high school part, getting it to them, it was very stressful at times, cause it was like I'm trying to get it done, but it was not getting done (Initial Interview).

FLASH is currently a proud member of the armed forces, so although he discussed applying to college, he failed to mention that going to the military was his second choice. Although FLASH hoped to go to college, a staff member at Pride failed to follow through with sending necessary documents, and his college applications were canceled. This staff member, who had been chastised for similar behavior before, was only given a tap on the

wrist and is still currently employed at Pride, with the same lack of regard for the students they ostensibly serve.

Then there are the SSSV acts that aren't discussed often such as the college dropout rate. Many of my co-researchers mentioned classmates who came home because they didn't have a plan. Brittany stressed this fact in the passage below:

> Once I walked across that stage
>
> The assignment begun
>
> No tools, no definite direction, no plan
>
> But worst of all no anticipation for the downfalls, broken bones, and knee scrapes
>
> That awaited me after high school.
>
> I am unprepared.
>
> I am misguided.
>
> I am burnt out.
>
> I am life's student.
>
> Yet, I still know nothing ("I Am" poem).

A few students dropping out of college and returning home is one thing. According to the data, Pride's dropout/forced transfer rate[107] from lack of preparedness alone, is cause for concern. And yet, my co-researchers didn't begin to guess who might need to be held accountable.

[107] According to the most recent MDCPS data, Pride High School's graduation rate was 91.1% for the 2019-2020 school year (Assessment, Research and Data Analysis, 2022). This number, however, doesn't account for students who were identified as not graduation ready early in the second semester and were transferred to a preparatory school or adult education program by the school. This percentage also fails to account for those students who were over the age of 17 who were unenrolled without prior knowledge. These tactics to circumvent the system are often used by schools to ensure that their graduation rates are the highest possible.

Then there are situations like the one below, introduced by Dre in his initial interview:

> It's weird because I doubt other schools or other students have to like deal with it, but it was just like a weird period of time when it felt like every month a kid would die or something like that and the emotion and like the resources given to us were lackluster. I felt like it should always be at least a, not even a therapist, but a counselor or something like that, just something more because it's needed.

Having worked at Pride for several years, Dre's concern is shared by so many more members of the Pride family, both past and present. When my co-researchers can commiserate together about losing classmates and not getting support from the school or not being allowed to grieve in their own way, who's to blame?

The stories in this chapter all share a theme of hegemony via reduced expectations, a concept discussed in the literature review. Over time, my co-researchers and have been trained to expect very little and excuse the institution for providing so little. This version of hegemonic discourse is traumatizing on its own, but when combined with self-talk, created by the system, that the onus is on the victim, the negative impact is exponentially greater. Like the first theme, the issues reflect slow violence in terms of generations-long under-resourcing and discrimination of students and their families. However, the stories presented in this section also paint a picture of survivance. Despite their past experiences, my co-researchers refuse to be silenced. Evidence of this can be further seen in the next two chapters.

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## CHAPTER NINE

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INTERLUDE

### REFLECTION # 2 [108]

March 25th 1:25pm

Looking through co-researcher transcripts.
Despite EVERYTHING Pride has put them through, they still have this crazy confidence that it will all work out in the end. That mustard seed faith ain't nothing to play with!
I don't know if making this is a habit is a good thing, but I'm jealous.
I wanna trust Pride High School like my co-researchers so bad, but I'm not about to get let down! Not again.
But shout out to them!

Figure 9.1. *Reflection #2*

[108] The phrase "faith of a mustard seed" comes from the Christian Bible. A mustard seed is one of the tiniest seeds, so the phrase implies that very little faith can be translated into great things.

### Theme 3: "Still Hopeful"

This chapter engages with Research Question 3: How does perception change as my co-researchers realize their agency thorough activism via the social action project developed? As shown in Table 6.3 below, Theme 3 demonstrates a shift in my co-researchers' understanding of their high school experience and role as Pride High School community members. It also reveals my co-researchers' thoughts surrounding the success of the social action project.

| **Theme 3: Still Hopeful** |
|---|
| Research Question 3: How does perception change as my co-researchers realize their agency thorough activism via the social action project developed? |
| **Theme-Related Components** |
| • After participation in a YPAR study, Black and Latinx survivors of SSSV were more aware and critical of their high school experience.<br>• Black and Latinx survivors of SSSV thought the social action plan created would be a success, with very little worry or hesitation. |

Figure 6.3. *Theme 3: Data and Theme from Data Analysis*

The process of collaborating on a social action plan required a lot of reflection on the slow violence we experienced as students at Pride High School. Data from the second interview uncovered a shift in understanding for many of my co-researchers. Data also shows that when asked to estimate effectiveness of the social action plan, there was very little doubt about its success, despite the experience with SSSV. As the project progressed, the students developed a more critical consciousness related to their

experiences in high school. That consciousness could be explained, at least partially, by having gained some temporal distance from their experiences and being engaged in a project that asked them to reflect on those experiences.

**More Critical of High School Experience**

During the first interview, each member of the research team was asked about their high school experience. After participating in the study, collaborating on the social action plan, and reflecting via the "I Am" poems, I asked everyone a series of questions, the goal of which was to have them reflect on their experience with the new knowledge they constructed. According to the data, for many of my co-researchers this experience helped them to look at their high school journey more holistically. Memories that were once colored by pride and admiration—as the school is a piece of Black Miami history and a longstanding pillar of the community—were now revisited after the passage of several years. During his interview, Al explained this shift:

> It definitely opened my eyes to a lot of what's going on at [Pride] now. And more than just that, inner city schools, but mostly [Pride], about what they need. Just dealing with the kids that graduated from there after I did and seeing what they been going through after we left—it's just a big difference and a lot (Second Interview).

Al, like most people, expected his high school to get better once he left, not worse. This work challenged what he knew to be true about Pride High School. According to the data, Al, like many others, was aware of the issues but didn't expect them to persist over time, a realization that illuminates the accretive complexities of slow violence. Brittany verbalized this explicitly in the excerpt below:

> It was eye-opening honestly, because once I left high school, I just assumed that it was going to skyrocket, and things were going to get better because usually that's what it's like when you go back and visit. But it was very eye-opening to see that a lot of things that I needed when I was in high school was still not being fulfilled, even though they did actually fix certain things, they were still lacking the things that were actually needed for students to really succeed (Second Interview).

The notion that the research study was an eye-opening experience was salient to the entire group. According to the data, this study not only removed rose colored glasses, but it provoked my co-researchers to consider the possibilities and ponder "what if" scenarios. In addition to describing the work as "eye-opening", Jahmez explained that learning about slow violence helped him to recognize its influence in his life and personality. While he maintains his conviction about how happy his high school experience was, a commonality amongst most of my co-researchers, he admits "this whole thing helped me to realize how much better it could've been and should've been" (Second Interview). From the data, one can deduce that while Jahmez is proud of Pride High School, he is no longer fully satisfied with the experience he had while attending. Similar sentiments were expressed by Bass, who claimed "It really made me notice, like how much different things could have been and how much better it can be in the future" (Second Interview), and Dre, who felt the experience showed him a stark contrast between "the resources that are provided to inner city schools and the greater America" (Second Interview). These sentiments echoed by many members of the team indicate a sense of evolving agency.

