THE LEFTOVER KIDS: CENTERING BLACK GIRLS' STORIES OF OVERDISCIPLINE WITHIN ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS USING A YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH

BY

JADYN HARRIS

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2022

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Stephanie Sanders-Smith, Chair
Professor Rochelle Gutierrez
Associate Professor Jorge Lucero
Professor Michaelene Ostrosky
Professor David Stovall, University of Illinois Chicago

ABSTRACT

Black girls in United States schools face discipline at inflated rates over their white peers. While Black girls are suspended out of school six times the rate of white girls (Baumle, 2018), they are also criminalized for trauma responses or mental health issues far more frequently than they are offered treatment services (Marston et al., 2012). Additionally, when Black girls demonstrate qualities such as self-advocacy, agency, resistance, and prioritization of their personal, academic, familial, and professional needs, these acts are frequently read by authority figures as defiance, apathy, or deviance, resulting in further surveillance and punitive measures (Baumle, 2018; Love, 2016, 2019; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). This consistent pattern of overdisciplining for Black girls results in their removal from educational spaces at alarming rates. Overdiscipline not only distances them from their school environments but from their peers. Further, regular overdisciplining has the potential to affect how Black girls view themselves.

This five-month youth participatory action research (YPAR) study focused on three Black teenage girls who were persistently overdisciplined in school. Throughout the project, participants explored their identity and experiences of overdiscipline through storytelling and the examination of childhood photographs. Participants drove most decision-making and goal-setting for the project. During the data-collection process, they learned about the four aspects of viewing and assigning identity – natural, institutional, discursive, and affinity (Gee, 2000) – and considered how these identity markers applied to their internal mindsets. They analyzed their past interactions with schools, teachers and other staff members, peers, and family to

interrogate perceived identity in relation to these interactions and the discipline they received, and they made recommendations for how school discipline policy should be changed.

This study builds on the extant research of Love (2013, 2016, 2019), Brown (2009, 2013), Butler (2018), Meiners (2007, 2011, 2015, 2016), Reynolds (2019), Taaffe (2016), Wun (2016a, 2016b), and others by exploring the messages that Black girls internalize and how overdiscipline shapes the way Black girls view themselves. Using storytelling and analysis, I expand on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Spencer et al. (1997) to investigate the structures of risk and support in Black girls' ecological systems.

This work is dedicated to

Indigo, Samara, and Audri

for their vulnerability in sharing their stories.

These names have been changed to protect their privacy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Above and before anything else, the three participants in this study should be honored with the highest level of gratitude for the time, energy, and candor they contributed to this work. They wanted the stories in this manuscript to be heard. They wanted their questions to be answered. They wanted their suggestions to be taken seriously: for people in power to sit and think about the consequences of the policies and daily enforcement of violence against their bodies, psyches, and souls that occurred during their tenure in public school. *So, I begin by issuing their call-to-action first: please read their stories and the discussion (Chapters 5-8) thoughtfully, and then take action to make lasting change.*

I think anyone who has been through a process like this will say that pursuing a doctorate changes you. For me, it altered how I thought of myself and how I functioned on a fundamental level. I moved to the Champaign-Urbana area from Dallas in August of 2016 with my small family of cats and dogs but knowing no one in town, and I leave in July of 2022 having gained friends, colleagues, and a new (human) family.

More happened in my life during these six years than in the twenty before. I gained lifelong friends. I discovered and fell in love with Chicago. I beat breast cancer in 2019. I met my future wife, and we were married in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. I discovered that I have ADHD and completely reassessed how I think, function, and process – well, everything. I attended a ten-day silent meditation retreat and came out the other side having discovered that I have greater strength of perseverance than I realized. I changed my research focus, and then I changed it again. Then I changed it again. I deeply contemplated my positionality as a white, middle-class lesbian raised in a violent home full of mental instability, educated to be

"liberal" in a highly segregated, wealthy area, and the incredibly complicated and mixed messages this left me to sift through.

In all this, I completed my dissertation. Part of my educational and research philosophy is that no one and nothing operates in a vacuum, and while I am proud of my accomplishments, there are so many people who have helped me get to this point. I'm sure I have missed some, and I hope those people will forgive me.

First and foremost, thank you to my wife, Korina, and your loving family who have embraced and supported me. I am so grateful to have you in my life. I have had to lean on you more than is fair, and you have been so gracious. Thank you for being real with me and for allowing me to bounce ideas off you at crazy hours of the day and night. Thank you for loving my babies. Your smile lights my whole world.

Stephanie Sanders-Smith, you will forever have my gratitude as the most supportive advisor and friend a grad student could possibly ask for. I honestly don't know what I would do without you. Your professional guidance has been invaluable. You take your job very personally, and your "Smithsonians" are the better for it.

Carrie, Sanchari, and Melanie, you are my best friends. Thank you for being sounding boards, commiserators, and partners in crime. For getting me through cancer. For lifting me up. I hope I have been as good to you as you have been to me. Dissertations are, perhaps, divisive for relationships, and it takes a lot of work to maintain friendships while also doing this work "successfully." You three did not let me go. I love you.

To My Family: Zonia, Mama, Daddy, Grammy & Poppy, Lynnie, and Vanessa. People are who they are partially because of how they were raised and who they were raised with. I

have been strengthened and supported by each of you. Zonia – you and I against the world, I will always love you and back you up, my sister. Thank you for being you, for helping me see myself, for being my "first student," and for helping me remember. Thank you for the *LONG* and stimulating conversations. Mama – thank you for instilling my heart with joy, even when you were not feeling it yourself. Thank you for teaching me empathy. Daddy – thank you for teaching me the joy of reading, to know what excellence looks like, and to never settle for less. Grammy and Poppy, who are no longer with us – you were my stability and my definition of love. I hope I have made you proud. Lynnie – you were the first person I ever came out to. Thank you for being that safe for me. Vanessa, my cousin – I love you so, so much. I was sixteen when you were born, and you were the first child besides my sister that I truly learned to love. I cherish you so much.

I would like to thank my incredible dissertation committee for making themselves available, not just in reading and critiquing this work, but during the entire process from start to finish. Rochelle Gutiérrez – you have been an inspiration to me through the years, and I have taken so much to heart watching you teach. Thank you for being honest and asking the hard questions, for pushing me to question, pushing me to see beyond my boundaries, pushing me always in my thinking. Dave Stovall – I travelled to Chicago each week to take your class because you are amazing. Thank you for always giving me straight answers, being willing to Zoom with me and help me work through tough problems, and most importantly, helping me deeply examine my positionality. Jorge Lucero, my art connection – you inspired me to look at "art" and artfulness in new ways. Thank you for your enthusiasm! You were a light for me during this long process. Micki Ostrosky – you jumped onto this project near the end when I

suddenly decided that changing my framework was a good idea, and you helped me wrap my brain around it. Thank you for your willingness and generosity.

This work was aided by the transcription efforts of Adriana Fernandez, my undergraduate research assistant during the last semester. Adriana, your passion as you attacked the data was infectious, and I enjoyed collaborating with you. I hope the experience was helpful for you and that you consider research in your future.

Mitzi Koeberlein, your title should be rewritten as *Queen Office Goddess of All Elements of Educational Import*. Know that I stopped by your office sometimes just to say, "hi" because you are wonderful, and when I come to town, I will continue this practice.

During the first semester of the pandemic, we formed various Zoom writing groups and support groups. It was in this period that I was working through my literature and methods. Yingbin Zhang, thank you for helping me see more clearly through the maze of my literature. You may not realize how grateful I am to you or how often I think of you, but every time I imagine my "wall of Post-Its," your face is there, too.

The list of friends and colleagues who kept me honest with myself is probably too long to name, but they include Dr. Francena Turner, Dr. Dori Harrison, Dr. Brittany Frieson Davis, Angelica Taylor, and Dr. Mary Lyons. You are all so busy with your own lives and families and the world, and words on a page are not enough to show appreciation for the time you took to work with me. I hope to show my gratitude in person soon.

I arrived in Illinois with four beautiful senior animals – Boo, Tiki, Howler, and Lucy, knowing that I would likely not leave with all of them. They have showered me with unconditional love and cuddles, quite literally licked away tears, nursed me through cancer,

and stuck by my side for more than a third of my life (and half my adult life). Our cats, Boo and Tiki, are now sixteen years old, and Howler is thirteen. Sadly, we lost our sweet Lucy Love at the beginning of this year, and so we find ourselves with an open position – "Junior Assistant Cuddlebug" – and we'll begin the search for candidates in the next few months. These incredible balls of love and joy just live to be with us, and they are forced to mold themselves to our lives. I cannot wait to be more "present" in their last years.

The incredible cancer team at the Mills Cancer Center in Urbana, Illinois gave me incredible care. They were kind and thoughtful during a time when I could have been panicking. I can say, three years later, that I am cancer-free because of their expertise and diligence. Dr. Higham (surgery), Dr. Rowland (oncology), and Dr. Barnett (radiology oncology), you have my gratitude.

Last but not least, I want to recognize and appreciate Dr. Liora Bresler, without whose inspiring research and mentorship I would not be here. When I was pursuing my master's degree in Music Education at Southern Methodist University, I read "The Subservient, Co-Equal, Affective, and Social Integration Styles and their Implications for the Arts" (Bresler, 1995). Liora's assessment of the ways in which the arts were integrated into school curricula – to varying effects – caused me to take a hard look at mechanisms by which curriculum and instruction were used as means to an end. It was then that I realized that my education needed to go farther. I contacted Liora, and she invited me to have a phone conversation. This resulted in her inviting me to visit campus. The rest, as they say, is history. I was lucky to have Liora on my early research committee before she retired from the University of Illinois in 2018.

Liora – to be in your classes was to experience a whole different world of education. You believed in small, packed rooms, which made many of us uncomfortable, but we got to know each other, and we all hung on your every word. The first couple of weeks was always a learning curve as we got to know the nuances of your thick Israeli accent and hieroglyphic chalkboard writing – ALL CAPS – that trickled

DOWN
THE B
O
A
R
D
AS YOU WROTE
WHILE
LOOKING AT US
WITH
INTEREST.

There was always food. There was always laughter. There was always research. There were no excuses for shoddy work. But there was always grace. Thank you, Liora, for catalyzing my research career. I know that I am not the first, nor will I be the last, that you have inspired through your passion and excellence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 2018, I conducted my early research study on mindfulness with a fifth-grade class. In this classroom I met a pair of twin boys named Trey and Theo (Harris & Sanders-Smith, 2020). Theo was quiet and contemplative, and he lit up when Trey asked if he could have one of my pretty purple pens. I gave him two – one for each of them. The twins, who are Black, were frequently in trouble and both were suspended twice during the two months that I worked with their class. Trey was loud and boisterous and vocally protested the disciplinary actions that the teacher used to control them as well as the lessons that he did not feel resonated with him. Theo's typical response to discipline was to say, "I don't care" followed by a complete shutdown of all his class work and then to engage in small efforts to disrupt the class. Theo's desk was purposely placed next to the door at the back of the classroom, away from the other students.

One morning, I arrived to find Theo sitting alone in the hallway. His back was to the wall, and his legs were bent so that he could rest his arms on his knees (Figure 1.1). Theo's head was bent forward in a pose of frustrated gloom. This was not the first time, nor would it be the last, that I would find Theo removed from his classroom. In fact, many of Theo's Black classmates, including his brother, found themselves on the wrong side of the classroom door on a regular basis. But, because Trey and Theo resisted the routines and practices in their classroom most often and in ways that were viewed as disruptive by their white teacher and administrators, the twins were disciplined most often.

Figure 1.1

"Theo, on the Wrong Side of the Wall"

Note: photo taken by Jadyn Laixely

While the boys did not have opportunities in their classwork to display their intelligence in ways that satisfied them, Theo was artistically motivated, and he found connection in the mandala art project that we did for several weeks during our study. When I admired his finished product, I was astonished to find that Theo had tested each color on the edges of his paper before committing them to the final artwork. Though Theo had given up doing any schoolwork at all by the time my two-month study was over, he was still giving his best to the artistic work he was doing with me. From this example, it seemed to me that Theo was not disinterested in

doing work but was instead disinterested in working in an environment in which he felt controlled and where his dignity was damaged.

A Black girl in the class named Heven, who always showed up to class with a new fashion statement in the form of nail art, creative hairstyles, or chic clothing choices that worked within the boundaries of her school uniform, struggled in class as well. Heven contributed greatly to our mindfulness sessions, lending insight to our discussions on breathing and contemplation, but she argued loudly and often with her teacher. She was suspended about two weeks before my study wrapped up for defending her sister in a fight with some classmates. When Heven returned to school after three days, she was made to wait in the office all day, and at 1:30 PM she was allowed to go to the classroom, retrieve her books, and leave. She never recovered emotionally and remained withdrawn and angry, even when participating in my study in which she had previously shown great interest (Harris & Sanders-Smith, 2020).

I greatly enjoyed my time with these children, and they expressed sadness when the project finished. I lived down the street from Trey and Theo and would wave to them as they played basketball with their neighbors and friends as I drove past. I was so happy to see them laugh and play – they were completely different kids out of school than they were in the classroom. Theo, though more austere and reserved even in these happier settings, would wave enthusiastically back to me along with Trey. In the weeks and months following data collection, I began to think more deeply about the types of experiences that Black children have in school. I started to wonder what sorts of experiences shape a child's world view, in addition to their internal mindset and sense of self. How did Trey, Theo, and Heven define themselves, and had this definition possibly changed because of experiences both in and out

of school? I recall worrying that if things continued for Trey, Theo, or Heven this way, their trajectory might lead them to involvement with the criminal-legal system, as the school-to-prison nexus has been long established to target Black youth (Alexander, 2010). It never once occurred to me that this was the children's fault but rather that it was a result of centuries of oppression within a system designed to exclude them (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

The School-to-Prison Nexus and Overdiscipline

The prison population in the United States is higher than that of any other developed nation in the West, at 457 incarcerated per 100,000 residents (Hinds et al., 2017). According to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, about one in thirty-seven adult citizens are under some form of correctional supervision at a given time (NAACP, 2019). At the same time, the proportion of incarcerated people of color in U.S. prisons is extremely high - 56% in 2015 - when compared to the White population (NAACP, 2019). Moreover, the ratio of Black to white incarcerated individuals is extremely inequitable: while Black people make up just 13 percent of the population in the United States, they account for five times the incarceration rate of whites (NAACP, 2019).

In public schools, suspension, expulsion, and disciplinary rates follow a similar trend. Meiners (2011) defines "the policies, ideologies, and local practices that move a select group of young people from schools to prisons" as the school-to-prison nexus. While the overall rate of suspension of Black students appeared to have decreased between 2012 and 2016, Black high school students were suspended twice as frequently as either white or Hispanic students in 2016 (NPR, 2018). Black students are 3.8 times more likely to be suspended than are white students throughout their K-12 career, and the number is nearly the same in preschool, where

Black three- and four-year-olds are 3.6 times more likely to be suspended out of school than white preschoolers (NPR, 2018).

Dajerria Becton

In 2015, Dajerria Becton, a 15-year-old Black girl, attended a pool party with some of her friends in McKinney, Texas. Things got out of hand when white pool goers called the police to report that Becton and her friends did not belong there. When officer Eric Casebolt and his comrades arrived, he treated the teens like criminals, throwing the yellow-bikini-clad Becton to the ground and kneeling on her back, and drawing a gun on the alarmed friends who tried to help her as she cried for her mother (Wun, 2016b). The entire incident was filmed by Brandon Brooks, a 15-year-old white boy who was never stopped or questioned (Capehart, 2015).