**Social Action Plan Success**

Given our newfound outlook on Pride High School, it was surprising that the data indicated much of the team felt our social action plan would be successful and encounter very few issues. Bass used the focus of the project to justify her stance. She explained "I think it's going to be very effective because it's not like we are asking to change the entire system as a whole, it's just small, nitpicking stuff that we think will change students' futures for the better" (Second Interview). Leon's hopes for the project extended beyond the confines of just Pride, as evidenced in the excerpt below:

> Definitely will have a great effect. If we could execute it the way I think, we're gonna execute it, then I think it will have an impact. I feel like it will eventually spread to other schools to, cause [Pride] isn't the only school that's struggling the way it's struggling, and I feel like all the students share common problems. So, I feel like if we make this go good at [pride], then we could take it to other schools. I feel like it's gonna have a great impact on the community as a whole (Second Interview).

In the area where Pride is located, there are several other low-income, predominately minority high schools. Thanks to social media, students can broadcast the day-to-day struggles of each of these institutions, sharing in a larger community of SSSV survivors. Despite SSSV and the systems in place that have allowed it to persist, Leon is confident that our plan can be the impetus for a district-wide evolution.

Some co-researchers felt it necessary to state the conditions that would ensure the success of the plan. Ace mentioned administrative support, "I feel like this project could be effective if at least one or two people at the school who are in charge of providing

support, or have say, are able to do so" (Second Interview). Jahmez's responded "I think it will be effective, but not right away. I feel like this will be something that takes a little bit longer cause, we are trying to slow down slow violence—it's gonna take a while" (Second Interview), suggesting we be realistic about the timeframe with which visible change will be apparent. Having borne witness to the schools' overall lack of consistency and constant teacher and administrative turnover, Brittany's response provided cautions, as illustrated in the excerpt below:

> I feel like it could be very effective if it stays in motion. Like starting out it could be really really strong, but if there's no one from the original study or people working at the school that can keep it in motion, then it could have a chance of dying out (Second Interview).

The responses from my co-researchers were overwhelmingly positive, however they all seemed to have the same goal, a goal Al, seemed to verbalize perfectly, "I just want the people that we need to help, to help. That's really it" (Second Interview).

As a result of this project, it seems as if my co-researchers evolved in their way of thinking. Through meaning-making, as described in existing research explored in the literature review, my co-researchers are reconstructing their understanding of themselves and the world and are situating themselves accordingly. Additionally, this process of reconstruction is impacting the students in ways that seem to indicate that they desire to operate within their reconstructed selves as they go out and enact transformational change in the world. Given the complexities of this reconstruction process and humans' innate need for support, seeking out assistance, and relying on foundational beliefs have been invaluable to the process. Both are discussed in the next chapter.

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# CHAPTER TEN

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INTERLUDE

## LOOK FOR THE HELPERS

"When I was a boy, and I would see scary things in the news,
my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers.
You will always find people who are helping'."
-Mister Rogers

The first time I heard this quote, I didn't think much of it all. Then the pandemic hit. During the lockdown, Mister Rogers' words resurfaced and were used to support countless community efforts and remarkable individuals that have went above and beyond for their neighbors. As well-intentioned as the correlations were, I found dozens of think pieces condemning the parallels and relegating the quote to preschool-aged children, just as "Mister Rogers had intended it to be".

But what about schools? Schools can be a scary place—especially as you navigate trauma, systemic oppression, and slow violence with very little support. I don't know what Mister Rogers would have wanted, but I would like to think identifying those who stand in the gaps would be right up his alley.

But what do helpers look like? From my experience, helpers look like an English teacher who has devoted every aspect of his life to education. Such an expert in creating and maintaining relationships, that he has three walls of pictures of former students and their children permanent affixed in his classroom. A guy who regularly gives some of his paycheck to former students who have fell on hard times.

Helpers look like a red-headed math teacher who prides herself on being a voice for her kids in rooms they have historically been excluded from. A woman who

started mental health breaks in her classrooms when she started to worry about her kid's socio-emotional health. Hell bent on dispelling the myth that Black kids aren't good at math, she leveraged her connections with the Algebra Project to make math more fun and relatable for our kids. So much so, that students who proclaimed to hate the subject were teaching difficult concepts to classmates just months later.

Helpers look like another math teacher who took it upon himself to single-handedly address the lack of tasty and nutritious breakfast options. After noticing his students were not showing up at their most complete selves during morning math classes, he started making smoothies for our kids. Taking it a step further, he started to create curriculum devoted to healthy eating and ensured that students got a healthy breakfast in the midst of a global pandemic. This is in addition to him coaching soccer for a local community park and operating as the CEO of a nonprofit.

Helpers look like custodians who take time out of their schedule to speak words of encouragement to students who might be having a hard time. Helpers look like coaches who grow their players as well-rounded productive citizens as well as athletes. Helpers look like dance instructors who drill discipline, hard work, professionalism, and confidence in their performers. I can go on and on.

Again, I didn't know Mister Rogers, but I would like to think that when he talked about helpers, this is who he had in mind.

Figure 10.1. *Look for the Helpers*

**Theme 4: "What They Don't Show You"**

My analysis of the data uncovered several relevant topics that could not be grouped with any of the previously mentioned themes and did not fall neatly into the research questions with which I began this study. Although this theme does not directly answer any of the study's research questions, it finds support in the frameworks in which this research is grounded. CRT and the Desire-based framework seek to unearth the entire story of marginalized communities, as Foucault (2003) suggests, those frameworks seek to excavate subjugated knowledges and wisdom. The focus of this theme illuminates the development of a complete picture of my co-researchers and their experience at Pride High School, which testifies to the pedagogical potential of research. As shown in Table 6.4 below, Theme 4 describes the impact teachers had/have on my co-researchers as they navigated their secondary education. It also takes a deeper dive into the influence pride has had on my co-researchers as well as myself, as it relates to Pride High School.

| **Theme 4: What They Don't Show You** |
|---|
| Research Question: N/A |
| **Theme-Related Components** |
| • Amid experiencing SSSV, Black and Latinx students from Pride High School sought refuge in select teachers and staff.<br>• The pride Black and Latinx SSSV survivors have for Pride High School has served as a silver-lining throughout their secondary educational career. |

Figure 6.3. *Theme 4: Data and Theme from Data Analysis*

Although this study focused on school specific slow violence, there were many moments during the study that my co-researchers and I reminisced on the good times at Pride High School. Data from both interviews, the poems and the group sessions revealed

that many of these positive moments included teachers and staff. Moreover, data indicate that, for my co-researchers, the proud moments they experienced seemingly balance out the suffering they described at Pride High School.

**Teachers and Staff of Pride High School**

Over the course of the study, Pride High School staff were mentioned constantly. There were moments when folx called administration and teachers out for being clueless to student struggles, ill-prepared, underqualified, and a host of other grievances. However, there was a group of teachers and staff that my co-researchers identified as the opposite of the traditional Pride High School teacher. The select group offered guidance, encouragement, care, inspiration, and more. When I asked co-researchers about memories they had with specific teachers/staff, there was no specification of good or bad, and while a few took the opportunity to recollect gripes and situations of unfairness, many took the opportunity to showcase some of the educators and staff who left an impression on them and their lives. In the excerpt below, Jahmez talked about an English teacher's encouraging words:

> I had an experience with [NAME REDACTED] cause like, ok, being in school, like you could be easily influenced by your peers and stuff. So, I feel like I didn't really wanna work as hard as I knew I was able to and get it done, but I had a teacher [NAME REDACTED], he taught English. I tried to switch out of his class once I was in [NAME OF CLASS REDACTED] and he let me know, like you can't run from what you gotta do, cause once you get to the next level and they put you in the class and you gotta complete it, you can't run from it… you can't take the easy route. So, when he let me know that I started to become more fond

> of actually accepting the challenge and doing things that I felt were difficult or take more time. So, that's one memory I remember—him just pushing me "you don't have to switch out of this class, just accept the challenge and get it done" (Initial Interview).