Niya Kenny

In 2015, Niya Kenny was sitting quietly at her desk at Spring Valley High School in Columbia, South Carolina. The teacher had called the resource officer because one of Niya's classmates, Shakara, was refusing to do her work and using her phone. When the officer, Ben Fields, entered the classroom, things quickly got out of hand as Fields grabbed Shakara, still seated in her desk, and violently flipped her over and onto the floor (Reynolds & Hicks, 2016). Niya had pulled out her own phone to film the incident, as Fields was known to "slam" students, and Niya could be heard in her own video shouting for Fields to leave Shakara alone (Jarvie, 2015). Not only was Shakara arrested, but Niya was as well for filming the incident and for her loud protests (Jarvie, 2015).

Kaia Rolle

In September of 2019, Kaia Rolle was filmed via the body camera of an Orlando police officer at her school. Kaia, a six-year-old Black girl, was being arrested for battery after the staff at her charter school, Lucious & Emma Nixon Academy, accused her of attacking them. Ignoring her cries for help while she begged for a second chance to do better, Kaia had her hands zip-tied together, was placed in a police vehicle, and was taken to the police station. The officer who arrested Kaia was fired, but the law that made it possible for him to arrest her was amended in the Florida senate in 2021. The new legislation, titled "The Kaia Rolle Act," prohibits the arrest of anyone under the age of seven – "unless the violation…is a forcible felony." (Florida Senate, 2021). The Kaia Rolle Act was passed into law when Kaia was eight and outside the bounds of its protection.

Forty-eight percent of preschool children who are suspended out of school more than once are Black (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). While this statistic might drive a person to ask, "Who is suspending four-year-olds?", it is notable that Black children make up just 18% of all preschool children in public schools. The question must then become, "Why are Black children removed from preschool spaces so often?"

The Trouble with Innocence

The face of a four-year-old child, or a six-year-old, to me is the picture of innocence. This value of innocence is an identity tag that I have assigned to children without ever meeting them, but which is quite evidence-based: I have taught thousands of children and have never met a "bad" one. However, Meiners (2015) troubles the notion of innocence in children, cautioning that it is this very designation of innocence that places Black children especially at

risk. When these children fail to meet (white) expectations of innocence, they are punished, and they are punished far more severely than their white counterparts (Meiners, 2015).

When I encountered the statistics on suspensions of children, figures that anyone can find and regurgitate, the first thought that came to mind is, who can look into the face of a four-year-old child and deem that face as less valuable than any of the others? Why are young children being arrested or suspended at all? Why are Black bodies unworthy of occupying the same learning spaces as the white students in the room? Why were a six-year-old girl's pleas for help and a second chance ignored? If, like me, teachers view all young faces as portraits of innocence, why are some of these faces excluded from their learning environments? But perhaps most importantly, how does this exclusion or other experiences affect the way Black children see themselves and the world around them? And are these wonderings the same as those in Black girls' minds? If I were to design a study to ask Black girls what is important to them, what would they tell me?

This study was designed to explore the experiences of Black girls who have been overdisciplined. The purpose of this exploration was to answer the following research questions:

1) What is the perspective of Black girls who have been overdisciplined in school?
2) What lived experiences and stories do participants feel are important in shaping their mindset?
3) How might participation in a youth participatory action research (YPAR) project reveal important ecological systems and structures in the lives of Black girls who experience overdiscipline?

I chose to conduct a youth participation action research (YPAR) study for this project. Through this approach, three Black girls – Indigo, Samara, and Audri – critically analyzed their own experiences and identities, crafted goals for social change, communicated their needs regarding discipline and policy change, and issued a call-to-action.

Definitions

Throughout this paper, boxes such as the one below provide definitions of terms used in this research study and data analysis, to lend clarity for the reader. I begin by providing two definitions before moving forward, so that the reader may understand how I am defining the key concept for this work (overdiscipline) and who it applies to (children).

OVERDISCIPLINE

Any act of punishment, especially toward a Black child, that is unreasonable, excessive, racially motivated, ambiguous in nature, or grounded in white norms and values.

CHILD

A person under the age of eighteen. For the purposes of this study, **Black girls** are African American children who identify as female.

Researcher Positionality

I grew up in Marin County, California, a region near San Francisco known for its extreme wealth and segregation even today (Menendian et al., 2020). My family, however, was not wealthy. As I grew up, I was very aware of the boundaries of privilege I straddled. There was wealth and excess all around me. Some of my friends lived in mansions, yet my family was evicted twice and had a car repossessed, and I was teased for not wearing the latest clothing

brands. My best friend was Black, but she was the only Black girl I remember going to school with for years. When I asked why there were not more Black people around, I was never given a satisfactory answer. In fact, I do not recall any answer at all.

Though I lived in a violent household and struggled emotionally, I had family that pushed me to do well in school and care for others. Somehow my mother managed to keep me in private school for over half of my K-12 years, and I still have no idea how she did it.

After high school graduation, the segregation in Marin frustrated me. Most of the Black people lived in one area (Marin City) and most of the Latino people lived in another (the Canal District in San Rafael). Rhetoric surrounding why these groups lived in these areas involved words and phrases such as "ghetto," "illegal," "deadbeat" and never addressed the systems and structures in Marin that pushed Black and Brown people to the margins. I left Marin for the city to attend San Francisco State University, and although I majored in Music, I took as many classes as I could on racism and different cultures. I was deeply passionate about how I could be part of something bigger than myself and work for social change. In 2007 I found myself living in Dallas, Texas and teaching elementary music, working in schools located in high poverty areas with 99% Black and Brown populations. My first school did not have the budget to replace my stapler when it broke. So, I held fundraisers to take my students on field trips and pay for kids to be in after-school music groups and go to competitions.

Eventually, I grew even more frustrated. The love and effort that I put into teaching every child in my school – a thousand kids at my last full-time position – was undone each time they were shouted at and forced to walk single-file back to their regular classrooms to practice for yet another standardized test. I was angry when I walked through the lunchroom as children

ate in silence and then were punished when they talked. I did not understand why kids were made to walk with a "bubble in their mouth" so they could remember to be silent. I felt that these experiences were traumatizing to the children we were tasked to serve. When I raised concern, I was told that I was "just the music teacher" and that since I had a "fun" class, I did not have the same "problems" with the children as other teachers and therefore did not understand what was necessary for kids to be educated in "real" classrooms. I disagreed.

All these life experiences combined are the reason why I decided to pursue my PhD in Education, and why I have dedicated my life to listening to and uplifting the voices of children who are made to feel as though their stories and lived experiences do not matter. **This is not my work**. This work takes coalition-building and should be driven by the children whose stories it tells.

Conclusion

The impetus of this project began with issues facing two Black boys with whom I had formed a bond. However, as I researched more deeply it became clear through the many stories I encountered that this project would do well to address the multifaceted and interwoven forces which exert themselves upon Black girls throughout this country. This project is antiracist work, but it is also Black feminist work (Reynolds, 2019). I worked to build a brave space for the Audri, Samara, and Indigo in which the stories that they shared were held sacred (Reynolds, 2019).

So much of the research I have read featuring children has been work done by adults on children, or from the perspective of children but voiced by adults. This project was carried out from the perspective of Black girls and showcases the lived experiences of Black girls. It builds

and extends upon the work of others who are dedicated to showcasing Black girls' stories. In considering what it means to create a safe, "fugitive" space for my participants to be able to share and create, I build on the work of Reynolds (2019). By constantly interrogating my own tendencies to identify and classify the innocence of children as an educator, I value the work of Meiners (2015). By honoring and uplifting the stories of Black girls and stepping back from my own need as a white female to restate or reframe, I recall the work of Ruth Nicole Brown (2013) and bell hooks (1989, 1992). And by constantly reflecting on whether this work is pushing forward the goal of helping Black girls to matter and to thrive, I am inspired by work of Bettina Love (2019). There are countless others. This project is not my work but is inspired by and for the Black women and girls with whom I have had the privilege to encounter, in person or on the page. I credit Maya Angelou, whose poem echoed the narrative of Audri, Samara, and Indigo and is therefore quoted in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The research questions introduced in Chapter 1 probe at the concept of *mattering* for Black girls (Love, 2019). The questions ask how experiences with overdiscipline have shaped participants' views of themselves, and what stories they feel are important to share. According to Love (2019), dignity, voice, and a sense of power are directly connected to whether Black children feel they matter in this world. Throughout this chapter, I come back to this concept of mattering. I explore how Black girls are affected by the school-to-prison nexus, and the (mis)conceptions of Black girlhood. Then, I share relevant literature on identity and the self and relate how storytelling and ecological systems are important within all of these themes and to this study. Next, I explain the YPAR methodology and why I chose it in order to showcase the stories of my participants. Finally, I elaborate how this study fills an important gap within the literature. In each of these realms, I come back to the idea of mattering and why it is essential for Black girls.

The School-to-Prison Nexus, and Trauma

One of the ways in which we can better critique the concept of mattering is by first acknowledging that Black girls face traumatic experiences that are unique to their intersectional identities (Baumle, 2018; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Dumas, 2014; Love, 2019; Reynolds, 2019). This trauma is then further compounded in schools when Black girls' responses to trauma, such as running away, speaking out, or shutting down are disciplined harshly through punitive policies such as school suspensions and arrest (Baumle, 2018; Lynch et al., 2012; Marston et al., 2012; Office of Juvenile Justice, 2015; Reynolds & Hicks, 2016; Simkins & Katz, 2002).

Baumle (2018) defines trauma as the experience and resulting effects of an event or accumulation of events, or a set of circumstances that is experienced as emotionally or physically harmful to an individual. This type of harm can be experienced in forms such as the structural trauma of racism and/or poverty (Baumle, 2018). For Black girls, trauma can be caused throughout the school day by what Love (2019) calls the *educational survival complex*. The educational survival complex is the environment within schools in which Black and Brown children are set up to "merely survive, learning how schools mimic the world they live in, thus making schools a training site for a life of exhaustion" (Love, p. 27). This life of exhaustion in school and from the outside world is a form of structural trauma (Baumle, 2018). When Black girls respond as they would naturally to this trauma, they are punished for it (Baumle, 2018; Love, 2019).

Black girls are suspended from school six times the rate of white girls (Baumle, 2018; M.W. Morris, 2016; Ritchie, 2017). Yet research has shown that Black girls are suspended, expelled, and even arrested for lower-level offenses than their white counterparts (Office of Juvenile Justice, 2015; Ritchie, 2017). Status offenses, such as running away, truancy, and violating curfew, are non-violent offenses (Office of Juvenile Justice, 2015), and yet Black and Brown girls are often arrested for these types of offenses rather than being offered alternative forms of help (Baumle, 2018; Steinhart, 1996). An arrest, rather than an investigation into why a child is running away from home or drinking underage, can indicate to a child that her life and her livelihood do not matter to the adults who sanctioned her containment.

In addition to being criminalized more often for low-level offenses, Black girls are frequently stigmatized and caught up in the criminal-legal system when they struggle with

mental health issues (Boals et al., 2013; Lynch et al., 2012; Marston et al., 2012). In a study involving 141 female juvenile offenders, half of whom were Black, Marston et al. (2012) found that nearly all of the girls (92%) had at least one mental health disorder. The researchers found that 87% of the girls in the study had conduct disorder. Conduct disorder (CD) is defined as a persistent behavioral pattern which violates "age-appropriate" societal norms or the rights of others. CD is characterized by a range of antisocial behaviors. In addition to CD diagnosis, 61.7% of the girls in the Marston et al. study expressed suicidal ideation, and many of them struggled with varying types of depression along with other mental health disorders (Marston, et al., 2012). Rather than receiving treatment for these debilitating conditions, these girls were contained in prison. According to Baumle (2018), imprisoning Black girls for their responses to trauma, rather than recognizing their need for help, compounds that trauma, leading to a trauma-to-prison cycle that continues into adulthood.

Unfortunately, for many adults, it is more common to push Black youth, and especially Black girls, into the criminal-legal system rather than to take time to understand their intersectional and nuanced relationship with the world around them (Blake et al., 2011; Crenshaw, 1989; M.W. Morris, 2016; Reynolds & Hicks, 2016; Simkins & Katz, 2002; Theriot, 2009; Tyson, 2003; Wun, 2016b). Crenshaw (1989, 1991) explains intersectionality by elaborating on the violence and discrimination that are enacted upon women in overlapping ways, due to multiple factors related to their identity such as race, class, and sex. Black girls are seen as older than they are – a term known as adultification (Burton, 2007; Epstein et al., 2017; E.W. Morris, 2007; Reynolds, 2019). They are consequently expected to "know better" and tend to be punished more harshly than their white peers when they show behavior that may be

normal for their age or violate white social norms (Burton, 2007; Epstein, et al., 2017; Meiners, 2015; Reynolds, 2019; Wun, 2016a). This illustrates intersectional discrimination, which happens to Black girls due to their gender, their age, and their race (Crenshaw, 1991).

Intersectionality between race and gender regarding the discipline of Black girls within schools is also connected to the racial and gender representation of teachers (Love, 2019). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 80% of teachers in public schools were white in 2019, while just 7% were Black, 9% were Hispanic, and 2% were Asian (NCES, 2019). Just one percent of teachers reported being of two or more races. Moreover, 77% of all teachers were female (NCES, 2019). Many girls of color, most of whom attend majority non-white schools, have few teachers who look like them (Love, 2019). In Chicago Public Schools, where Black students make up about 31% of the total student population, Black teachers make up just over 20%, while white teachers account for half of teaching staff (Chicago Public Schools, 2019). It stands to reason that in areas where the population of Black students is significantly smaller, Black girls' chance of having teachers who look like them goes down. Yet, school discipline statistics remain consistently disproportionate when it comes to Black girls, nationwide (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

When exploring the connection between discipline and mattering it is important to consider the increased presence of police within schools. As detailed above, when adults treat Black girls as though they are older than their actual age, are more defiant, and are less in need of emotional help, often the result is police involvement. School resource officers and police who patrol the community frequently make arrests for behavior that seems relatively benign. In 2019, six-year-old Kaia Rolle was arrested and taken to a police station in handcuffs

from the charter school she was attending for allegedly throwing a tantrum (Calvan, 2020). This is just one of many stories of trauma-inducing experiences Black girls have been subjected to by police officers (Ritchie, 2017; Theriot, 2009).

According to Theriot (2009), the increase in police within school halls has not served to deter crime. However, the number of arrests of Black and Brown children for low-level offenses has increased (Theriot, 2009). The presence of school resource officers has been found to increase the number of arrests made for "disorderly conduct," such as violating the school dress code, getting up to throw away trash, or stealing as little as two dollars from a classmate (Theriot, 2009; Wun, 2016a). Once a child is arrested, her chances for rearrest or reincarceration are incredibly high (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2019).

The trauma-to-prison pipeline refers to the criminalization of Black girls' response to trauma and mental illness (Baumle, 2018). This term serves to steer the conversation away from a focus on the school-to-prison nexus and toward a deeper emphasis on trauma (Baumle, 2018). Arguably very important, the concept of the school-to-prison nexus focuses on the harsh discipline policies within schools that serve to criminalize Black and Brown youth and funnel them into the criminal justice system, where these youth have a high rate of recidivism (Advancement Project, 2013; Barnes & Motz, 2018; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2019). The presence of police within schools functions not just as a gateway to the criminal-legal system; it positions schools squarely in the system which mirrors reality for Black adults, who make up half of all people in prisons and jails (Dumas & ross, 2016). Thus, the school-to-prison "pipeline" is in reality a "nexus." However, Baumle (2018) argues that Black

girls' behavior, specifically their response to trauma, is criminalized so frequently that a trauma-to-prison pipeline has been firmly established.

Black Girlhood and Blackness

Mattering is a primary concern for Black women and girls, who have been systemically criminalized, silenced, erased, and whose bodies have been located as sites of violence for centuries (Baumle, 2018; Bright et al., 2014; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 2009; E.W. Morris, 2007; M.W. Morris, 2012). Ruth Nicole Brown (2013) describes Black girlhood as freedom. Unfortunately, for many Black girls, their lives are not lived as freely as they would like. White society, with its embedded systems and structures, works tirelessly to contain Black girls, and to place constraints upon the very definitions of acceptable identities and behaviors in order to make that containment more feasible (Baumle, 2018; Breeden, 2021; Butler, 2018; M.W. Morris, 2012; Stern et al., 2021; Velez & Spencer, 2018).

In her research, Butler (2018) elaborates upon numerous stories similar to Kaia Rolle's, including legal cases, in which Black women and girls have had to navigate spaces which were complicated by race, gender, class, sexuality, dis/ability and place. Butler describes "Black Girl Cartography" as "the study of how and where Black girls are physically and socio-politically mapped in education." It is important to consider the spaces in which Black girls are located in reflecting on the concept of mattering and its relation to school-to-prison nexus. For example, many educators and community members "map" the behaviors of Black girls onto place, such as Black girls being "loud and ratchet and ghetto" in urban spaces (Butler, p. 37). Others counter this narrative by describing urban Black girls as sophisticated survivors who know the codes of the street and can navigate those communities (Butler, 2018).

Black girls stand in a place that makes their viewpoint unique from all others. Black girl standpoint theory positions Black girls at the center of their distinct and intersectional experiences and privileges this narrative (Lindsey, 2015). This standpoint is preferable when working with Black girls rather than, for example, using feminist standpoint theory, Black feminist standpoint theory, or even Critical Race Theory, all of which may fail to take ***girlhood*** into account or do not center Blackness in their analysis (Lindsey, 2015). To be a Black girl in the United States is to be especially vulnerable: Black girls must struggle to maintain their dignity and Blackness while fighting sexism, racism, ageism, adultification, patriarchy and the toxic stress of surviving a school system that is attempting to push them out (Butler, 2018; Love, 2019; M.W. Morris, 2016; Reynolds, 2019). Some Black girls battle these multiple systems of discrimination while working or living with a dis/ability, and still others live in poverty.

Those in power – read: white society and those who embrace norms and values pushed by white society – not only map their views of Black folks and children onto spaces and vice versa, but laws and policies are then crafted in response to those views. Black Critical Theorists analyze the laws and policies in the United States, with the view that this legislation functions to specifically subjugate Black people (Dumas & ross, 2016). Black children and adults do not just face racism in this country. Anti-Blackness, the suppression, subjugation, discrimination, and hatred of Black folks by whites, is important in our understanding of how racism and whiteness as property continue to endure (Annamma, 2016; Burrell-Craft, 2020; A.Y. Davis, 1971; Dumas & ross, 2016; Lipsitz, 1995). In their 2016 article, Dumas and ross shared several examples of how Black youth were subjected to physical and emotional abuses by educators, in which their Blackness was specifically attacked. These examples included a teacher in Illinois repeatedly

calling two Black students "nigger" and a Black girl being threatened with expulsion unless she changed her natural hairstyle (Dumas & ross, 2016). All of the instances of abuse cited in Dumas and ross' article occurred within the past decade. The discrimination and abuse that Black children endure in school is not a relic of a bygone era, but a current issue that persists.

Schools can be sites of racist, heteronormative, sexist and ableist practices which target Black girls for disciplinary action, and which are in turn seated in whiteness (Butler, 2018). Whiteness, as defined by Lipsitz (1995), is "the unmarked category against which difference is constructed" (p. 369). Culturally, Whiteness is unseen and unheard, because it is the benchmark of "normalcy" by which all people are judged, both socially and culturally (Lipsitz, 1995). The structures of Whiteness are detrimental to Black children in schools, who are developing their sense of self and beginning to understand their relation to the world around them. A school which has in its dress code a policy on natural hairstyles is using white norms by which to judge its students (Butler, 2018; E.W. Morris, 2007).

While the structure of schooling is rooted in policies and practices that are grounded and coded in white norms (E.W. Morris, 2007; M.W. Morris, 2012; Wun, 2016a, 2016b), these norms have been practiced, celebrated, and reified in society and the law for centuries. In her groundbreaking book, *We Want to Do More Than Survive* (2019), Bettina Love enumerates examples of white rage in which, in the last two hundred years alone, the law has protected white men and women as they entrapped, shot, bombed, stalked, chased, lynched, tormented, tortured, and butchered Black men, women, and children – all for the crime of being Black (Love, 2019). Love shares her own panic as she became a university professor and felt the pressure to appear "respectable" as a Black woman: "Being Black was exhausting…I did not

know how to thrive. I had everything I had ever wanted and was terrified it would all be taken away from me just for being Black" (p. 154). Love (2019) describes the routine she developed if she was pulled over while driving, in which she would "accidentally" pull out her university ID before her driver's license and use a "professor voice" that she never really used in class, all in an attempt to conform to white norms and avoid being killed. Still, she admitted that this ritual and her status as a professor would not make her matter, because she was a Black woman in Georgia, where a police officer was recorded admitting "we only kill Blacks here" (Love, 2019).

In contrast to the incarcerated Black girls whose conduct disorder was so prevalent (Marston, et al., 2012), Love (2019) – a Black lesbian – was attempting to conceal the type of "conduct disorder" which might result in her containment or even death. She adjusted her voice and flashed her professorial identity. When she realized that she could never hide from Whiteness, and that not only she but her children were in danger of this same threat, she felt defeated and terrified.

Black women and girls undergo a constant and arduous struggle to avoid white rage – only to suffer at the hands of Whiteness, regardless of their efforts. In addition to family structures, it is essential that bonds of friendship, such as sister circles and voluntary kin, are formed in order for Black girls to not just survive but to thrive (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011; Reynolds, 2019; Williams, 2020). Sister circles are support groups which serve to provide Black women with encouragement, knowledge, and help (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011). Sister circles are grounded in existing friendships or networks, and some are formed around collective survivorship, such as cancer, or affinities, such as book clubs or spirituality (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011). Sister circles can be related to family spaces: mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and

daughters (Reynolds, 2019). All these sites of sisterhood can be especially empowering for Black women and girls in claiming space (Reynolds, 2019). While spaces such as schools, parks, entire neighborhoods, and other gathering spaces in this country are often sites of Whiteness (Harris, 1993; Lipsitz, 1995), Black women and girls can claim space for themselves and find empowerment within sister circles (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011; Reynolds, 2019).

In addition to the empowerment which can come from convening within sister circles, Black women and girls benefit from relationships with folks known as voluntary kin (Williams, 2020). Voluntary kin are nonbiological individuals to which we form bonds so close that they are considered family, such as the "aunt" who attends family functions, or friend one can entrust with her deepest secrets, with no expectations of (romantic) intimacy (Williams, 2020).

According to Brown (2013), "Black girls…are often the people least guaranteed to be centered as valuable in collective work and social movements that they could very well lead and organize" (p. 15). While Black girls are preyed upon by societal structures and systems designed and determined to undervalue and undermine them, they can find strength and refuge in each other, in family, and in friendships.

Identity and the Self

The complete and intersectional identities of Black girls must be protected and celebrated *as Black girls*, if they are to truly feel as though they matter (Love, 2019). Researchers have found that many Black children are trained at home to differentiate between their internal sense of self and the role that white society imposes upon them (Bowman & Howard, 1985; E.W. Morris, 2007). While this may help them navigate the outside world, it can also inflict damage and cause difficulty with adjusting to their environment (Bowman &

Howard, 1985). In addition to the daily struggle to survive in school and society, Black children face challenges to their identity such as adultification, identity threat and stereotype threat (Reynolds, 2019; Townsend et al., 2010; van Laar et al., 2010). By examining these and other topics related to the self, by way of Gee's four identity lenses, we can begin to uncover how Black girls make sense of themselves in relation to the world around them (2000).

James Paul Gee (2000) identifies natural identity, institutional identity, discourse identity, and affinity identity as interweaving and interconnected perspectives for determining the "type of person" one is. Natural identity is determined by forces outside one's control, such as being an identical twin or having ADHD. Being Black is part of one's natural identity, but as I will explore below, Blackness is also discursive, institutional, and affinitive.

Having curly hair or long fingers, being tall, and certain aspects of our personalities can all be aspects of natural identity (Gee, 2000). Gee asserts that institutions, other people, and groups play a large part in the recognition of natural identities, thus muddying the waters of what is or is not a natural endowment. For example, my having a spleen is part of my natural self, but it has nothing to do with my identity (Gee, p. 102). However, the fact that I could match pitch at six months old (a natural ability) was discovered by my mother as she sang to me, making her influential in my becoming a singer and majoring in music later in life.

One struggle related to natural identity for Black girls can happen when they wear hairstyles which conflict with school dress code policies (Dumas & ross, 2016; Evelyn, 2020; Lattimore, 2017; Lindsey, 2013). This includes wearing natural hairstyles. Many incidents have been recorded in which teachers have cut Black students' hair, administrators have prevented Black students from walking with their classes at graduation, and Black students have been sent

home or suspended for wearing Black hairstyles (Dumas & ross, 2016; Evelyn, 2020; Lattimore, 2017). Such policies are traumatic, are seated in anti-Blackness, and do not allow for all students to matter and thrive (Love, 2019).

Vocations, "callings," and other types of identifying markers which are "authorized" by institutions indicate what Gee labels as *institutional* identity (Gee, 2000). When I finish my dissertation, this university will grant me the privilege of calling myself "doctor," an institutional identity. I can add this to a list: teacher, student, medical patient, and so on. In the case of my participants, who are also students and medical patients, "criminal," "prisoner," and other such descriptions might fall into this category. They are terms imposed by structures and institutions of the state. Some institutional identities can be regarded as impositions or barriers, rather than the positive affirmations of self for which many forms of identity are viewed.

Many institutional and societal expectations are bestowed upon Black girls from a very early age. This may cause some Black girls to believe that they should grow up faster or that they are responsible when bad things happen to them, even when this responsibility does not lie with them. This is the process known as "adultification," in which Black youth are viewed and treated as though they are older than their actual age, and held accountable, often legally, for acts that children normally do (Burton, 2007; Epstein et al., 2017; Meiners, 2015; Reynolds, 2019). Adultification is enacted upon Black girls by society – an institution with enough force to affect legislation, school policy, and the sentencing of Black girls. We have seen this in the studies that show Black girls incarcerated rather than receiving help for mental illness (Marston et al., 2012).

Day 1
I brought her here in hopes to find
Amidst this unfettered plain
A rainbow across a starlit night
To which she could attain

Instead her spirit slowly broke
A fragile china doll
On splintered glass, her soul exposed
I will weep for her awhile

Day 2
The child is smart
She began computing
Around the age of three
At 15 she decided to account
Yet now she cannot add
The facts of life together
So they make sense

Day 3
My child lies now
Asleep all day
She doesn't go to school

Inside the walls
Of Grecian white
Her color is not cool

Excerpt, S.I.P. (School Induced Psychosis). (A.M. Davis, 2007)

The autoethnographic poem above was written by Amira Millicent Davis, a single Black mother and doctoral student at the time of publication (A.M. Davis, 2007). Davis witnessed the slow psychological downturn of her teenage daughter as she attempted to navigate the waters of a primarily white school district in the town where my participants grew up and went to school. She stated that this story was written with multiple lenses, including African American female, artist, single parent, and educator (A.M. Davis, 2007). Many of these lenses – artist,

single parent, educator – are institutional identities. Even "African American female" comes with its own institutional connotations: "Jezebel," "Mammy," "welfare queen," and "angry Black woman," are all titles which Black women must contend with (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Townsend, et al., 2010). Millions of Black girls like Amira Davis' daughter struggle to hold onto their sense of self in their desperation to maintain dignity and self-respect in school. The pressure to remain strong and yet to not be viewed as aggressive, defiant, or deviant in rooms filled with people who do not look like them can be overwhelming. Identity threat as it relates to Black folks is the negative perception of Black people by others (van Laar et al., 2010). Stereotype threat, which is related to identity threat, happens when Black folks feel the pressure to conform to, or resist, the varying stereotypes that societal or institutional structures have laid out as representative of Black people (Townsend et al., 2010). Both identity threat and stereotype threat cause undue stress and anxiety and can be confusing to young Black girls trying to navigate their own identities (Reynolds & Hicks, 2016; Townsend et al., 2010; van Laar et al., 2010).

Institutional and natural identities play a role in identity politics and intersectionality and can have a direct impact on Black girls. The rights of women of color, whose lived experiences are impacted by their identities as both women and persons of color (natural identities which are also shaped institutionally), frequently are not considered when organizations are fighting for the rights of the oppressed (Crenshaw, 1991; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Intragroup differences often fall to the wayside in favor of, for example, gender- or race-based initiatives (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Yet another intersectional aspect must be considered when girlhood is factored in. Black girls' identities as Black, female *young people* are complicated by

the way society and the law view race, gender, and age (Crenshaw, 1991; Meiners, 2015; M.W. Morris, 2012).

The third of Gee's lenses, discourse identity, applies to individual characteristics and how one relates to others. Discursive identity traits are usually applied in relation with or connection to other people (Gee, 2000). For example, an identity marker of "charismatic" or "diligent" is determined by the "rational" individuals who observe the trait. A person who identifies as "funny" will have a difficult time being so without other people around to laugh at her antics.

Blackness can be as discursive as it is part of one's natural identity, while at the same time constructed by society and institutions (Brown, 2013; hooks, 1992; Love, 2019; E.W. Morris, 2007; Townsend et al., 2010). Race is a social construct and not based on biological factors, but it is still one of the first traits we notice about each other when we meet (Omi & Winant, 1996). Race, therefore, becomes a source of discourse even if it is within our own minds, often predetermining what we think of someone (Omi & Winant, 1996). Gee (2000) explains that racial groups, gender groups, and the intersectional groups which can arise are in part interactional, or discursive. "Working out (discursive) identities almost always involves interactions across, and relationships among, different…social groups" (Gee, p. 119). This can explain why Black girls are often misread, as people from different groups interact with and read each other according to their own cultural lenses (Epstein et al., 2017; Gee, 2000).

The concept of innocence, a discursive identity trait often ascribed to children and which I in fact attributed to four-year-olds in Chapter 1, can be problematic (Meiners, 2015). Even though children of color experience the same amount of violence as their white

counterparts, the innocence of Black children is not always assumed and instead must be proved (Meiners, 2015). Further, gaining knowledge involves risking a child's assumed innocence, as remaining "innocent" requires the negation of certain life experiences (Meiners, 2007). Black girls, whose life experiences can include traumatic events including racism and violence on multiple levels, necessarily lose the "innocent" quality which many (white) children are expected to have (Epstein et al., 2017; Meiners, 2011). Rather than being discounted, lived experience should be valued, as it is a crucial part of what makes up who we are, as individuals and as larger groups (hooks, 1989; Lindsey, 2013; Reynolds, 2019).

To be a part of a culture is to experience the structures of feeling that affect its individual members: it is at once communal and individual, changes with each generation, and each generation teaches and influences the next (Zembylas, 2002). Developed by Raymond Williams, *structures of feeling* describes the way individuals feel within a community and within a given time period. This involves the discourses and interactions which in turn help to shape our individual and collective identities. Culture is not simply the art, traditions, or clothing that people wear but is deeply embedded in the identity of each individual and includes, among other attributes, a sense of community and structures of feeling (Zembylas, 2002). We can only know what our world feels like at this time and place: we can study a different time period or civilization but never truly know what their quality of life felt like. Therefore, it is important to trust the feelings, stories, and narratives of those living their experiences ***at this time***. The erasure of those stories – and this includes the negation of the lived experiences of Black girls to maintain a false sense of innocence – implies that their perspective does not matter (Love, 2019; Meiners, 2015).