Jahmez was at a critical juncture when this memory took place. Peer pressure is a common issue high school students' experience. This is especially true in low-income areas. Depending on the type of peer pressure and its severity, Jahmez could have been led down a path that would have deterred his focus and his goals. The conversation with this teacher did more than just keep Jahmez on track, the interaction serves as a personal reminder for him to step up and handle his responsibilities. Dre's memory of an elective teacher served in a similar capacity:

> It was this one day [NAME REDACTED] called me. I was like really hungry, so I left—we weren't supposed to do that. So, he called me, and he asks me "like why are you leaving? People expect you to be here". He told me he had high expectations for me, and I couldn't do things like that anymore. It was like the first time somebody actually had a conversation with me on like the realest level about the things I did outside of school. I realized anything I was doing during school; I could wait until after school…. I don't know why that took three years to learn. I feel like it was a really great lesson for me, but you know, happened a little late [*laugh]* (Initial Interview).

By his own admission, Dre was breaking school rules by ditching classes so frequently that he no longer saw it as a problem and would leave for any reason. His other teachers were aware that he skipped class but only one of his teachers thought it was worth

addressing. That conversation forced Dre to see the error in his ways. Unfortunately, this would not stop his actions completely, but from then on, he was cognizant of the mistakes he was making.

My co-researchers told many stories of staff members stepping in when they didn't have to. When Bass was going through personal problems at home and was starting to miss class, her math teacher called her to express concern. In Bass' words, "like she was just very concerned about what was going on. She saw me as like a student that, if I'm not there, a lot of people don't talk. So, her genuine concern, helped me" (Initial Interview). Things didn't automatically get better for Bass, but knowing she had someone who cared about her and enjoyed her presence in class, made coming to school worthwhile.

For FLASH, it wasn't a teacher, but a coach who stepped in. FLASH recalled: "I was sad throughout the school day, and I walked up to my coach's office, and he seen the look on my face and was like "what's going on?". Sat with me, not only as a coach, but as a father figure…" (Initial Interview). FLASH went through his entire day struggling. Class periods at Pride High School are one hour and 30 minutes long. Yet it took his basketball coach only a moment to see something was wrong and step in.

I have spent my entire teaching career at Pride High School, and I have taught some of my co-researchers, so while it wasn't completely shocking to hear of memories that included me, it touched me to know that I was that influential in the lives of former students. When asked about a time he felt proud of Pride, Leon didn't hesitate to tell the story of how he ended up at his current university:

> It was the moment my teachers came together and got me into college. It was three teachers that worked together on it, [NAME REDACTED, NAME REDACTED], and Kala Jones. I had other plans for college, as far as how I was going to get into [UNIVERSITY NAME REDACTED]. I was gonna do two years at community college and then transfer over, but they found me a program which got me in quicker. I always had appreciation and always will have appreciation for them (Initial Interview).

Leon's plan, like many students from low-income, Black schools, involved him taking a longer route to get to college because he didn't think he could get in any other way. It took a group of teachers to see in him what he was incapable of seeing in himself.

During the initial interview, I also asked my co-researchers how they knew someone from Pride genuinely cared about them or their success. Pride High School and low-income, Black schools in the area have a reputation of being filled with teachers and staff who only use the school and the students as a tool for upward mobility. The co-researchers' responses indicate that that is still a significant issue, nevertheless, students knew who really cared. Favorite Student explains:

> They go beyond the measure to make sure you're passing your class, or you're not getting into trouble or anything like that. You didn't let me get into trouble. Whenever you knew I was into something, you'll either talk to me about it or tell me how I should deal with the situation. I think you're the one that made me type up that stupid apology to the assistant principal, so you made me apologize which I wouldn't have done. That's how you know when a teacher genuinely cares about you cause they make you do something you probably wouldn't do on your own or

> you probably didn't think to do—they go beyond their measure, beyond their job. As a teacher, you don't have anything besides teach students because that's what they pay you for, but when I got in trouble you would sit down and talk to me and make me see things from different perspective…. (Initial Interview).

Favorite Student, and many of my other co-researchers, believed that all an educator's job entails is to teach. This has been their experience for much of their P-12 education, and when a teacher goes beyond that either by taking the effort to get to know them, or talking them out of bad decision, they immediately call it out and attach themselves to that person. This was evident by the association between the positive stories about teachers and those teachers' popularity among students. The students at Pride High School knew which folx were willing to do more than what the job description called for; those willing to teach in the truest sense of the word. As a result, they made every effort to surround themselves with those adults as much as they could.

**The Power of Pride**

Pride High School has a very complex reputation. On one side, Pride is a tough school. Located in what most would consider a ghetto; the community surrounding Pride High School is a food desert[109], riddled with run-down public housing and an intersection for several gang territories. Conversely, there is another side to Pride High School. Pride

[109] According to Widener and Shannon (2014) food deserts are areas "lacking spatial access to healthy foods, like fruits and vegetables, as well as a range of other nutritious options" (p. 1). Areas with limited access to healthy food are more likely to have lack of access to other services as well thus creating a cycle that negatively impacts the lives of community members, research posits. "…residents of impoverished or deprived areas frequently face higher prices for food and other necessities. Poor education and limited health care services in conjunction with high prices for fresh produce and other healthy food may result in poor diet and adverse health outcomes for residents if these areas" (Dutko et al., 2012, p. 3).

is a nationally acclaimed school for several different sports and extracurriculars. This is the side of Pride that my co-researchers boast about and fiercely defend. Posits

During the first session, I put a picture of Pride High School on the screen and asked my co-researchers "What comes to mind?"

**FLASH:** The place to be. Trendsetters above all.

**Ace:** What comes to mind for me? Pride. Pride and dedication. Individuals that will work hard to reach any goal.

**Bass:** Pride. I went to Pride High School solely based on pride cause I wasn't even in that area to go there. I had to beg my mom and dad, "hey this is where I want to go".

**Jahmez:** It's the pride. It's one of the most popular schools at [CURRENT UNIVERSITY NAME REDACTED]. White people, Black people, they all know about Pride.

During this conversation we also talked about the other side of Pride High School. Many of my co-researchers revealed that the media does a good enough job already tearing down Pride High School. Whenever the school is in the news, it's for something negative, never something positive. Alumni, therefore, take it upon themselves to fight back with counterstories that present the reality of the school.

Football is one of those places of pride. Some of my co-researcher's happiest moments of their high school career surrounded athletics. Brittany claimed, "I felt proud when our school went to state…I knew the boys on the team personally, I knew the coaches and I knew that they had worked so, so, so, so hard to get to that point" (Initial Interview). A championship win warranted a pep-rally and it's during those events that

Pride students are able to put all the comments and opinions of the outside down, if only for a moment. Both Bass and Ace made comments about the joy that those moments brought them and their classmates. Bass stated simply "pep rallies and stuff… where we got to celebrate accomplishments" including the superior rating she and the band earned. Ace, expounded:

> I'll say every time we won like a championship. The school was so lively. We all came together, the pep rallies—we all just came and bonded, and the teachers were happy. We weren't thinking about exams, no homework, nothing. It was just a lively, bonding event that we all enjoyed. We all knew the situation; you know at the end of the day we are all under one community, we are all under the same situation (most of the time) and we just work with it. We forget about our problems—most of the time—when it was things like that. You know, we go home, and we face things but when you're like in a pep rally, most of our pep rallies were just lively, energetic, passionate, very prideful, and that pride helped a lot of these kids wanting to keep coming back to the school and wanting better for themselves, wanting to be like these athletes or these other students who were able to participate in the pep rallies. You wanna be the guest speaker, you wanna be one of the helpers. That motivated many of us in the stands. when we all came together- we felt like a family—even though we weren't. Most of us we didn't even know each other, and we still found that support, we are [SCHOOL MASCOT REDACTED] for life and that [SCHOOL MASCOT REDADCTED] for life is that motto that we all carry from that high school.

Pride High School is so much more than just the football team, the track team or the band. Several co-researchers made an effort to mention that. However, from the data, it's clear they were mentioning it to remind outsiders. Those on the inside are proud of everything good that comes out of Pride High School.

## Summary of Results

Overall, based on the data generated by my co-researchers, I identified four themes. I analyzed two semi-structured interviews, poems, and group sessions to identify the themes and sub-themes presented in chapters 6-10. First, I discussed the belief held by my co-researchers that pain was necessary to persevere in chapter seven. Second, I discussed the innate desire to blame everyone except the true perpetrators of SSSV in chapter eight. Third, I discussed the confidence in the social action plan, despite history in chapter nine. This section ends with analysis of the helpers the teachers and staff and the pride that makes Pride High School what it is in chapter ten. In the next chapter, I will discuss the significance of the findings and how this this study can impact future research. Moreover, I make recommendations for lessening SSSV in low-income and predominately Black schools in urban schools across the country.

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

# DISCUSSION

The purpose for this Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) study was three-fold. First, I engaged with a select group of co-researchers to better understand how they internalized and made meaning of their experiences with school specific slow violence (SSSV). Second, my co-researchers and I collaborated on a social action plan that would lessen the effects of two SSSV acts that continue to impact Pride High School. Third, I analyzed various data to examine (1) how the meaning making process impacted each co-researcher and (2) how their perceptions of agency changed as they realized their agency.

In this chapter, I ground the findings I presented in chapters 6-10 in the theoretical frameworks that guided this inquiry. I then discuss research positionality and reflexivity. Finally, I provide recommendations and suggestions for future research. A comprehensive conclusion rounds out the dissertation.

This study reveals the deleterious effects of SSSV on the mindset and attitude of folx who graduated within the last five years from Pride High School. This study also illuminates the hope and pride those folx have for their high school. To discuss these findings, I discuss the tensions my co-researchers had to negotiate and the contradictory messages they internalized to cope with the SSSV they experienced at Pride High School. Additionally, because this research is rooted in desire-based frameworks, which seek to provide a more comprehensive story and narratives of survivance, I also discuss the positive effects some teachers and staff have on Pride students, and the pride that keeps alumni wanting to fight for change.

The outcomes of the YPAR project show that the co-researchers were interested and invested in addressing and lessening acts of SSSV at their alma mater. To do this, my co-researchers and I deliberated and agreed on two pressing acts of slow violence: lack of resources and lack of exposure to careers outside of college, and we collaborated on a social action plan. Moreover, the outcome of this YPAR project provides evidence that agency can be developed as my co-researchers started this work unsure that they were capable of enacting change at their old high school. Unfortunately, the school has not yet responded to the social action plan, which suggests that much work remains.

## Theoretical Framework

This discussion situates my study findings in the theoretical frameworks that guide this study: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Desire-based research. These frameworks are useful in interpreting the findings of this study regarding the lived experiences of Black and Latinx folx discussing their experiences of SSSV at Pride High School and the complicated relationship that they have developed with those memories. CRT is useful for analyzing content as it relates to race, power, counterstorytelling, community, and group development. For example, CRT is useful to understand the importance of providing spaces in which my co-researchers had the opportunity to describe their high school experiences from their perspectives. Critical race theory is also important when analyzing their counterstory to expose racialized structures of oppression within the education system and society. Desire-based research is advantageous for recognizing current pain elicited by the past while also acknowledging the hope and vision for the community. Desire-based research addresses the hope within the pain of my co-researchers as they look to the future. Through desire-based research, I examined

the survivance narratives, or the will to resist domination, of my co-researchers as they sought to understand and act on the educational injustices they experienced in Pride High School. In the next section, I draw on both theoretical frameworks to further interpret the study's findings, which I have organized according to the themes discussed in chapters 6-10.

## Review of Findings

### No Pain, No Gain

The findings of this study speak to the internalization of the notion that suffering is expected. Throughout the study, my co-researchers normalized the idea of operating with less than needed. The lack of resources was a salient thread throughout the experiences of my co-researchers, and while they expressed frustration because of a lack of resources, they normalized it as standard procedure, or common sense (Kumashiro, 2013), at Pride High School. My co-researchers did not internalize this idea of accepting lesser-than randomly, however. Meaning making research tells us that for someone to internalize an ideal, there must be intentionality—it must extend beyond the scope of the person—and normativity—a standard of correctness (Zittoun & Brinkmann, 2012). In the case of my co-researchers, the reality that low-income and predominately Black public schools get less resources is accurate. This is consistent with existing literature surrounding the plight of marginalized communities. Delgado explains:

> Majority of society perceives the conditions of the marginalized and excluded to be normal and simply as no cause for concern. It follows from this that the problems that chronically oppressed groups encounter in society are neither new

> nor particularly interesting and are mostly their own doing (as quoted in Duncan 2002, p. 133).

Society has written off the lack of resources and supplies at Pride High School as common sense to the extent that fellow members of the community justify this "truth" for younger members, as evidenced by Ace, who notes that "those students are aware of the situation, but they just kind of put up with what they got just like how I went through it myself" (Initial Interview).

Over the course of the study, my co-researchers noted other examples of normalized suffering. Favorite Student and Jahmez refer to the lack of books and technology, Dre mentions a shortage in writing instruments, and Brittany explicitly notes the absence of computers and tablets. A school lacking the fundamentals almost ensures an education that is substandard, but one that fails to prepare students on the technological front not only prevents students from keeping up with modern education, but also, in a country that moving toward hi-tech at a rapid pace, hinders future job opportunities. A host of research on the disparity of technology availability found that Black, Latinx and poor students were less likely to use computers in school or at home and less likely to have a high-speed internet connection (Bailie, 2007; Javeri, 2007; Kidd, 2009). Kidd (2009) explains that the Digital Divide refers to the student to technology

ratio, how the technology is used[110] and technology adoption.[111] Since recent research heralds' educational technology for its impact on student academic performance (Javeri, 2007; Teclehaimanot, 2006), the development of high order thinking and metacognition skills (Murphy et al., 2005), improvement of student motivation and attitude (Bailie, 2007; Vonderwell & Peterman, 2008;), addressing the needs of low-performing and "at-risk" students (via scaffolding[112]) (Javeri, 2007; Teclehaimanot, 2006), the gap is only widening for students at Pride High School.