The fourth lens through which Gee describes identity is how people's affinities align with others (Gee, 2000). These affinitive practices allow people to bond with others who are like-minded. The sister circles described earlier in this chapter provide an example of affinity identity: Black girls come together for varying purposes, but often with a like-minded pursuit, and with the goal of creating a sense of community and support (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011). Townsend et al. (2010) stated that Black girls who reported a strong connection with their ethnic group also shared that they had a positive sense of academic self-worth. In their book *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation*, Kyodo williams et al. (2016) share the ways in which they radically take up space. These Buddhist teachers have re-envisioned the way meditation is practiced, which includes reimagining "freedom" and "liberation" for Black folks (Kyodo williams et al., 2016). While discussing privilege and the disconnect between Black folks who have different appearances (on the spectrum of darkness of skin and kinkiness of hair), Reverend angel Kyodo williams states, "It's an important entryway into the potential for healing when we start to recognize we are all participating unless we are interrupting" (p. 119). Through participation in various affinity groups, Black girls can not only strengthen their sense of individual and community identity, but they can also find sources of empowerment and connection. There are many ways and spaces for Black women and girls to engage in acts of joy, resistance, self-love, self-care, coalition building, and so many other undertakings which affirm their Blackness, their femininity, their strength, and their right to thrive and matter in this world.

Storytelling, Black Girlhood, and Photography

In this chapter, I have illustrated how the school-to prison nexus criminalizes Blackness. Specific to this study, I have explored how Black girls are targeted by these systems and examined the different lenses of identity in relation to Black girlhood. I now turn to storytelling and its ability to provide an open space for Black girls to express their uniqueness, to share their experiences, and to matter.

The book *Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood* (Brown, 2013) provides a collection of artistic work created by Black women and girls, drawn from the SOLHOT project. SOLHOT, which stands for Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths, is based in the Champaign-Urbana community of Illinois (Brown, 2013). The book and the project are evidence of the type of collective pride, truth, and artistry which can be generated when Black girls practice radical imagination, claim their own space, and set no limits for themselves (Brown, 2013). When Black girls use artistic means to express themselves, they have a broader range of tools to voice their need to matter in this world (Brown, 2013; hooks, 1992; Love, 2019; Tesfagiorgis, 1993).

In *Hear Our Truths*, we find many descriptions of Black girls as "fighters," "soldiers," and being caught between the categories of victim or aggressor (Brown, 2013). This will be especially relevant when reading Samara's chapter. The media provides an onslaught of imagery which serves to cast Black girls as hypersexual and deviant (Lindsey, 2013). For Black girls to thrive and feel as though they matter as they navigate the discourses and labels being placed upon them, the need for positive, affirming outlets in which to express themselves is necessary (Brown, 2013; Lindsey, 2013; Love, 2019; Reynolds, 2019).

Historically, photography has been used to essentialize Black people by presenting lone images devoid of the narratives or voices of those whose likenesses they represent (Brown, 2013; hooks, 1992). Brown (2013) cautions against the use of photographs that lack context and instead invites researchers to critically analyze their own gaze. The narrative story, coupled with a photograph, provides a reason for the photograph's coming into being in the first place and gives the viewer information on the image's creator. This complicates the interpretation for the viewer, allows them to think more critically, and interrupts the tendency of the viewer to superimpose their own story upon the image (Brown, 2013).

Figure 2.1

"Negro Boys on Easter Morning," Russell Lee, 1941

The photo in Figure 2.2 was taken in Bronzeville, Chicago in 1941, and is titled "Negro Boys on Easter Morning" (Gunderson, 2015). The photograph was taken by government photographer Russell Lee as part of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) photo project

(Gunderson, 2015). Part of this project documented the great migration, which led them to Chicago. Researchers more than fifty years later were able to identify just one child in the photo: Spencer Lee Reedus, Jr., the fourteen-year-old in the center (Gunderson, 2015).

What has always struck me about this photo is the gaze of the boys in the photo. As I in turn have gazed at this image, which was taken of five Black boys but provided no narrative from their perspective, I have been left wondering what they were thinking. Analyzing the photo for artistic elements such as light and shadow provide no explanation or description for what the boys are thinking or feeling. hooks (1992) described the "gaze" as a political part of her life, at once an instigator of terror, a perpetrator of trauma, an act of defiance, and a site of resistance. Black slaves were punished or killed for looking the wrong way or at the wrong person (hooks, 1992). Free Black folks during the Jim Crow era were lynched for looking the wrong way (hooks, 1992; Love, 2019). Black looks have become a "rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze…not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality" (hooks, 1992, p. 115).

Through the art of storytelling, Black girls and use their own gaze to ***resist and counter*** the gaze of those who view, name, and label them out of context. Incorporating the voices and stories of Black girls within the body of research provides context and weight to mere facts and figures. Gathering facts about the number of Black girls suspended per year, for example, tells nothing of the reasons for suspension, nor do these numbers account for the numerous times that Black girls have been suspended for fighting against unfair treatment or abuse by teachers and other school staff. Stories, however, provide this important context.

Youth Participatory Action Research

The YPAR approach offers an ability for researchers to co-create knowledge with study participants and recognizes that participants are experts in their own lives (Smith et al., 2012; Wang, 2006). YPAR calls people to action in the name of social change as readers are invited to recognize this new knowledge on the participants' terms (Jordan, 2003; Smith et al., 2012, 2010). This gets at the heart of mattering: what matters most to participants, and how this can be conveyed not through the eyes and words of the researcher but through those of the community most impacted (Higgins, 2014). Children working with researchers through YPAR are empowered to identify problems in their communities or their everyday lives and discover solutions to these problems (Smith et al., 2012). This is in striking contrast to typical research studies, in which problems are identified and investigated by the researchers (Jordan, 2003). YPAR researchers recognize that "objective" research within the social sciences is impossible, and they also characterize their research as "openly political" (Jordan, 2003).

Because YPAR projects provide a direct window into the lives of participants, members of the community and other stakeholders can enact change by gaining knowledge from their insider perspective (Ornelas et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2012; Wang, 2006). YPAR aims to increase the *critical consciousness* within participants through dialogue, and in doing so, to shed greater light on their own perspectives (Carlson et al., 2006, Peabody, 2013). Critical consciousness is the level of consciousness at which individuals "become aware that their own assumptions shape the interpretations of reality" (Carlson et al., 2006). People with critical consciousness are aware that their decisions can change their reality, and through this

consciousness, they can take steps to enact social change (Carlson et al., 2006; Peabody, 2013).

Throughout this chapter, I have returned to the concept of mattering and its relation to Black girls' ability to thrive. One of the necessary factors in mattering for Black girls is empowerment (Gines, 2015; Lindsey, 2013). According to Lindsey (2013), empowerment includes the knowledge of, and ability to, act in healthy, safe ways that "affirm one's own humanity." Lindsey notes that we must be careful to address empowerment for Black girls, as very little research has taken Black girlhood specifically into account (2013). In this chapter, I have provided examples in which Black girls' power has been coopted by others, including school policies designed to punish them for failing to maintain white standards of dress or behavior (Dumas & ross, 2016), and the unwillingness of institutions to address mental health issues properly (Marston et al., 2012). Black girls' lives, both in and out of school, are often controlled by decisions made by others (Cook & Buck, 2010). To feel empowered, Black girls must have safe spaces in which to form relationships and to speak freely, to feel a sense of community, to develop a sisterhood (Gines, 2015). As coresearchers in a YPAR project, Black girls can be empowered in making the decisions about their needs, identifying and celebrating their strengths, and pinpointing opportunities for change and action for themselves and within their communities (Cook & Buck, 2010; Cook & Quigley, 2013).

Current Study

Using the University of Illinois library search engine due to its broad access to extant research, I searched for studies containing the terms YPAR, Black, and girls and yielded just six results. Of those six studies, two focused on Black girls in STEM fields (S. Davis, 2016, 2020),

one focused on body image and self-esteem (Chard et al., 2020), and another focused on health equity (Abraczinskas & Zarrett, 2020). Just two YPAR studies focused on school discipline, racial discrimination, and inequity in schools for Black girls (Bae-Dimitriadis & Evans-Winters, 2017; Hope et al., 2015). In a similar search of extant literature, I located seven studies which centered the voices of children of color as experts of their own lived experience (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Downey & Anyaegbunam, 2010; Graham et al., 2013; Lutrell, 2010; Strack et al., 2004; Taaffe, 2016; Wilson et al., 2007).

In addition to a photovoice study by Claudine Taaffe (2016) which centered the voices and stories of Black girls, the work of Ruth Nicole Brown (2013), Monique Morris (2016), and Maisha Winn (2011) specifically foreground the artwork, stories, and/or voices of Black girls. These bodies of work represent a small but powerful counter-narrative to the images of Black girls which are cast by society and the media – the deviant, defiant, loud, hypersexual, angry, or emotionally shut down, adultified Black girl who should know better than to behave or look the way she does (Baumle, 2018; Love, 2019; E.W. Morris, 2007; M.W. Morris, 2016; Reynolds, 2019).

The current study engaged three Black high school girls in a YPAR project which they helped design. It was my intent that by beginning the work privately with me, participants might feel free to share their stories. Perhaps more importantly, in group sessions participants would have the opportunity to share together, explore their identities more deeply, and craft mutual goals for social change. For at least a short time, these three girls might form their own sister circle around this experience (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011). Each girl had been immersed in

or affected by multiple systems of Whiteness, including the school-to-prison nexus and the larger societal structure dictated by white norms and expectations (Butler, 2018; Wun, 2016a).

This study stands to fill a gap in a field of research that continues to undervalue the stories of Black girls who are repeatedly pushed out of schools and incarcerated rather than listened to (Bae-Dimitriadis & Evans-Winters, 2017; Baumle, 2018; Marston et al., 2012; M.W. Morris, 2016). Through study, Black girls were invited to investigate their sense of identity and how it had changed over time, and to share stories and experiences that were relevant to them. Their voices and stories have thus been pushed to the foreground, ensuring that their sense of mattering is privileged.

Conclusion

This chapter began by describing Bettina Love's concept of mattering: how Black folks' dignity, voice, and power are connected to their sense of meaning in the world, and their ability to thrive within it rather than merely surviving (Love, 2019). From there followed an examination of the school-to-prison nexus and how it is maintained and upheld in this country. I explored Black girlhood, the four lenses through which to view identity, storytelling, and YPAR. I identified several studies which center the voices and stories of youth.

In the chapter that follows, I unpack the overlapping frameworks which represent the windows, mirrors, and lenses which provide the structure for this project. These include YPAR, Black Girl Standpoint Theory, Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality Theory, and Phenomenological Variant Ecological Systems Theory.

CHAPTER 3: FRAMEWORKS

Black girls are acted upon by multiple and overlapping forces and spheres of influence constantly as they navigate their world (Epstein et al., 2017; Lipsitz, 1995; Stern et al., 2021). Similarly, there are several windows, mirrors, and lenses through which this project and the Black girls who are its focus can be viewed. I chose youth participatory action research (YPAR) as the methodology for this project, as this approach to research views children as competent citizens who can actively participate in the institutions that make decisions about their lives (Wang, 2006). This approach invited the girls in this study to express the needs they saw as most important and to get their point across in ways that felt appropriate for them, rather than adhering to a strict research protocol. Because Black girls stand at several intersecting sites of violence, at which their bodies, faces, voices, and even their hair are centered, I selected Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality Theory to serve as lenses through which to view the stories my participants have told.

Phenomenological Variant Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) provided a mirror and the conceptual framework for this project. I used PVEST to analyze the stories and narratives produced by the girls as they worked to make sense of their own identities, mindsets, and relationships while grappling with the concept of discipline.

Finally, I recognize that my own positionality as a researcher is a framework. This mirror, which was discussed in depth in Chapter 1, reflects how I view others, including my research participants, policy makers, and the community in which I live and in which the girls in my study live.

Methodology: Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

Participatory action research (PAR) is an approach to research in which participants – youth (YPAR), community members, or members of other groups who often are positioned as objects of study – partner with researchers to act as coresearchers and creators of knowledge (Smith et al., 2012). The purpose of PAR and YPAR is for the participants to identify problems within their own community as well as targeted solutions and stakeholders who can enact those solutions, rather than allowing researchers to identify problems to study within a community that is often one in which they are not a member (Jordan, 2003; Smith et al., 2012).

A key word in YPAR is *action*: through their research, youth and their coresearchers do not merely identify social problems or describe their reality; the end goal is social change regarding the problems the participants have identified (Jordan, 2003; Sutherland & Cheng, 2009). Another key concept within participatory research is *voice*. While some scholars speak of PAR and YPAR as important in "giving" participants a voice to express their needs (Jennings & Lowe, 2013; Leafgren, 2012; Sutherland & Cheng, 2009), I assert that everyone has a voice and that some voices are merely oppressed to the point of silence. The work of YPAR and other participatory research is to act as a megaphone.

The girls in this study set goals for changes they wanted to see in their community, based on their experiences of overdiscipline. They identified stakeholders – potential changemakers – and made suggestions for policy change within their school district.

Theoretical Frameworks: Black Girl Standpoint Theory, Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality

I have chosen to frame this study using the theoretical tenets provided within Black Girl Standpoint Theory, Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality Theory. Black Girls Standpoint and Intersectionality go hand in hand. The two principles share the viewpoint that, specific to this study, Black girls are physically, emotionally, and structurally located at the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Reynolds, 2019). Critical Race Theory provides a structure on which both other theories are also built (Breeden, 2021; Joseph et al., 2021, Velez & Spencer, 2018). Each is discussed next.

Black Girl Standpoint Theory

Black Girl Standpoint Theory positions Black girls as the central focus of research (Lindsey, 2015). The operative word being "girlhood," this theory specifies the intersectional experiences of Black girls as unique to them alone (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Scholars and researchers who write and work using Black Girl Standpoint include Ruth Nicole Brown (2013), bell hooks (1989, 1992), Treva Lindsey (2015), Bettina Love (2016, 2019), Aja Reynolds (2019), and Claudine Taaffe (2016), among others. These authors and activists celebrate all that Black girlhood is and use counterstorytelling to dispel myths and lies that attempt to saddle Black girls with harmful stereotypes. This dissertation employs Black Girl Standpoint as its base, recognizing that the stories and voices of Black girls must be heard in order to get a complete picture of their individual and collective experiences.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT is a legal set of theories which aims, among other goals, to disrupt the idea that racism is abnormal in U.S. society (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Yosso, 2005). Scholars of Critical Race

Theory value storytelling as a means of exploring race and racism. While critical legal scholars recognize that legal language in this country continues to perpetuate hierarchies that not only include whites over Blacks and other people of color, but male over female, and rich over poor, critical race theorists argue specifically for racial realism (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In considering how structures and systems are set up to perpetuate the consistent dominance of Whiteness in public education, CRT provides an ideal jumping off point in which to critically examine these structures, because CRT is transdisciplinary: it gives space to draw from ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, and many other fields (Yosso, 2005).

CRT understands and explains all social inequities through the lens of race (Dumas & ross, 2016). While some might theorize that not everything that happens in a given day is racially charged or motivated, critical race theorists submit that virtually everything is in some way touched by the constructs of race and the inequities that are subsequently formed (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

There are seven tenets of CRT: a) when racial equality benefits the interests of whites/dominant groups, interest convergence is performed; b) white people will seek to protect Whiteness, a property which comes with inherent benefits and privileges; c) "chronicling the experiences of people of color" (Burrell-Craft, 2020, p. 12) must be done, through counter-storytelling and experiential knowledge, in order to dismantle dominant narratives; d) "liberal" concepts such as colorblindness and race neutrality are not objective, do not remedy issues of inequity, and must be critiqued; e) Black people endure multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on race, gender, class, and other subordinated identities; f) systemic racism and power dynamics are ever-present in our society and must be

addressed realistically, because they will never totally be eradicated; and g) scholars engaging in CRT are dedicated to establishing a socially just society through activism (Burrell-Craft, 2020). For the purposes of this study and situating systemic racism – as well as systemic oppression. These terms are defined below.