Pabon (2017) labels social suffering the outcome of a build-up of institutional power working against a marginalized group, as is the case for Pride High School. Scholars prior to Pabon describe social suffering as the results of "what political, economic, and institutional power does to people, and reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems" (Kleinman et al., 1997, as cited in Pabon, 2017). Pabon (2017) further relates social suffering to Black education as a form of double suffering:

> In the first case, students are told, despite evidence to the contrary that participating in schooling is not suffering but an opportunity to improve ones' life

[110] "Low SES schools are more likely to use technology for drill and practice whereas high SES school uses technology in innovative teaching strategies…. Pinar (2002) suggests that the instruments of computer technology are used to drill and kill students into passing standardized test, not actually being integrated effectively into classroom instruction or pedagogical practice that promote quality teaching and active student learning" (Kidd, 2009, p. 92).

[111] Teacher's willingness to adopt and implement learning technology is contingent on "continuous training and development, proper technology support from technology personnel, encouragement from school administration, and an organizational structure that supported teachers using technology" (Kidd 2009, p. 93).

[112] Scaffolding is a pedagogical instrument that involves the gradual removal of teacher assistance as a student increase their understanding of a topic or skill.

> chances. Then, as the group continues to suffer as a result of inequitable access to social and educational opportunities, that too is deemed not a legitimate form of suffering, but the inevitable and natural result of failure—on the part of the individual and/or the group—to take full advantage of schooling, either as a result of laziness or lack of innate ability (p. 768).

Pabon (2017) describes a lose-lose situation for minority students. This type of outcome cultivates an outlook that glorifies settling for less, as is the case for my co-researchers as evidenced by the data.

The co-researchers also speak to an overarching concept that suffering shapes your life for the better. Jahmez justified this ideology by explaining that suffering was commonplace and "thuggin' it out" was the only option. For him that thuggin' it out paid off, but the thoughts presented by Jahmez and the rest of the team, whether intentional or unintentional, align with Duckworth's (2016) concept of grit, which she describes as "the perseverance and passion for achieving long-term goals" (p. 73). Duckworth argues that even if one is not already ahead, if they have the "ferocious" desire to succeed despite all odd or circumstances, they will (Goodman, 2018). Research has even shown a strong correlation between grit and long-term academic attainment (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). The problem, however, with such this mindset is the disregard for systemic inequalities that make it easier for society to categorize us and treat us differently. It also individuates problems by ignoring the systemic and institutional (and even historical discursive emergence) endemic to those problems. Grit is a culturally specific concept predicated on historical tropes that rationalize class power and imbricate class hierarchy with racial

discrimination. Moreover, grit and growth mindset theory operate as extensions of deficit thinking. Tewell (2020) elucidates:

> Grit presumes that learners who do not measure up simply need to locate their perseverance and passions. Mind-set theory begins with the premise that people who possess or develop a growth mind-set advance their intellect through hard work and dedication. It creates an environment, however, where students are defined in terms of deficits and their lack of perseverance in striving toward goals determined by an educational system that is structurally unjust. (p. 138)

According to the logics of grit and growth mind-set theory, all my co-researchers should be highly successful. From the magnitude of SSSV they encountered at Pride High School, they have demonstrated the fierce desire to succeed, which begs the question as to why they aren't "successful" in terms of white, class-based logic. Favorite Student and FLASH didn't end up in college, their first choice post high school, not because they didn't work hard. The reason Bass and Brittany felt ill-prepared for the real world was not because they didn't try hard enough to locate their passion—in fact, both discussed their passions in detail during this study. Grit and growth mind-set theory fail to account for historical, systemic, political, and institutional conditions of possibility that produce various forms of slow violence. The experiences of my co-researchers provide a counternarrative to deficit discourses that position students who have not "achieved" as lazy, unmotivated, and underserving.

**It's Us, Never Them**

As highlighted in Chapter eight, findings in this study suggest that my co-researchers struggled to locate the specific sites and perpetrators of the slow violence

they experienced. Throughout the study, I discovered that my co-researchers were willing to blame other victims, themselves, or no one at all. In some cases, when faced with an obvious culprit, members of the team opted to rationalize the situation. The impulse to take personal responsibility for acts of slow violence, even if/when it is happening to them, indicates the power of institutional discourses and institutional power. Power can certainly emerge discursively, but in the case of institutions like schools, power is effected through carceral knowledges that are employed through all who work in the institutions.

Freed (2015) defines institutional discourse using three criteria: (1) a verbal[113] exchange between two or more people where one person is a representative for an institution and the other(s) are "non-experts" who must comply with institutional norms and objectives, (2) the interaction and speakers' goals are determined by the institution, and (3) at least one person defines the interaction as work. It is through this discourse between institutional spokesperson and client that the dominant group aims to construct and reproduce positions of dominance that serve their own interests[114] (Mayr, 2008). With so much unchecked power, there has been a heightened concern "with the ways in which language is used to create and shape institutions and how institutions in turn have the capacity to create, shape, and impose discourses on people" (Mayr, 2015, p. 786).

[113] Other scholars (Mayr, 2015; Roberts, 2011) have argued that communication of any kind could suffice, it doesn't have to be strictly verbal.

[114] "Organizations exists only in so far as their members create them through discourse. This is not to claim that organizations are 'nothing but discourse', but rather that discourse is the principal means by which organizational members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are" (Mumby & Clair, 1997 as cited in Mayr, 2015, p. 786).

Institutional discourse has been used as a power tactic rooted in both white supremacy and classism (Mayr, 2008).

Institutional discourse in education throughout the history of schooling. Operating from both a front stage and backstage perspective, the school has maintained a dominant position, regardless of the effects on the student. The front stage, the view seen by the student is performative, while the backstage is where the performance is rehearsed and contradicted (Roberts, 2011). The deceit produced from this act is necessary to prevent the person from cultivating the capacity to critique knowledges, thus, reducing resistance and increasing the internalization of the desired message. Mayr (2008) reiterates Foucault's message that power "is secured not so much by the threat of punishment, but by the internalization of the norms and values implied by the prevailing discourses within the social order" (p.15). Messaging around education being a personal responsibility and a private benefit rather than a public good, which validates racialized and classed bootstrap theory and meritocratic thinking have produced students as individuated subjects who believe they can succeed if they work hard, and if they fail, they have only themselves to blame.[115] The findings of this study corroborate the persistence of this pernicious claim.

**Still Hopeful**

The data analysis reveals that my co-researchers developed agency between the start of the study and the finalization of the social action plan. During our second group session, after we created a list of acts of slow violence, I asked the group to identify from

[115] Plausible deniability made possible in part by the "social bonds [that] have given way under the collapse of social protections and the welfare state and are further weakened by the neoliberal insistence that there are only individual solutions to socially produced problems" (Giroux, 2014, para 7).

the list we created which SSSV acts they felt we could impact. There was a long pause before anyone started to answer the question, and the responses was riddled with uncertainly and doubt. Given the research on student agency, that response was shocking and unexpected. Scholars have noted that Black students and communities have a history of possessing agency that directly oppose deficit mindsets (Williams et al., 2020). Williams and colleagues (2020) define Black student agency as "Black students' capacity to critique the larger educational enterprise as being imbued with a specific anti-Black racial bias and acting in ways that disrupt such institutionalized racial bias" (p. 255). Black agency requires a willingness to call out the inequities of the educational system while also refraining from engaging in them.

Knowing most of my co-researchers on a personal level, I was confident that each of them had exercised agency at some point in their high school career. Freire (1968/1972) suggests that for Black and Latinx students to feel comfortable discussing agency work, then I had to focus on SSSV first: "Unlocking the potential within students who are marginalized requires an explicit acknowledgement of factors oppressing them" (Freire, 1968/1972, as cited in Kundu, 2020). When society tells a group of students that everyone is treated equally, but they are constantly receiving contradictory messages that they are indeed different, that explicit acknowledgement of the racial elephant in the room is crucial for engagement. By the end of the sessions, when asked, 100% of the team expressed that they would be willing to do advocacy work again. Thus, the findings in the study support the present research on agency in marginalized communities.

**What They Don't Show You**

Both the extant literature (Rudasill et al., 2010; Ulug et al., 2011) and findings of this study speak to the power of student-teacher relationships. Relationships are important, especially at a low-income school and even more so at a predominately minority, low-income school. Positive student-teacher relationships have been shown to increase student academic achievement (Murray & Malmgren, 2005), lessen risky behavior (Rudasillet al., 2010) and provide a host of other benefits to the student. Moreover, positive interactions have been shown to positively impact the teacher as well (Murray & Zvoch, 2011). The findings from this study support and are supported by current literature. Almost every member of my co-researcher team was able to tell a story about a teacher or staff member that positively impacted their life. The stories provided by the team varied. Al, a super laid-back student, told a story of him hanging out in a teacher's class during lunch soaking up the wisdom of his elders. Leon, someone who values relationships deeply, recalled several stories with different educators and staff, from the cosmetology teacher to the janitor. Favorite Student revealed that she sought refuge in my classroom, and as a result chose to spend all of her time in my classroom, even if that meant going to get her work from another teacher and completing it in my class, because as she put it "I didn't like those people in that building" (Initial Interview).

A common thread among all the stories is a level of trust. This is consistent with current research. Murray and Zvoch (2011) conclude that trust is an important factor on both sides of the teacher-student relationship:

> The trust factor in the current study as comprised of items pertaining to acceptance and respect, suggesting that these aspects of relationships are

> important to students. Further, the fact that student perceptions of trust were so consistently associated with both student and teacher ratings of adjustment suggests that trust is indeed an important feature of early adolescents' relationships with teachers (p. 515).

They continue by suggesting that in high-poverty areas, trust may be key that allows teachers the opportunity to distribute "socially valued knowledge and skills to students" (Murray & Zvoch, 2011, p. 515). This study supports their claim. At the start of our first session, our warm-up was an introduction that included my co-researchers responding to why they chose to participate in this research. Each member's response included some level of trust, be it with me or another educator who suggested the project to them, but it all came down to them having faith in an adult/mentor figure and choosing to follow through. As a result, we were able to create an amazingly powerful body of work.

## Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

England (1994) describes research as a space to be shared by the researcher and their fellow contributor(s). For both groups to operate harmoniously, identities must be recognized and their potential impact on the research must be acknowledged. This is especially true in qualitative research. Bourke (2014) explains:

> The nature of qualitative research sets the researcher as the data collection instrument. It is reasonable to expect that the researcher's beliefs, political stance, cultural background (gender, race, class, socioeconomic status, educational background) are important variables that may affect the resource process. Just as the participants' experiences are framed in social-cultural contexts, so too are those of the researcher (p. 2).

As a Black, heterosexual, cisgender woman educator who grew up in a low-income neighborhood like my co-researchers and attended and is currently teaching at Pride High School, I believe that my identity allowed me to engage with the rest of my research team in a way that was authentic, open, and honest. There were many moments when my co-researchers mentioned nuanced information such as nicknames for teachers, names for special rooms, and district-specific initiatives. Had my identity not closely resembled my group, pertinent data would have been lost in translation. There were moments in which I felt I was too close, but through the use of reflexivity and memo writing, I was able to navigate those moments and take a "step back".

Furthermore, I acknowledge that my positionality made it easier for my co-researchers to trust me. Asking Pride High School alumni to expose the difficult realities of their high school experiences left them open to backlash. Pride alumni are a very proud group and even the slightest objective critique is met with harsh responses that sometimes straddle the line of bullying. Although knowing my positionality doesn't dictate my intentions, operating in a place where I have developed a rapport with many of my co-researchers allowed them to lower their guards and engage freely.

If positionality is what we know, then reflexivity is what we do with what we know. Corlett and Mavin (2018) depict reflexivity as the "rendering [of] biases visible through personal disclosure so that audiences could take them into account" (p. 9). Qualitative research recognizes that researchers are situated in their work, so constant scrutiny of the ways in which personal experiences might impact data perception is vital. The process of being actively reflexive was challenging. As a former teacher of a few of my co-researchers, I was constantly worrying about power dynamics. To reduce power

relations, I required everyone to call me by my first name, an action very uncharacteristic of my teacher identity. This proved to be harder than expected as several members of the team slipped up and addressed me as Ms. Jones. My co-researchers also refrained from using expletives, even when they felt it was warranted, out of "respect".

Lastly, as a former Pride High School student, I sometimes had to remind myself to defer to the group and allow them to come to their own conclusions about their experience with SSSV. There were acts of slow violence that I assumed were important but were so normalized that my co-researchers failed to even acknowledge them, such as inappropriate teacher-student relationships and punitive disciplinary actions. In these cases, I deferred to the group and deferred to their lived experiences.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations stem from my collaboration with my co-researchers, interviews, poem analysis, extant literature, and self-reflections. Below I outline several recommendations that should be considered by educational stakeholders who hope to reduce and eventually eliminate the educational and social inequities endemic in SSSV.

### Resistance

Currently, there are tensions between institutions and the people in them. We value the knowledges produced by institutions but deprecate the knowledge of people who inhabit institutions like schools. Resistance is often a normal consequence to this type of dissonance. Current literature that speaks to how marginalized groups navigate educational inequities (Ewing, 2018; Romero et.al, 2008; Stovall, 2006;Tuck & Yang, 2014), demonstrates that resistance has shown to be a favorable option that renders a

powerful message even if that message isn't always attached to a favorable outcome. Tuck and Yang (2014) describe different forms of resistance. In some cases, resistance to educational injustice is directed at the state. Tuck and Yang (2014) tell a story of 19 Hopi men who, in response to settler colonialism imposed on them by the U.S. government, refused to send their children to school. As a result, all 19 men were taken to jail. This event became the face of Hopi resistance and continues to frame conversations on schooling, justice, community, and sovereignty for the Hopi people (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Ewing (2018) recounts the resistance of Chicago community members when the mayor announced numerous school closings that would disproportionately impact Black children and families. Through her documentation of board meetings, rallies, press conferences, vigils, and interviews with folx affiliated with the closed schools, Ewing (2018) brings attention to the systematic erasure of Black bodies around Bronzeville in Chicago.