DEFINITION: SYSTEMIC RACISM AND OPPRESSION

Systemic racism and oppression are ideologies, policies, and thought processes situated across all societal systems that uphold and protect white supremacist values. Examples of systemic oppression can include:

- Normalizing white, heteronormative, cisgender identities
- Anti-immigration policy targeting Black/Brown folks
- Redlining and other housing discrimination
- Microaggressions
- Anti-transgender laws

(Nadal et al., 2021)

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality, as one of the seven tenets of CRT, explains discrimination as something that is located across the "borders" of identity. According to Crenshaw (1989, 1991), Black women's identity, for example, cannot be separated into distinct parts but must be viewed in their whole complexity (Breeden, 2021; Burrell-Craft, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Velez & Spencer, 2018). In other words, the Black girls in this study, for example, should not be viewed as Black AND female AND youth but as Black girls who endure a very specific gendered, racial, and ageist form of discrimination.

According to Velez and Spencer (2018), an effective way to understand how adolescent youth develop is by understanding how they cope with and interpret their own vulnerability

through an intersectional lens. In this way, adults (or in the case with YPAR, youth) can identify the supports these adolescents need. I would argue that an intersectional YPAR approach can be used not only with adolescents but with younger children as well.

INTERSECTIONALITY

The ways in which, due to their location at the intersection of race, gender, and class (and often dis/ability and other factors), women of color – and for the purposes of this study, Black girls – experience multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization and systemic discrimination that:

a) Cannot be separated out into these individual factors, and
b) Are exponentially more damaging than the discrimination white women face (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991)

Black girls are therefore not merely Black AND female AND young. They are Black girls and experience discrimination uniquely because of this.

Conceptual Framework: PVEST

Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed ecological systems theory (EST) in the 1970s to explain how children change as they "perceive and deal with" their environment (p. 3). Later, Spencer et al. (1997) created Phenomenological Variant Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST), which provides a more nuanced view into individuals' own understanding of the external spheres of influence on their development and behavior and their response to this ecology (Joseph et al., 2021; Spencer et al., 1997; Velez & Spencer, 2018). Using PVEST afforded me the ability to analyze the data from the girls' stories and conversations with me while considering how they made sense of societal expectations and values, stereotypes, discipline policies, and other relational aspects of their lives, as well as their own thinking (Spencer et al., 1997).

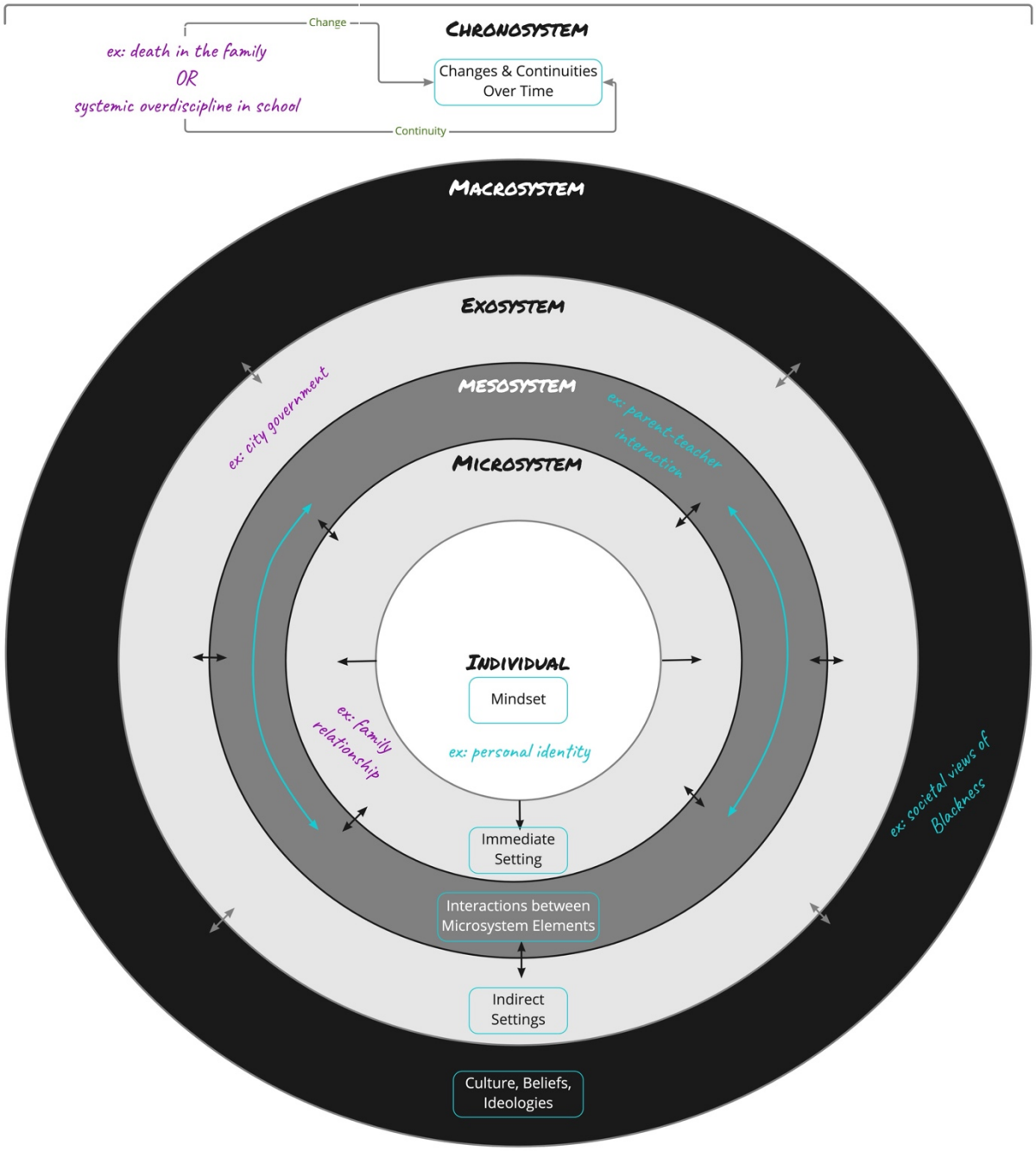
PVEST is made up of five components (Breeden, 2021; Morton & Parsons, 2018):

1) Net vulnerability relates to factors a child is born with, acquires, or chooses and which can be perceived as either risk or protective factors.
2) Stress engagement is an actual event that a child experiences due to net vulnerability. A stress engagement can be the result of an imbalance between risk factors and support systems the child has in place.
3) Reactive coping mechanisms are the responses – cognitive and behavioral decisions – that a child engages to respond to stress engagements. Coping responses can be maladaptive or positive in terms of identity development.
4) Emerging identities, or stable coping mechanisms, are the result of a child learning to respond the same way over time to repeated similar stressors.
5) Life-stage outcomes, which can have a reciprocal effect on a child's experiences and her perceptions of those experiences, are the "overall intended effects" of engaging in identity development.

For the purposes of this study, the overall concept of PVEST is engaged, including the use of the interlocking systems in the participants' ecologies, to make sense of their experiences, as told through their dialogue and storytelling. Therefore, terms such as "net vulnerability," "stress engagement," and so forth are not employed. However, the concepts of risk and support, coping responses and stressors, and identity are used to explain how the girls made sense of their own lived experiences and to identify systems of support and risk for girls like Audri, Samara, and Indigo who are chronically overdisciplined in school. The spheres of PVEST are described next.

Figure 3.1

Diagram of Ecological Systems



This diagram shows how the spheres of influence – the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem – interact to influence individual development (Breeden, 2021; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Spencer et al., 1997). Items in boxes (i.e., "Mindset") describe salient characteristics in a particular sphere. Items in script font show examples of elements that may belong to a certain sphere. For example, societal views of what it means to be Black are part of an individual's Macrosystem.

Individual Mindset

MINDSET

How a participant in this study thinks, what she values, and how she operates, based on her experiences.

In the findings chapters, each of which centers a different girl from the study, I discuss the participants' mindset as can be interpreted from the stories they told and their discussions with me. The use of the term "mindset" is my own and not derived from literature on PVEST. Rather, this developed from analysis of the data and a need to name the desire for all three girls to have their identities and values recognized. Because the data revealed not just identity factors but also a vast array of emotions and values, the term "mindset" was chosen. Had this been a psychology thesis, perhaps this term might have been replaced with "internal working model," which might require more in-depth psychological analysis.

SEEKING CONTEXT

A form of empathic understanding, in which a person suspends judgment in favor of seeking to understand another individual's or group's unique circumstances. Context seeking is often overlooked in instances where "objectivity" seems warranted (i.e., where officials attempt to use the same set of rules for all children.) However, such objectivity tends to be based on white-normed rules and values and is therefore not truly objective (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Yosso, 2005).

Each girl in this study valued empathy and seeking to understand/be understood (e.g., *seeking context*). All of them experienced incidents in which they were misunderstood by peers, school staff, police, and/or their parents, and due to this, formed strong opinions around

this concept. Therefore, I define this term above as an important element of their collective mindset.

The Microsystem

The microsystem includes the activities, roles, and relationships as well as settings that are situated most closely to an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This can include the home, school, and for adolescents, workplaces, along with the people found within these settings. Immediate family members, peers, teachers and other school staff, coworkers, and others who are close to an individual are placed within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The microsystem is the place where much early identity development and psychological growth occurs for a child. In fact, infants are not aware of the other systems in their ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Children whose microsystems are lacking in diverse perspectives or representation – such as schools with all or mostly white teachers, for instance – may internalize negative perceptions about children's own and others' social groups (Nadal et al., 2021).

> **ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION**
>
> A person's movement within the ecological environment due to their change in role, setting, or both (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

It is important to note that the layered systems within a person's ecology are fluid and changing. Ecological transitions occur frequently, especially for children: they transition from one school to another, parents get divorced, friends transition in and out of their lives, and so forth. These ecological transitions are caused by, or instigate, developmental processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It will become evident when reading the stories and thoughts of

Samara, Indigo, and Audri that many of their memorable experiences – whether they resulted in overdiscipline or not – were related to ecological transitions. To use Audri as an example: the birth of her daughter introduced a new person into her microsystem; the death of her adopted father caused a person to leave her it; and the abandonment of her biological parents and her adopted mother shifted those individuals from her microsystem – where they had an immediate impact on her life – to her exosystem, where they were much more distant.

The Mesosystem

The mesosystem is site of interaction between settings within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), there are four types of mesosystem interaction: ***multisetting participation*** occurs when a child splits time between multiple locations; ***indirect linkage*** happens when connection is made between people in two settings via a third party; ***intersetting communication*** is transmitted between settings; and ***intersetting knowledge*** involves information that exists in one setting about the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The settings in a person's microsystem are often positioned to affect one another. For example, work demands and school demands may conflict, or a child may find herself splitting time between two parents who are divorced (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Newman & Newman, 2020). In the case of this study, overdiscipline is placed in the mesosystem, as it is often the result of complex interworkings between multiple settings and people within a child's microsystem. For example, Samara was treated differently based on the reputation she acquired (intersetting communication and knowledge); Audri was arrested at school based on information her mother communicated to police (intersetting communication

and multisetting participation); and Indigo was suspended for things she did not do, based on what other people said (indirect linkage) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The Exosystem

The exosystem consists of settings and factors outside an individual's immediate environment – external sources – but that nevertheless affect them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Nadal et al., 2021). Outside settings can make a dramatic impact in a child's life. A parent's job, for example, can be a great source of stress or provide a major windfall, both of which can affect everyone in the home. Exosystems may also include the larger school district, workplace policies or administration, local government, grocery and other vendors, and municipal services.

Elements of the exosystem impact a child when they set off a microsystem event. For example, Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains that viewing violence on television may not necessarily breed violent behavior. He writes that the act of watching television itself necessitates "freezing speech and action and turning the living into silent statues" for as long as a television show is on (p. 242). He goes on to explain that it is not the child's behavior that should be interrogated, but the lack of "talks, the games, of the family festivities and arguments through which…learning takes place and character is formed" (p. 242). Thus, the power of an exosystem element – a television studio – has the power to exert developmental pressure on a child.

The Macrosystem

The macrosystem consists of ideologies, societal attitudes and values, and other expectations dictated by the dominant culture, subculture, and society that affect an individual

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Nadal et al., 2021; Newman & Newman, 2020). Elements of the macrosystem can include government educational policy, white norms and values, ableism, systemic racism and xenophobia, gender norms, and religious values.

The Chronosystem

The chronosystem is a larger, temporal umbrella that takes into account changes and continuities over time and their effects on an individual (Nadal et al., 2021). The Black Lives Matter movement, criminal-legal system, patterns of overdiscipline, major life events such as births and deaths, changes in ecological status (such as a large move or transition), and other continuities or large movements in a child's life affect their identity development and emotional growth and are therefore placed in the chronosystem (Nadal et al., 2021).

Though each of these systems can be described separately, and indeed I have even pulled them apart in the findings chapter for each participant, they are meant to be viewed as a whole (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As with intersectionality theory, PVEST holds that a person's ecology cannot be parsed into separate systems but must be viewed simultaneously, as none of the systems operate within a vacuum (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the findings and discussion chapters of this dissertation, however, each system is tackled apart from and in relation to the others in order to better understand the spheres of influence and how they act upon the girls. On viewing this interlocking group of spheres, it can be seen how CRT and Intersectionality are important. If the individual in the center is a Black girl, then there are many opportunities for discrimination, marginalization, and abuse to compound inward, stemming from the macrosystem, through the exosystem, and onto the interrelationships of the microsystem, all of

which is overarched by events and structures in the chronosystem. Without interrogating the effects of each layer, one cannot understand the whole.

The four frameworks presented in this chapter – YPAR methodology, Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality Theory, and PVEST – along with my own positionality, address the multifaceted ways in which forces connect in society and institutions to place pressure upon Black girls to conform to sets of standards and norms that were not meant for them. These multiple framings and viewpoints represent exactly what Black girls face on a daily basis: windows, mirrors, and lenses through which they view the world and through which they are constantly viewed, scrutinized and judged.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Throughout the first three chapters, I demonstrated the need for Black girls to feel as though they matter within the societal and institutional structures in which they are located. Historically and in the present day, Black girls are pushed to the margins, misrepresented, and misunderstood, with devastating consequences to their personal and collective livelihood and mindset (Love, 2019; M.W. Morris, 2016). In this chapter, I establish how the research questions and methods provide the participants with an avenue through which to share their unique viewpoints. These girls' right to matter and thrive was often disregarded in their microsystems, especially in school settings. The goal of this project was to identify positive social and policy change to improve the lives of girls who alternatively would be subject to overdiscipline in their wake. This study sought to answer the following questions:

1) What is the perspective of Black girls who have been overdisciplined in school?
2) What lived experiences and stories do participants feel are important in shaping their mindset?
3) How might participation in a youth participatory action research (YPAR) project reveal important ecological systems and structures in the lives of Black girls who experience overdiscipline?

This project was conducted as a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) study and was viewed through the lenses of Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality Theory. The data were then analyzed using Phenomenological Variant Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST). PVEST maintains that a person's own sense-making (phenomenology) of their socialization and their social position is crucial to understanding their development. Rather than positioning

children as subjects to be studied, YPAR researchers partner with them to "critically analyze social structures," and by becoming so engaged, children do not internalize the oppressive sociocultural factors to the same degree they may have prior to their involvement in the YPAR project (Smith et al., 2012, p. 5).

A movement as well as a theoretical lens, CRT involves counterstorytelling to critically examine unjust distribution of power and naturally lends itself to the YPAR approach (Burrell-Craft, 2020). Velez and Spencer (2018) contend that important elements from Intersectionality Theory naturally connect with the interlocking spheres of PVEST, as intersectionality is the study of interlocking systems of oppression.

This project was designed for Black girls to have freedom of choice and expression along with the agency to make decisions and changes to the project along the way (Ornelas et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2012; Wang, 2006). They decided the direction of the project and the call-to-action for the community. The participants in this study, Black girls who had been overdisciplined in school, are part of a small and intersectional – and very vulnerable – part of the community (Baumle, 2018; Bright et al., 2014; Marston et al., 2012; M.W. Morris, 2016; Ritchie, 2017; Reynolds, 2019). They represent an important point of view which must be heard, in hooks' words, "Coming to voice is an act of resistance. Speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject. Only as subjects can we speak" (hooks, 1989, p. 12). Since no one can know what it is like to experience life in the way that these girls have, it is necessary to listen to their narratives in their own voices (Zembylas, 2002). Change cannot be made in the name of Black girls if the research behind it does not include their voices.

In keeping with the tenets of both Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality Theory (Burrell-Craft, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), I focused on storytelling and paid attention to the concepts of space, power, voice, and deficit narratives throughout data collection and analysis (M. Davis, 2008; Dumas & ross, 2016; Jennings & Lowe, 2013). The participants in this study had been overdisciplined, arrested, suspended, and repeatedly removed from educational spaces. Schools are institutions in which Black girls have historically been stripped of power, their voices historically silenced, and their bodies historically located as sites of violence (Alexander, 2010; Baumle, 2018, hooks, 1989; Love, 2019; Lynch et al., 2012; Meiners, 2007; M.W. Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016b). By centering this project around theories which placed their stories at the forefront and asking them to make crucial decisions about the direction of the project, we interrupted those cycles of silence and violence.

Originally, this project was designed using the Photovoice methodology, which also involves the YPAR approach but includes photography as a form of self-expression. The project was changed from Photovoice to YPAR when the participants struggled with the original methodology, coupled with their own personal life demands. However, as a YPAR approach, Photovoice involves the sharing of narratives and storytelling by participants, which provides an increased understanding of their needs and assets. The intention was to engage in a peer review process which would involve reviewing stories and considering portions of those narratives for inclusion in a presentation to the community, to accompany the participants' self-portraits. This end goal did not come to fruition, but much useful and rich data was produced in the form of the girls' narratives and stories, as well as a strong call-to-action.

Research Context Design

Setting

Okunye is one of approximately 80 schools in Illinois which are considered Regional Safe School Programs (RSSPs). According to the Illinois State Board of Education (2020), the purposes of RSSPs are 1) to "increase safety and promote learning in schools," and 2) to meet the educational needs of "disruptive" students in alternative environments. The program began in 1997 and serves students in grades 6 through 12 (Illinois State Board of Education, 2020). The social workers at Okunye explained to me that students who attend RSSPs are referred by their home schools through a district referral process. Okunye is located in a small-urban city in Illinois and serves "at risk" youth from two counties. Participants for this study were recruited from Okunye with the help of social workers at the school.

Participants

Three Black teenage girls – Audri, Samara, and Indigo – participated in this study, along with two social workers at Okunye. When the study commenced, Audri was eighteen, Samara was seventeen, and Indigo was sixteen years old, and all of them had been expelled from their local high school in their freshman year after a series of suspensions for various acts that ranged from fighting to merely being suspected of committing an offense.

Audri was a young mother with a one-year-old daughter. Originally adopted at the age of six weeks, Audri became pregnant at the age of sixteen, causing already tense relations between herself and her adopted mother to worsen. Her adopted father died a month after her daughter, Amaya, was born. Shortly thereafter, when Amaya was three months old and just as the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning, Audri's mother kicked her out of the house and then

moved out of state, removing any chance of Audri returning home. At the time of the study, Audri and Amaya were living with a guardian – a teacher at Okunye – and pursuing her GED.

Samara was an emancipated minor who lived with her boyfriend. She had a close relationship with her mother but explained that she moved out because she does not like "being around a lot of people." Samara worked evenings at a local big-box store and went to school at Okunye during the day. She did not have a relationship with her father but was close with her grandmother and siblings.

Indigo lived with her grandmother and older sister, while her younger brother lived with their mother. Indigo did not have a relationship with her father by choice, and this will be discussed in her chapter. Indigo worked evenings at the same big-box store as Samara, though they did not know each other at the start of the study. She commuted with her sister, who worked at the same location and had a car and attended school at Okunye during the day.

I chose to work with this age group for two important reasons. First, Black girls who are subjected to overdiscipline practices have historically been silenced (Baumle, 2018; Crenshaw, 1989; M.W. Morris, 2016). This study explored the concepts of mindset, Blackness, criminality, Black girlhood, structures of risk and support, and the use of storytelling. Therefore, it was necessary to find girls who were old enough to have experiences on which to draw. Being over the age of sixteen and therefore in the older bracket of "Black female youths," Indigo, Samara, and Audri had many years of experience upon which to speak.

The second reason for choosing this age group involved what I was asking of the participants. During the recruitment process, they were asked whether they had access to childhood photos of themselves, which meant that first they had to find these images, and this

included a not-small amount of discomfort. All three girls were separated from close family members, and just the finding of old photos held the potential for bringing up painful memories. We then discussed these photos during the first phase of the project, which is detailed below. One aim of the study was for participants to explore how they viewed themselves when the photos were taken, compared to their current selves. They were encouraged to discuss both happy and painful experiences – or anything in between – which they felt shaped who they were and their personal mindset.

Naturally, one of the risks of the study was the potential for crisis when bringing up traumatic memories. By choosing older girls, I hoped to reduce the risk of retraumatization, which might be higher if working with younger girls on this topic. This was not a mental health study. As a YPAR project, it was a personal exploration for the purpose of empowerment and social change (Wang & Burris, 1994). However, there is a lot to unpack when exploring childhood events in any project (Baumle, 2018; Marston et al., 2012). Retraumatization was not the goal of this study.

In the review of literature, I discussed the concept of adultification of Black youth. Black girls are frequently treated as though they are much older than their actual age and held accountable to act as though they are older (Burton, 2007; Epstein et al., 2017; Meiners, 2015; Reynolds, 2019). When they do act their age, such as making mistakes, throwing tantrums, or "acting out," they are punished, and at much harsher levels than their White counterparts (Burton, 2007). However, in this work I asked Samara, Audri, and Indigo to explain things that they had encountered that many adults have not, such as early emancipation, working long and late hours while attending school, and caring for a child at a young age.

The girls who participated in this project stood to benefit from it by exploring how their past experiences shaped their mindsets and how they viewed themselves. They were invited to work together to define objectives for the project and set goals for social change. These are among the aims of YPAR work (Smith et al., 2012; Wang & Burris, 1997). All the girls in this study had experienced various levels of being pushed out of school and also into the hands of the criminal-legal system, whether by family or by school staff. It is clear from looking at the existing research that Black girls rarely are explicitly at fault for this pushout (Baumle, 2018; Love, 2019; M.W. Morris, 2016; Reynolds, 2019). This project is transformative in that it allows for the negative experiences of the participants to become acts of empowerment. By handing participants the reins and asking them which stories they would like their communities to hear and how their experiences have affected their individual and collective mindsets, this project demands that their truth to be heard (Brown, 2013).

Recruitment

Some Black girls have a unique and fraught relationship with school and the criminal-legal system, along with a history of being silenced, as was discussed at length in Chapter 2 (Bright et al., 2014; Butler, 2018; M.W. Morris, 2012; Wun, 2016a). Through this project, participants were asked to speak out and bring their stories to the forefront. As discussed above, it was determined that Black girls, ages 15-18, who had been overdisciplined would be ideal candidates for this study. Participants would ideally have access to childhood photos of themselves, as these photos would be discussed during the first phase of the study. The social workers at Okunye contacted several girls who fit the description and sent them an online recruitment flyer I created (see Appendix D).

Recruiting interviews involved me introducing myself, a brief overview of my teaching background, and reasons for becoming a researcher. This included explaining that I worked solely with Black and Brown kids for many years and witnessed my students being silenced, suspended, frustrated, and angry, but when I attempted to speak out, I was told that the actions of other teachers and administrators were justified due to the behavior or mindset of the students in question, or that I did not know what I was talking about. I shared that I went back to school in order to learn more about how I could make change for my students, and that led to this project. I then explained the project goals, asking participants their age, where they went to school, and a cursory question about their experiences with discipline in school. Next, I described the length of the project, phases, and the original goal which was presentation of self-portraits. I then invited questions, of which they only had one: when do we start?

Recruitment resulted in two sets of girls (Appendix H): Alpha Group, who joined in May and June of 2020 but dropped out due to multiple factors including the lack of structure of summer and the pandemic; and Beta Group, who joined later that year. Alpha Group began with the recruitment of Cherri, who was an enthusiastic participant and remains in contact with me to this day. The social workers provided me with a list of approximately eight candidates for the study, including Samara, whom they had approached to gauge interest and received permission to give me their contact information. However, when I called the girls on the list, I had difficulty getting anyone to answer or return my messages. In fact, several times I was hung up on as soon as I began to introduce myself.

After careful consideration, I noted my positionality as a factor. The girls who were being recruited had all had very negative experiences at their public schools, for years. Most teachers are white, middle-class women – and so am I. If I were one of the girls on the list, and I got a random call from me, I would hang up too. I turned to Cherri to help with snowball sampling, which proved quite useful, and two more girls – Anna and Mikki – quickly joined.

However, the project never got off the ground. Anna and Mikki had difficulty remembering appointment times with me, and then Cherri lost her job, her phone, and her apartment all in the same week. By the end of June, all three girls had dropped out of the study. In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was only gaining momentum, I used the summer to regroup. Together with the social workers at Okunye, I devised a plan to support future study participants, whose lives were complicated even without a deadly, worldwide pandemic to worry about.

In the fall of 2020, I renewed my recruitment efforts, this time during school hours and with a social worker "in the room" – I Zoomed first with the social worker, who then pulled a potential candidate from class to come speak with me. This way, there was a trusted person in the room, and each potential participant could gauge my sincerity and learn about the project. Our efforts were successful, and first Audri, then Navi, Samara, and lastly Indigo joined. Sadly, Navi chose not to go through with the study due to a tragic event that occurred just as the project was beginning. The project continued with Audri, Samara, and Indigo.

Protection of Privacy

Originally, the girls decided that they wanted to share their true identities, in the final presentation of this work. They wanted to own their stories in sharing their full selves. However,

I am now tasked with protecting their identities, since I am no longer in touch with them (explained later) and cannot verify that is still their desire. All names, cities, schools, and other names have been changed to protect the privacy of the participants.

Storytelling/Narrative

During the process of working both together and one-on-one with me, participants shared stories of their lived experiences through free discussion and open-ended interviews. The girls' narratives and stories were crucial in understanding the extent to which their experiences of overdiscipline had affected them, along with the impact that the sources of risk and support had on their lives and their mindset. The numbers paint a clear picture of how Black girls are factually overdisciplined (Epstein et al., 2017; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Marston et al., 2012; M.W. Morris, 2012). Storytelling "establishes a common experience between teller and listener, creating a connection between them" (Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 411). Perhaps it is in this way that the perpetual oppression, silencing, and removal of Black girls may be attended to.

Interview Style: Semi-Structured Conversations

Due to the nature of the research and its aims, interviews with the participants were semi-structured: sessions were conversational, interactive, and critical. I began with one to three planned and intentional questions at the beginning of each session, some consistent across participants and some that were different for each participant and were selected based on the last conversation we had. Frequently, I entered with goals for the girls, such as "Discuss her expulsion." The third session for each participant was dedicated to teaching them the

lenses of identity (Gee, 2000). The majority of each session was spent in open discussion that was catalyzed by my prompting.

The first question I asked all participants was simply, "Who are you?" Some days I asked, "What's new?" In each session, I allowed conversations to grow from there, as I followed the participant's lead. In this way, rapport and trust developed. However, the end goal was clear (and was stated when I introduced the study), as I sought to learn from each participant her thoughts concerning, "As a Black girl, what are your experiences with overdiscipline, and how have they shaped you?"

Audri, Samara, and Indigo came to the Zoom space with varying degrees of life experience or lack thereof when discussing intersectional issues such as race and gender and their relationship to discipline and societal norms in the ways that were necessary for this project. This was evidenced when Samara stated in our second session, "I don't always think this deep." This signaled to me that I was asking her probing questions that caused her to reflect in ways that were atypical for her. Merging many of these topics together was necessary during our conversations: for instance, race, gender, and age are interconnected in matters of discipline for Black girls (Reynolds, 2019), and so at times, I offered my opinion, shared research, or asked direct questions about the impact of experiences the girls shared to guide conversation back to the goal topics.

Had I been working with adults with more life experience and/or time to contemplate their intersectional identities, I may have approached conversations differently. In other words, a question posed to one of the girls, "Do you think you would have been treated differently if you were white?" may not need to be asked to an adult who has already considered this. This

is not to say that girls of this age do not think along these lines. On the contrary, they had many thoughts and opinions on these topics. However, their ways of expressing this knowledge varied, and they sometimes struggled to come up with the words to describe their thoughts or feelings. Therefore, it was necessary to follow their lead and then ask probing questions at times. Butler (2018) maintains that sustaining and protecting sites where critical discourse and self-love can be shared "requires a commitment of engaging in an ongoing dialogue with past, present, and future Black girls and women" (p. 33), centering their stories and having explicit conversations. Butler calls for more Black women to work with Black girls, and I had no intention of replacing this sisterhood. I did, however, choose to engage the girls in these critical conversations rather than merely act as a recorder.

Alternatively, I may have chosen to leave matters of intersectionality unattended to and then written about the findings as null if the girls had not addressed them. However, the primary aim of this project was to discover and listen to the perspectives of Black girls who are overdisciplined, perspectives which are undertheorized and underrepresented in extant research (Bae-Dimitriadis & Evans-Winters, 2017; Butler, 2018; Docket & Perry, 2005; Graham et al., 2013; Lutrell, 2010). Their Black girlhood presumes perspectives of race, gender, and age that cannot be ignored. Leaving these perspectives undiscovered would not serve to fill this gap.

Intervention

Phase I

The purpose for this phase, initially, was three-fold: 1) To collect participants' stories about past experiences of overdiscipline; 2) To teach participants about the four identity lenses

(Gee, 2000), which were employed to drive inquiry about mindset and how the girls viewed themselves; and 3) To discover how participants viewed themselves as past- and present self, which set up participants for exploring present- and future-self in Phase II. These three purposes aligned with the goals of YPAR of increasing participants' critical consciousness and individual empowerment (Sutherland & Cheng, 2009), documenting a portion of their lives to bring about an understanding of their needs and assets, and enacting social change.

Table 4.1

Phase I Planned Timeline – Concise (all sessions one-on-one)

Week	Session	Activity
1	1	• Consent forms verified, get to know each other, begin exploring childhood photographs
2	2	• Continue building rapport and trust and exploring childhood photos
	3	• Introduce and explore Identity as a Lens, connect to stories of overdiscipline
3	4	• Continue themes from Session 3, prep to meet group next week • Questions? Goals, hopes for group week?

Each participant worked one-on-one with me using Zoom video conferencing to communicate. Though I would have preferred to conduct this study in person, Zoom was an ideal online solution for holding meetings, and we used it for all sessions during the study, since all schools in Illinois were closed due to the pandemic. Zoom featured the ability to have video and audio calls, though because the project centered the use of storytelling and photography, we used the video call option. As a University of Illinois graduate student, I was able to use Zoom for unlimited time and set up dedicated repeated meeting links for each participant, making the fifteen, 1.5-hour sessions easy to plan.

It was estimated that Phase I would take up to four 1.5-hour sessions (see Table 4.1). In total, I actually met with Audri seven times, Samara four times, and Indigo five times during this Phase. The social workers at Okunye suggested that all sessions be conducted during mid-morning or early afternoon. Though I took their advice, not all sessions worked out, as can be gleaned from Appendix E. I learned to be very patient while waiting on Zoom and developed a "15 minutes and out" rule for myself, in which I waited on Zoom for fifteen minutes past a scheduled meeting time before signing off and sending a note to participants asking a) if they were ok, b) how I could support them, and c) when they would like to reschedule. The life demands on all three girls made sleep a valuable commodity, especially for Audri who was raising a child of her own. Both Indigo and Samara found it difficult to be awake and functional before noon, as neither of them got off work before 10:30 PM on most nights. This also affected their ability to attend school and is discussed in greater depth in their individual chapters. I became intimately familiar with their school and work schedules and was mindful of the time the girls dedicated to the project.