In most other cases, resistance to educational injustice is rooted in a demand for more than what the institution is designed to, or, in other words willing, to do (Moses et al., 1989; Tuck & Yang, 2014). When the city of Chicago reneged on its promise to build a community school in Little Village, community members staged a hunger strike on the site originally planned for the school (Stovall, 2006). Stoval (2006) further explains "Within this time period the strikers forced CPS [Chcago Public Schools] to the negotiating table, resulting in the approval of the high school complex…which opened September 6, 2005" (p. 100). The work of the strikers inspired further action in a nearby town of North Lawndale. Romero and colleagues (2008) review the Social Justice Education Project (SJEP) that exists out of the desire for the cultural, social, and

intellectual needs of Latinx students to be met. Through participatory action research, Romero and colleagues (2008) offered a class five times in three high schools, which afforded students "the opportunity to engage in a critical analysis of social justice issues that impact the lives of youth and other Latinas/os" (p. 133). McCoy and Villeneuve (2020) argue that resistance could include essentially burning the system down from the inside out. They explain "Native people have long responded to settler colonialism's ever-evolving attempts at control with 'local ambition and indigenous creativity…deployed to confront outside pressures" (p. 491). The schools/institutes highlighted in McCoy and Villenueve (2020) were all created by Indigenous educators and "form a practice of sovereignty that engages in "creative self-determination towards goals of equity, justice, tolerance, and mutual well-being" (p. 491). Both the literature and findings uplifted in this study suggests that educational injustices must not be left to endure. Resistance takes many forms, and they all work together to dismantle educational inequity.

**Policy Discourse**

As evidenced by this study's findings, significant policy changes are needed to eliminate SSSV. As a country, there has been a push to focus on the school, but we have failed to include various societal inequities that directly contribute to SSSV. Education does not happen in a vacuum, and separating the school from pressing social, political, economic, and historical issues reinscribes the past on the present and the future (Pinar, 2012). Curricular violence is evidenced by so-called "Don't Say Gay" legislation recently signed by Florida's Governor. Under the pretense of "parental rights," the bill prohibits "classroom instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity from kindergarten through

third grade and prohibits such lessons for older students unless they are age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate" (Berger, 2022, para 3). The effort to separate the school and a critical issue like LGBTQ+ rights has already divided the country, with scholars suggesting grim outcomes for LGBTQ+ students. This study suggests that rather than elide crucial conversations about significant social issues, schools and universities actually provide some of the most essential spaces to grapple with those issues.

**Burn It To The Ground**

After analyzing the findings, a recommendation I propose is starting over from the beginning. As the data show, many of the slow violence acts identified by my co-researchers and me exist and persist through complex histories and intersected systemic issues. To eliminate certain acts of slow violence like lack of rigorous course offerings, building upkeep, or lack of qualified educators, we must first change the assumptions within the system that have allowed such issues to persist for so long. The assumptions that enable acts of SSSV are rooted in racism and classism and are built into the fabric of this country's educational system. Davis (1998) echoes these sentiments as she discusses them in relation to the carceral system: "the deterioration of public education, including prioritizing discipline over learning in public schools located in poor communities, is directly related to the prison "solution".

I propose burning it to the ground in the literal and figurative sense. I am an advocate for disrupting and/or preventing further conversations surround reform because they are pointless. By opening our minds to the possibility that learning may not happen

in the school, we are taking the advice of scholars like Pinar[116] and Illich[117] while also acknowledging that educational spaces have always been diverse. Organizations like the Black Panther Party (Kirkby, 2011) and the Chicago Young Lords (Lazú, 2013) have both had educational programs within their organizations that sought the reconstruction of knowledge for children. Mississippi Freedom schools were pivotal during the Civil Rights Movement because they offered "an education that public schools would not supply, one that both provided intellectual stimulation and linked learning to participation in the movement to transform the South's segregated society" (Perlstein, 1990, p. 297). Burning it to the ground offers an opportunity for community organizations such as the Urban League of Greater Miami, Inc. to help prepare parents and collaborate with them in the learning and unlearning of their children. Burning it to the ground repositions teachers who are no longer confined by the rules of the institution to embody the responsibility to exchange knowledge with future generations of citizens who engage in the struggle to reinvigorate democracy and grapple with the meaning of justice.

The recommendations I provided reflect a certain tension. However, as the Civil Rights Movement demonstrated—Black Panther Party, the Back to Africa Movement,

[116] "Speaking sparingly of schools (Pinar, 2004) particular as decades of corporate school 'reform' have magnified the historic impulse to forefront the school as the indispensable site of social engineering" (Burns & Cruz, 2021).

[117] "Many students, especially those who are poor, intuitively know what the schools do for them. They school them to confuse process and substance. Once these become blurred, a new logic is assumed: the more treatment there is, the better are the results; or escalation leads to success. The pupil is thereby 'schooled' to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. His imagination is 'schooled' to accept service in place of value" (Illich, 1971).

Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—they each have their own place in the fight against injustice.

## Future Research

Among critical researchers, future research should seek to further understand the impact of slow violence on Black and Latinx folx outside of school. The current study contributes to this effort by examining the meaning making and internalization process of SSSV survivors. Existing literature and the data support the claim that slow violence is not only found in the school. Future research should disentangle the constellation of social, economic, political, and historical issues—environmental, economic, legal, judicial, carceral, etc.—to understand and counter the production and persistence of SSSV. Continued work current students instead of alumni will add to the literature by demonstration the interaction between SSSV and slow violence in the community. Using the YPAR methodology in future work would ensure that the voices of those affected by slow violence are heard.

This study demonstrates that my co-researchers assumed some of the guilt of slow violence acts that occurred to them. Moreover, analysis surrounding this determined that the institutional discourse students receive from the school, aided in their assumption that by falling short they either did not work hard enough, or didn't want it bad enough. A study that examines this concept with current students, would add to the limited literature on both institutional discourse in schools, as currently there is no substantive literature on racialized institutional discourse and SSSV.

The co-researchers of this study were folx who held some level of cultural capital at Pride High School. Despite my best efforts to include all groups of alumni, those who

were pushed out, dropped out and/or allowed to slip through the cracks were not included in this study. This group is likely to have had a differing connection to Pride High School as it relates to SSSV and how they have made meaning of it compared to the co-researchers of the current study. A future study specifically focused on the experiences and internalization of SSSV of that population is desperately needed. The current study serves as exploratory research that will set me up to work with that population of co-researchers and others that might've been overlooked.

Furthermore, a future study on the implementation of the social action plan, crafted by my co-researchers and me, should examine how an alumni-led project can be modified and used in other low-income, predominately Black or Latinx schools in the district. This research could also examine the process the plan must go through to be implemented at Pride High School as well as progress over the first year of implementation.

Lastly, the current study provides valuable methodological contributions that can positively impact YPAR and other participatory action research studies. The ethical choices I employed regarding data analysis and choosing to keep my co-researchers out of that process can be utilized in future studies to speak to academia's role in the retraumatizing of co-researchers/participants/contributors. Future research could examine how we apply reflexive and ethical measures to ensure that we are not providing undue hard to those who willingly choose to participate in our research.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that school specific slow violence should not continue to be ignored or swept under the rug. Through a YPAR methodology grounded in CRT and

desire-based research framework, my co-researchers and I engaged in a project that focused on learning how students from a low-income, predominately Black high school internalized and made meaning of the SSSV acts they experienced as students as Pride High School. Over the course of several months, my co-researchers and I designed a social action plan that focused on lessening the impact of two acts of slow violence: lack of resources and lack of access to opportunities outside of college.