Sharing Photographs

During Phase I, participants shared childhood photos. I had planned to use Zoom's "Share Screen" feature for participants to share photos if they had saved photos to their devices or on social media. However, they all found it easiest to text me the photos, and then I shared my screen with them while we discussed the images and their stories.

Indigo, Audri, and Samara found many photos to share. I had requested that they find one or two from various age groups, suggesting ages four or five, eight or nine, and perhaps twelve or middle school age. What they brought to my Zoom meetings surprised me, given

that they were not all in close contact with their parents. Rather than contact them, the girls mined the social media pages of their parents and other family members and scrolled through their own phones, on which – to their own surprise at times – they found photos from when they were quite young.

My reasoning for asking for images beginning at age four is that this is the age at which most children first enter school and begin to encounter life outside the home on a broader level. Children begin to form social or racial stereotypes at about age three (van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). However, as pointed out in Chapter 1, Black children are suspended from preschool at much higher rates than are white children (NPR, 2018). Because there is a direct link between suspension rates and the school-to-prison nexus, starting at this age at our photographic investigation made sense. However, Indigo, for example, shared photos of herself ranging from eight-months to present day. Samara's photos went back to age three. I found that, although the child in the picture may not have been processing her social structure or reckoning her racial status, the girl in front of me did just that as she looked at her younger self.

The childhood photos the girls chose were important to them for various reasons. Audri found an entire video of herself at age twelve playing with her younger brother, which her father, since deceased, had filmed. The video was central to Audri's narrative because it represented a moment when she was happy and her father was alive. Each photograph and story provided an onramp to deeper discussions of the self. We explored how these photographs connected to the girls' views of themselves and related to their experiences of

overdiscipline. Critical Dialogue Questions (see below and Appendix A) were used at times to help facilitate discussion.

Critical Dialogue Questions

Though it was rarely needed because the girls generally had much to say and needed little prompting, I had on hand a series of questions designed to help them to reflect on their childhood photographs during the project. The purpose of the questions was to engage participants in dialogue that would be meaningful to them about their experiences. Critical Dialogue Questions (Appendix A) are derived from Freire's SHOWeD critical dialogue technique (Grieb, et al., 2013). 1) What do you see in this photograph? 2) What is happening in this photograph? 3) How does this relate to our lives? 4) Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist? 5) How can we become empowered by our new understanding? 6) What can we do about it? (Chonody, et al., 2012; Grieb, et al., 2013, Strack et al., 2004). The SHOWeD technique is based on the following: What do you **S**ee here? What is really **H**appening? How does this relate to **O**ur lives? **W**hy does this problem/strength exist? The above questions were not all relevant to the pondering of childhood photos, and in the rare instances that we used them, I developed more appropriate dialogic questions for these photos.

Phase I primarily focused on the girls sharing any stories they wanted, from their past all the way up to the present, the feelings these stories brought up (including any feelings of trauma), questions or thoughts they brought to mind, and their connecting all this back to sense of self (past self and present self).

Pedagogy: Identity as a Lens

During these first sessions we explored the four types of Identity as a lens (Gee, 2000). Recalling from Chapter 2 and Appendix B, these four ways to view identity are *natural*, *institutional*, *discursive*, and *affinity*. Natural identity (Figure B1) is determined by forces outside one's control. Vocations, "callings," and other types of identifying markers indicate *institutional* identity or identifying traits which are "authorized" by institutions such as schools, the government, or even society (Figure B2). The third of Gee's lenses is discourse identity. Discursive identity traits are usually applied in relation with or connection to other people (Gee, 2000, Figure B2). The fourth lens, affinity identity, allows people to bond with others who are like-minded (Figure B2).

The example of being Black as part of one's identity was given in Chapter 2. Blackness is at once natural, discursive, institutional, and affinitive, as we see when Black girls struggle to be accepted in school while wearing hairstyles which conflict with school dress code policies. While Black hair is a part of their natural identity and is a way for them to maintain affinity with other Black girls, institutional practices within schools, which can be rooted in White norms, and discourse among teachers and administrators, function to oppress Black girls (Dumas & ross, 2016; Evelyn, 2020; Lattimore, 2017; Lindsey, 2013).

During Phase I, the girls connected their stories, thoughts, and questions to their new knowledge of identity (see Appendix B). Together, we explored how the four ways to view identity are interwoven.

Goal Setting

Before meeting as a group for the first time, each girl set individual goals for themselves with regard to the project. When they met together for the first time, they identified an audience for their project – district administrators and school board members – and began to set group goals, which included tasking these stakeholders with taking a hard look at the reasons behind the discipline policies that were in place and had pushed them out of school.

Attrition

In January of 2021, Samara contracted the COVID-19 virus and missed school for ten days. She was unable to join me over Zoom, reporting severe illness, and we had to reschedule our first group session multiple times. Finally, Samara recovered enough to make it to our group session, and though she shared that she was exhausted, she contributed wonderful insights and served as a voice of support and reason during the session. That was the last that I saw of Samara. She dropped out of the program at Okunye. Reports from her social workers, after weeks of trying to get in touch with her, stated that she was unresponsive to their calls. I left voicemail and text messages, to no avail. We concluded that Samara, living as an adult, with job demands and ongoing health concerns from COVID, may have simply reorganized her priorities.

Audri disappeared suddenly as well, though perhaps not so quietly. At the beginning of February, she excitedly told me that she had found an apartment for herself and Amaya. However, closer to the move date, she seemed stressed out, and she expressed trepidation. When the time came for our next session, Audri did not appear on the Zoom screen, nor did

she return my calls or messages. I contacted the social workers and her guardian, and over the course of a few weeks I learned that Audri, who had been mere weeks from earning her GED, was dropped from the program due to non-attendance. She had also caused a disturbance at school and was having difficulty at her new apartment. At the time of the dissertation defense, I had not received a response from Audri, despite reaching out to her periodically to offer support. Again, on contemplating the situation with her social workers and with her guardian, I am left with the thought that Audri was overwhelmed by her sudden independence, which as most adults discover is never as freeing as we imagine it to be. Rather, the paralyzing weight of responsibility can feel suffocating.

Phase II

The original plan was for participants to work one-on-one with me also and together as a group (with all three participants and myself) during Phase II to explore their identity, learn the elements of photography and self-portrait, and ultimately produce their own self-portraits. However, once Audri and Samara left the study, Indigo expressed frustration. She had embarked on the product expecting to work with other Black girls to help discover things about her own identity, which she had not discovered yet, and suddenly she found herself alone.

I explained to Indigo that because this was a YPAR project, she was under no obligation to move forward with a design or goals that she did feel comfortable with. When I offered her to option of ending the project prematurely, she expressed that she wanted to finish the project. I suggested redesigning the study to better suit her. However, Indigo was not sure where to begin.

When discussing the concept of school discipline, all three girls had questions surrounding who made the rules, where the impetus for school discipline had originated, and why adults seemed to feel they had blanket authority to punish and judge children they did not know without context. From listening to the girls' questions and frustration, I had begun to contemplate how the district code of conduct had been used as a device by which to enforce this authority and subjugate Black girls.

> CODE OF CONDUCT
>
> "A set of principles, expectations, and/or rules that are given to students and parents to make sure that the expectations that the school has for behavior are clearly communicated to them…They also indicate how the adults will provide and enforce behavioral expectations." (University of Nebraska, Student Engagement Project, 2014)

I wondered what Indigo's thoughts might be on how the school district code of conduct had been used as a device in all three girls' school experience, to support their removal from the classroom and from school through the use of detention, suspension, and expulsion. I proposed that we examine the language in the code of conduct to see what questions Indigo had and perhaps make suggestions to the district for changing the document that could benefit girls like her who had been harmed by it. This was in line with the original intent of forwarding Black girls' voices and stories, as well as creating social change, and Indigo was very interested in this idea. Phase II of the study involved only Indigo and consisted of one Zoom session which lasted nearly two hours. During this session, I shared my screen with her and pulled up the sixty-seven-page district code of conduct (District, 2021), which she had never seen. We started with a general overview of the document, and then Indigo became interested

in the list of thirty-seven acts labeled as "gross disobedience or misconduct" (See Appendix F, Figure F1).

Threats to Staff: Bomb or NOT Bomb?

On first glance, Indigo decided that everything on the list looked straightforward. On her second pass, she looked more carefully. This time she noticed that the first infraction on the list, alarms and bomb threats, seemed like a much graver offense than, for example, tardiness, which was number twenty-two. We created two lists: "Bomb" and "Not-Bomb" and began re-categorizing the list of offenses (Appendix G).

Indigo decided that arson, harassment, and physical confrontation with staff should go on the "Bomb" list, but misuse of computers, disobedience, disruptive behavior, and misuse of electronic devices such as cell phones should go on the "Not Bomb" list. She then created a "Question" list for offenses she felt needed more context-seeking from teachers or administrators before passing judgment or punishment. Finally, she removed several items from the list that she explained were not punishable infractions, but actions children took due to life circumstances, such as tardiness or loitering (see Appendix G). The results of Indigo's work will be published later as a sub-study of this larger one.

Ethnographic Refusal

To quote Indigenous Canadian scientist and researcher Max Liboiron, "my capacity to do harm far exceeds my intentions" (Liboiron, 2020). In this project, it was imperative that I do the work of taking a step back to honor the stories and voices of the girls who were there to do their own work of self-exploration. I define "honor" as an uplifting and valuing of the lived experiences, embodiment, and spaces in which the participants in this study have moved, or by

contrast, been contained, and the stories, emotions, silences, and other forms of expression that have come out of those experiences, embodiments, and spaces. Audri, Samara, and Indigo were given the choice, upon review of their own and each other's work, not to share it with the community at all or allow me to publish it. This was their prerogative. One of the ultimate goals in YPAR projects is individual empowerment. Inviting participants to refuse their contribution to be published put the power of their stories squarely within their own domain. Unfortunately, I lost the ability to consult with all three girls on this end product: the dissertation thesis. While all three girls signed permission to use their stories, likenesses, and work in this and other presentations, my personal goal was to have them with me to the end so that they might be involved in selecting which stories they felt were most important to share and curating the sharing of their narratives. Sadly, I have been unable to reach Audri or Samara to accomplish this, and I lost touch with Indigo two months prior to this writing. I have therefore felt the enormous weight of making sure that I represent the girls in ways that would make them proud to have participated in this project and confident that its sharing will effect change.

Data Collection

We began the project with an exploration of past photographs, examining how each girl related her sense of "past self" with her idea of herself in the present and her plans for the future. This part of the project focused heavily on storytelling from the girls' past and present and was very productive. The girls not only produced a wealth of data in the form of stories which related to their experiences of discipline and topics such as family, love, empathy, power, but they also responded enthusiastically to questions I came prepared to ask. With the

exception of the first session for each girl, these questions I asked were often follow-ups to something one of them had said in a previous session.

All three participants struggled with taking new photographs of themselves to share, making the collection of new photographs impossible, and eventually bringing about a change in project direction. The girls struggled – hard – to send even a single selfie to the group or even to me privately, in an attempt to dip their toes into self-portrait waters.

Audri, Samara, and Indigo were continually involved in the direction of the project, and our sessions were a mixture of semi-structured and open interviews, with each session built upon the next. We discussed ahead of time that there would be an audience for their work – which the girls ultimately decided would be district administrators – and they set a goal for district policy change. This allowed me to come to each session prepared with two to three initial questions for each girl, or with follow-up questions to thoughts from our last session, and they knew to expect questions or explorations into concepts such as discipline, mindset, and identity. For example, at one point I asked Samara, "What do you think that teachers see when they look at Black girls in their classroom?" Samara, knowing that the project was centered around overdiscipline and that we wanted to change how Black girls were viewed, had a focus for her thinking.

Data

Data included audio and video recordings and field notes from thirty-six sessions with Audri, Samara, Indigo, and the two social workers. These data included seven "failed" sessions, during which I sat alone and reflected aloud, while Zoom recorded, upon the circumstances that each participant was grappling with at the time. Total video/audio recording

data equaled more than thirty hours (Appendix E). Data also included text message correspondence between participants and me.

I used Zoom's proprietary automatic video transcription as a starting point for transcribing video sessions, but I spent many hours cleaning these transcripts, as Zoom did not do well interpreting the words of the girls, who spoke with heavy Chicago/Midwestern African American Vernacular English and often ran words together ("i-on-no" for "I don't know" was interpreted by Zoom as "oh no," for example). I also took hand-written field notes and screenshots of text message communication between the girls and myself. All data were stored in a password-protected Box account provided by the university. Most data came in the form of stories told during our Zoom sessions.

Storytelling and Narrative

The storytelling/narrative that resulted from participants' grappling with their own sense of self and identity, discipline experiences, racialization, and other topics during our discussions, including the examination of their childhood photos during Phase I, produced valuable data about the unique perspective of each participant as well as some collective views. Samara in particular tended to answer questions and engage in inquiry through storytelling. When she struggled to describe her feelings on an issue or find the right words to define a concept, she would pause to consider and then use a story to illustrate what she meant. She was less "economic" with her words than Indigo, for instance, but her stories were compelling and allowed me to understand her thinking more clearly.

I chose storytelling as a medium for this project because I found a deficit in extant research when it came to the direct perspectives of children who are overdisciplined. Very few

studies, compared with the whole, seek out the opinions and stories of the children whose lives their research centers (Docket & Perry, 2005; Graham et al., 2013; Lutrell, 2010). Ruth Nicole Brown (2013) is notable in providing work from, for, and by Black girls, often in their own words and through the artwork they produce. Initially, the idea was for the girls' self-portraits to be accompanied by narratives or stories that they had chosen for their audience to read, thus taking control of the narrative before one could be created for them in the viewer's mind. Though the self-portraits did not come to fruition, the narratives continued to be gathered as the girls engaged in conversation with me and with each other.

Community Response/Participants' Response

Again, a primary aim of YPAR projects is social change. When the girls met during the one session in which they were able to come together as a group, they decided that school board members and/or upper-level district administrators would be their chosen audience. They wanted these stakeholders to listen to their stories and see them for who they were, not a story or version of themselves which had been negatively impacted by the overdiscipline they had received.

Data Analysis

Coding of Stories

Round 1

Table 4.2 shows how the data collected were analyzed. All data were analyzed initially using the NVivo qualitative analysis software. An initial codebook was developed using open coding by viewing the participant videos and looking for broad themes, beginning with an initial set of a priori codes related to identity (i.e., discursive, institutional), discipline (i.e.,

suspension, expulsion, detention), school (i.e., relationship: teacher), and home (i.e., food insecurity). It was expected that these codes might show up due the demographics of the girls and the topic of the project. New codes were added quickly as analysis continued, with some codes specific to each girl. For instance, several childrearing or mother-related codes were added for Audri which could not be used for Samara or Indigo. Additionally, "values" codes were added to account for the girls' sharing of moral and ethical standards that were important to them, such as bravery, empathy, or independence.

Round 2

A second round of axial coding was conducted, during which it became clear that the data were strongly stratifying into systems of support and risk. After considering analytical frameworks, including identity theory and field theory, I determined that ecological systems theory was the most appropriate framing for this data and created parent nodes titled "individual," "microsystem," "mesosystem," and so forth. I consulted with my advisor, Dr. Stephanie Sanders-Smith, who recommended that I work with Dr. Michaelene Ostrosky due to her familiarity with Bronfenbrenner's work. Dr. Ostrosky joined my committee and was helpful in helping me think through ecological systems as it pertained to the data provided by Audri, Samara, and Indigo.

It became clear that a chapter for each girl would be appropriate for the findings, as the girls each told stories that were specific enough to them to warrant their own platform. The code "QUOTE" was added to call out specific stories or quotes that felt notable: if one of the girls said something with passion or a strong emotion, repeated a point, took time to answer and make the importance of her words clear, explicitly called out a point as important, or if I

was struck by something one of them said, I used this code. Most of the stories that wound up in this paper were coded "QUOTE."