Aside from the direct consequences, such as Favorite Student having to leave school or FLASH going to the armed forces, SSSV influences outlook, attitude, and mindsets years later. Because slow violence lacks spectacle, lacks an exact timeframe, and the severity is undetermined, it has been allowed to continue to infiltrate our schools and negatively impact our communities. Until educational stakeholders pay attention and reevaluate the status quo, more people will experience the same trauma and graduate with distorted views and inaccurate assumptions of themselves and their abilities. The commonalities between my experiences and those of the rest of the team demonstrate a level of intergenerationality that further underscores the need for interventions like the social action plan. Disposability politics has rendered us invisible to those in power and it's in these shadows that we succumb to slow violence. But no longer. The very fact that my co-researchers and I can collaborate on this work illustrates survivance and our willingness to work to change the narrative. The work of my co-researchers and I serves as the catalyst needed to try a different approach. We are no longer accepting our place in the shadows.

We refuse to be forgotten/erased/disremembered any longer.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: Dissertation Interview 1 Protocol

**Interview Procedure:** The study that you have agreed to participate in requires two supplemental interviews, one of which will occur right now. As you may now, this study is investigating school-specific slow violence, how folx make meaning of school specific slow violence and how advocacy may (or may not) affect the feelings surrounding school specific slow violence. During this interview, you will be asked to respond to several open-ended questions. You may choose not to answer any or all of the questions. The procedure will involve recording the interview, and the recording will be transcribed verbatim. Your results are confidential, and you will not be identified individually.

**Informed Consent:** A verbal "YES" from you will signify your willingness to participate in the part of the study.

| **Question** |
|---|
| **Descriptive Question**: How would you describe your high school?<br>Follow up question (FU) 1: Based on your knowledge, how plentiful were the resources at your school?<br>FU 2: How did teachers deal with the lack of resources? |
| **Grand Tour:** Walk me through a typical day in your life as you experienced your high school as a student. |
| **Example Question:** Is there a specific memory from your high school experience that really stands out to you?<br>FU 1: Why do you think this particular memory stand out? |
| **Specific grand tour Question**: If possible, tell me about a time when you felt frustrated/angry with your high school or someone connected to the school (teacher, staff, district personnel, etc.) in as much detail as you can remember |
| **Specific grand tour Question**: If possible, tell me about a time when you felt happy with/proud of<br>your high school or someone connected to the school (teacher, staff, district personnel, etc.) in as much detail as you can remember |
| **Example Question:** Tell me a memory you have of a specific teacher at your high school<br>FU 1: In general, how did you know if a teacher/administrator genuinely cared about (or was invested in) your success? |
| **Example Question:** Tell me about an experience that you had as you transitioned out of high school. |
| **Descriptive Question:** Can you talk about your transition from high school till now? |
| **Descriptive Question:** Can you tell me about how your friends from high school are doing? |

**Structural Question:** Looking back on your high school experience, what are some of the lessons that stand out to you?

## APPENDIX B: Dissertation Interview 2 Protocol

**Interview Procedure:** The study that you have agreed to participate in requires two supplemental interviews, one of which will occur right now. As you may now, this study is investigating school-specific slow violence, how folx make meaning of school specific slow violence and how advocacy may (or may not) affect the feelings surrounding school specific slow violence. During this interview, you will be asked to respond to several open-ended questions. You may choose not to answer any or all of the questions. The procedure will involve recording the interview, and the recording will be transcribed verbatim. Your results are confidential, and you will not be identified individually.

**Informed Consent:** A verbal "YES" from you will signify your willingness to participate in the part of the study.

| **Questions** |
|---|
| **Grand Tour Question**: Could you talk to me about what it was like to take part in this project?<br>Follow up question (FU) 1: Likes? Dislikes?<br>FU 2: What are some takeaways from participating in this experience?<br>FU 3: Any lessons you feel you learned? |
| **Example Question:** How effective do you think our social action project will be at your past high school?<br>FU 1: What types of changes would you want to see? |
| **Structural Question:** Now that you have participated in this research study, how do you feel your high school experience could have been better? |
| **Descriptive Question:** How do you think your mindset has changed from the beginning of this study to now?<br>FU 1: How has this experience caused you to rethink anything? Or think about things in a different light?<br>FU 2: How would you like to continue participating in advocacy work in the future? |
| **Contrast Question:** Over the course of this study, we've discussed the statistical outcome for students who attend/graduate from low-income schools such as yours. With that in mind, and in whatever format you prefer, what do you want to tell the world? (It can be about you, your school, the students that go to your school (or schools like it), the neighborhood you grew up in, etc.) |
| **Specific grand tour Question:** If you could give advice to a current student at your old high school, what would it be? |

## APPENDIX C: Social Action Plan

The following is a plan proposed by alumni with the help of current students.

Problem: Lack of Resources + Lack of Exposure to Careers Outside of College

- ⇒ The college resource center was created to be a one-stop shop for all things college, career and vocational. Currently, with the lack of technology (functioning computers or fast computers), lack of resources (no printer paper or ink) and lack of access (students aren't allowed to visit during class time) the CRC is operating at a fraction (less than 50%) of its capacity.
- ⇒ Additionally, the schools' current focus is towards college, leaving students with no interests in college, no choice but to navigate the process alone. Despite a semi-successful CTE department, very few resources are allocated to assisting students with finding viable secondary plans that exclude a college or university.

Proposed Solution:

- ⇒ Create an automated protocol to ensure that the printers in the CRC are always fully functional and stacked with paper and ink/toner. Ensure that all stakeholders (admin, staff, faculty) associated with the space are aware of the protocol and that it is written for future staff changes.
- ⇒ Allocate funds to update technology.
- ⇒ Create procedure for students to access the CRC during school hours. Make sure that all stakeholders are aware of the process.
- ⇒ Locate alumni who have successfully navigated the college process and those who have navigated the technical/vocational process and are open to speaking with students. Compile the list and contact information into a database that is easily accessible to all students.

Being members of the alumni community, we are not frequently updated regarding school updates. With this in mind, updates that reach those no longer in the building would aid the goal of transparency in this quest for excellence for all students.

Thank you.
[REDACTED] Alumni

# VITA

## KALA C. M. JONES

| | |
|---|---|
| 2011 | A.A., Biology<br>Miami Dade College<br>Miami, Florida |
| 2015 | B.A., Psychology<br>Mount Holyoke College<br>South Hadley, Massachusetts |
| 2015 | Teacher, Advanced Placement<br>Miami- Dade County Public Schools<br>Miami, Florida |
| 2017 | Rookie Teacher of the Year Award<br>Miami Northwestern Senior High School<br>Miami, Florida |
| 2019-Present | College/Career Assistance Program (CAP) Advisor<br>Miami-Dade County Public Schools<br>Miami, Florida |
| 2021 | Ed.Sp., Teaching and Learning<br>Florida International University<br>Miami, Florida |
| 2022 | Ph.D., Teaching and Learning<br>Florida International University<br>Miami, Florida |

## PRESENTATIONS

Jones, K., (2015). *The Invisible Scars*. Paper Presentation to the College Student Body and Faculty at LEAP Symposium, South Hadley, Massachusetts.

Jones, K., (2021). *We've Seen This Before: School-Specific Slow Violence in the Era of Covid-19.* Paper Presentation at Southeast Philosophy of Education Society, Virtual.

Jones, K., (2021). *No More Business as Usual: Working with Students to Eliminate School-Specific Slow Violence Once and For All.* Paper Presentation at International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Virtual.

Jones, K. (2022). *There's Gotta Be Something Better: School-Specific Slow Violence and Student Hope*. Paper Presentation at International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Virtual.