Round 3

Following the coding in NVivo, I executed what I called a "narrative dump," in which I extracted the transcripts from all the "QUOTE" codes I had tagged for each girl and dumped them into Word documents titled "Audri," "Samara," and "Indigo." These documents eventually became the findings chapters. This led to a third round of selective coding, in which the pulled stories were coded based on the ecological systems they represented. During this round of coding, the term "mindset" began to be used to describe how each girl viewed not only herself but the world around her. I compiled a list of labels that each girl used in her narrative, as well as emotions expressed, and I began to grapple with the idea of what concepts belonged in the mesosystem.

Overdiscipline and the Mesosystem. I spent considerable time grappling with the mesosystem within the girls' ecologies. Generally, the mesosystem is depicted as a concentric circle between the micro- and exosystems, with arrows within it representing the interrelationships within settings and other elements in the microsystem (Stern et al., 2021). In my examination of PVEST diagrams, I did not find examples that placed details – such as examples of these interworkings – in the mesosystem area. I chose to show this interplay by placing examples from the girls' stories, such as overdiscipline or family involvement in school, within their individual mesosystems. In working through this, I struggled with where to place the concept of overdiscipline, which all three girls experienced and needed to be acknowledged. Initially, I placed overdiscipline within the girls' exosystems, viewing it as a

result of school discipline systems. However, as I continued to process and discuss with colleagues, I struggled with the idea that it was not merely discipline systems or policies that brought about overdiscipline, but the adults within schools who utilized these policies. Further, societal values that these adults held ultimately drove the thinking behind both the creation of these policies and the enforcement of them by teachers, administrators, and school police.

For a while, overdiscipline resided in the girls' macrosystems due to these considerations. However, upon further consideration, I determined that overdiscipline, as a result of multiple interworkings between school settings, teachers, administrators, and students, essentially is a mesosystem element. However, I chose to double-categorize overdiscipline for the purposes of this study: I placed it in the girls' chronosystems as well as their mesosystems to recognize that overdiscipline was pervasive within their schooling experiences and that Black children have been historically overdisciplined in the American school system.

Following the coding of the narrative dump, I titled each story and organized them by how they were illustrative of elements within the ecological systems.

Round 4: Member Checking

The goal of this project was for the girls to approve all analysis of their stories and presentation of their work. This became impossible, as Audri and Samara dropped out well before completion of the second phase of the study. As such, I have done some serious soul searching when it comes to the sharing of this work. Ultimately, I concluded that Audri and Samara wanted their stories to be heard, and they wanted change, not just for themselves but for other Black girls who would come after them. Although I have not heard from them since

last year, I take their stories seriously and hope to do them justice in sharing them. Still, my findings and analysis were not processed alone. I undertook a rigorous checking process, including meeting with the social workers at Okunye, meeting with my advisor to discuss my findings and analysis, and sending drafts of all findings chapters to colleagues.

Table 4.2

Data Analysis Table

Stage of Coding	Data Analysis
1st Round: Open	• Transcribed data from recorded Zoom sessions • Open coding using a priori and emergent codes
2nd Round: Axial	• Axial coding • PVEST parent nodes created • "QUOTE" code created
3rd Round: Selective	• Selective coding to PVEST categories • Narrative dump • "Mindset" term used • Labels/emotions compiled • Mesosystem categorization
4th Round: Member Checking	• Chapters sent to colleagues (Black women) to check for accuracy in interpretation of stories, to ensure voices of girls "sounded out" accurately, "blind spots" avoided • Consultation with colleagues, advisor, and committee members to verify PVEST analysis • Consultation with social workers for context

Accuracy of Interpretation: Checking with Colleagues. All of the colleagues whom I asked to read my findings chapters were Black women. I did this in order to check their interpretation of the girls' stories against my own. This was important to ensure I had not missed any nuance to the girls' words or insinuated meaning erroneously. Additionally, I

consulted with my wife, a Black woman who studies sociology at Arizona State University. The frequency with which we conversed about this work at times overshadowed other topics of conversation. To this point, I recognized my friends' and colleagues' roles as professors and Black women whose duty was not to exhaust themselves with my work. I asked them if they might be willing to help, and how much, and then I sent full chapters or portions of chapters, depending on their responses. I sent chapters to multiple people so that if I did not hear back from someone, I still had feedback.

Accuracy of Framework Analysis: Committee, Advisor, and Colleagues. In addition to checking to make sure I had interpreted the participants' stories accurately, I also sent findings chapters to committee members, my advisor, and a colleague familiar with Bronfenbrenner's work – Dr. Dorian Harrison – to check that they understood my analysis of the stories against the PVEST framework. Additionally, I met with my advisor, Dr. Stephanie Sanders-Smith, every other week and corresponded with her via email and even text to discuss framework concepts, the girls' stories, and analysis. Dr. Sanders-Smith's collaborative feedback style was helpful for me, as it allowed me to bounce ideas off her that I was grappling with.

As I received feedback from these colleagues, committee members, and Dr. Sanders-Smith, I met or corresponded with them for clarification and then edited as necessary. For example, on reading Indigo's chapter, Dr. Harrison pushed me to think temporally about how I was defining the girls' mindsets and experiences as well as making sure I was clear about what school(s) I was referring to in different scenarios, rather than simply writing about "school" as an entity. This caused me, for instance, to consider the ways in which Okunye supported the girls that the traditional schools had not, as well as ways that Okunye still fell short.

Social Workers. In addition to working with the social workers for recruitment purposes and in facilitating Zoom meetings, I met with two of the social workers together to interview them on two different occasions. The social workers provided essential background information on Okunye and policy information. The interviews were scheduled in January after I had already spend considerable time with the girls. It became obvious to me that some more context was needed as the girls described the reactions to adults at their previous schools as well as incidents with teachers at Okunye they described.

From the social workers, I learned that Okunye had "zero tolerance" policies in place (in which certain behaviors or possessions such as weapons could get a student automatically suspended or expelled), like most schools. However, Okunye's administrators typically sought to understand the motivations behind their students' behavior before making decisions, and sometimes this resulted in letting zero tolerance slide. The social workers gave the example of the possession of mace: some students had been sent to Okunye for bringing mace to school. However, Okunye recognized that many girls carried mace for safety reasons as they navigated their way to school through dangerous neighborhoods. In response, Okunye developed the policy that students could turn in their mace devices as they arrived in the morning and retrieve them at the end of the day, so they could protect themselves on their way home. This juxtaposition of policies – one which excommunicated girls, and the other which recognized need, both surrounding the same "weapon" – was one which I would not have been aware of had I not interviewed the social workers.

Lastly, the social workers disclosed that students' disciplinary infractions at their previous schools were reviewed by the head of school at Okunye before they were admitted.

This behavior was measured against the needs of the other students and staff at Okunye. If a student who needed to be moved to an alternative school had been in fights with several other students who were already at Okunye, or if the student exhibited particularly violent behavior, that history could result in them being turned away. This type of decision could determine whether a child wound up with a school to attend at all. The social workers assured me that the head of school was careful not to provide a biased version of a student's data to staff. However, as will be seen in Samara's chapter, how teachers at Okunye interpreted these data appeared to vary.

Effectiveness of Call-to-Action

Results of data analyses allowed me to determine the effectiveness of the call-to-action set by the participants, and implications for future study. I presented the findings from this study to the school district code of conduct committee, who responded with enthusiastic commentary about the participants and their shared narrative. They pledged to meet and discuss the questions and concerns that Indigo had. However, while they scheduled a second meeting with me to discuss planned changes for the new school year, the board members suddenly had an emergency just before I arrived and at the time of this writing have not contacted me to reschedule. It seems that the implication is that the work did not move far enough in the direction to enact social change.

Conclusion

Black girls' bodies, voices, and psyches have historically been fraught within White spaces and institutions (Baumle, 2018; Crenshaw, 1989; Marston et al., 2012), which are by definition all public spaces (Lipsitz, 1995). In designing the research questions for this study, it

was my hope that the Black girls would feel empowered to share stories that were important to them. The research intervention was designed to provide participants with the creative space, agency, and room to develop critical consciousness so that they may explore how their experiences with overdiscipline has shaped their mindset and perspectives on the systems of risk and support in their lives. In turn, Samara, Indigo, and Audri wanted district leaders to act for change on their behalf. This study examines how self-exploration and structural critique might influence Black girls' sense of self, and the response of stakeholders to these critiques. There is potential for transformative change when key decision-makers interact with the stories shared by Black girls, but it must be acknowledged that these decision makers can make little impact upon the lives of Black girls if they wait for these students to approach them with solutions that should have been proactively sought – before they are pushed out of the system altogether.

CHAPTER 5: AUDRI

Figure 5.1

Audri, artistic rendition by J. Laixely

"The big question is: When did the discipline happen? Like, when was that the start? Why do people want to do that to their kids, if they love their kids so much? If they tell them, like, like, "I love you" and all of that, then why do that to your kids? Because I don't feel like that's love, then, if you're doing that. **That's not love. And if it is love, then I don't want it.**

I think it comes from my past life, past trauma, and everything, because my mom used to tell us like all the time about, like, how like, her dad would treat her, like, this way. But like, **you're supposed to break that cycle**. Why would you keep that cycle? I got my Christmas taken away. I went plenty of nights without eating. And like and like like like like like like she'll, literally make jokes about like, "One night won't hurt you. Just look at you." I'm thinking like, *I wonder why*? Because

> when I do get to eat, like, I eat, obviously, because I'm hungry. So, I know I'm going to break that for my child. Like, she will never have to go through that."
>
> *Audri, November 27, 2020*

The first thing I noticed about Audri was her smile. The next was her laugh. It was loud, explosive, and infectious, and it splashed across her face as quickly as her grin. At a time when Zoom fatigue for everyone was high, Audri was a breath of fresh air. I enjoyed every moment with her on the screen and felt inspired afterward by what we discussed. We ended each session looking forward to the next. Audri's one-year-old girl, Amaya, was a bouncy and talkative child – though she had not yet developed the ability to make her toddler language intelligible to the rest of us. Amaya was present during several of our online sessions, and one time I had the thrilling pleasure to be "hung up on" by her as she crawled to the bed, her large, curious eyes huge on the screen as she pushed her mother's laptop closed. Seconds later, Audri, who had left for a moment to get Amaya some water, reopened the computer, shaking her head and saying, "Kids."

During these sessions, Audri and I discussed life, love, childrearing, discipline – both at home and at school – family, politics, and many other things. Audri spoke passionately and in rambling sentences peppered with the word "like." She frequently used this word, seemingly as a placeholder while she gathered her thoughts, repeating it over and over again before continuing with her line of discussion.[1]

[1] To stay true to her voice, I have chosen to leave in this stylistic repetition in her narrative, rather than editing it for brevity.

Over the course of three months, I developed a relationship with Audri. Around Christmastime I visited her school to deliver a gift card for her participation in Phase I of the project, and her social worker allowed for us to visit briefly in his office, sitting six feet apart due to COVID-19 restrictions. I brought a xylophone for Amaya during this visit, and Audri happily shared with me later that her daughter loved the instrument.

Audri disappeared from the project and my life as quickly as she entered. Quite suddenly in February of 2021, and soon after moving into an apartment of her own with Amaya, Audri stopped attending school and ceased responding to my calls or texts. The social workers at Okunye were unable to reach her. I learned later from her guardian, who worked at the school, that Audri was experiencing hardships and was unresponsive to her guardian as well. I have continued to reach out to Audri every few weeks, with no response.

Before her abrupt exit from school and from the project, Audri was an enthusiastic participant and showed great willingness to discuss a variety of topics. I began our first session with an exploration of identity and allowed our conversations to branch out naturally. Often, I would circle back to ask Audri about words she used when describing herself or stories she told. Analysis of these conversations revealed that Audri cared deeply about her role as a mother. She was strongly determined to do well for herself and her child and to provide a more nurturing environment than the one in which she had been raised. Audri was very aware of how others viewed her, specifically peers, her mother[2], and her teachers, and she talked at length about the importance of the need for understanding and empathy when relating to

[2] References to "mother," "father," and siblings are Audri's adoptive family. Biological parents and guardians will be referred to as "biological."

others. Audri's views of herself had been adversely affected by many of her personal experiences.

Audri's Mindset

From the stories, reflections, and opinions that she shared, I gleaned many qualities about Audri, including values and the way she viewed the world that she spoke about directly, and outlooks that were implied through context. These elements encompassed a variety of nuanced personal viewpoints and values, a sense of identity that revolved around motherhood, and a rejection of societal expectations. Trust was essential in Audri's life. She guarded her heart and her child closely, and she expressed a desire to be honest and forgiving with her child. Analysis of Audri's stories included coding for repeated themes in participants' viewpoints, values, emotions, and idealistic qualities. Four "pillars" stood out in Audri's narrative: independence, trust, motherhood, and empathy. Through deep discussion with Audri, it became clear that these concepts hinged upon each other: her experiences led her to value empathy, not just for herself but for others, and to take great care in whom she placed her trust. Audri had been placed in many situations where she had been dependent on others who had let her down. This led her to desperately seek her own independence for her own and her daughter's wellbeing.

Independence: Reality Smacks You in the Face

Audri's experiences as a teenager forced her to take on adult responsibilities quite rapidly. Her outlook on reality and her ability to trust the adults in her life were affected by these experiences. Early in the project, as we were perusing photos and videos of her younger

self, I commented on her description of twelve-year-old Audri, saying it seemed like young Audri "had a good head on her shoulders."

> Audri: Oh yeah, it was something, alright. It was screwed on right. Over the years, it's started to unscrew. Like, when you a kid, you don't see reality. You just see good times. Playin, loving. That's all you see. And as soon as you grow up, **reality smacks you in the face**.

A lot changed for Audri in the five short years between when the carefree photos and videos were taken and her present life. Audri was expelled from school in her freshman year, her father (present in the video) had died in 2019, and her mother had kicked her out and left the state while Audri was caring for her newborn. She commented many times on how her trust had been broken to the point where she had changed how she viewed and related to others. She struggled to trust even those who clearly meant her no harm, such as her guardian, who had given her a home when she needed it most.

However, in every one of our sessions, Audri spoke of wanting to "flip the script" and give more to her daughter than she had had as a child. She excitedly told me of her progress in her GED program and plans to get her driver's license and a place of her own. Though she described reality as "a smack in the face," it was not hopeless. On the contrary, at the time of our study, Audri spoke often of life goals and plans to live a successful, independent life.

Trust: I Used to Have a Very Good Heart

I generally experienced Audri as a laughing, good natured teenager. She joyfully described times with her father and siblings, caring for her daughter, and her plans for the

future. Contrastingly, Audri conceptualized herself as "evil" or "bad" and described struggles to return to past iterations of herself.

> Audri: I used to have, like, such a kind heart. Like, you think, like, I used to always be like this evil or this way? Like no, I used to have a very good heart. Then that changed one day because **I see that kindness don't get you nowhere**. Now if I get downright ugly, now it's a problem…But **didn't nobody see me when I was out here giving everybody the benefit of doubt**, when I was out here being kind to everybody. Now, since I'm getting downright ugly, now it's a problem.
>
> Jadyn: So, would you say you don't have a kind heart now?
>
> Audri: Um, it's still black, we're working on turning it back to red *(laughs nervously)*. It's black in there. Slowly but surely.

Audri's found that when she gave people the "benefit of the doubt" or showed others kindness, she did not receive the same grace in return. This prompted her to look inward and determine for herself the amount of trust she was willing to place in others. She shared that she did not have many friends. However, through her struggles with body image and other issues brought on by treatment from people she trusted, Audri had emerged with a fierce determination to view herself in a more positive light and to pass this outlook on to Amaya. Though she still described herself as evil, she also said she was a "work in progress" and was quite forgiving of herself.

Motherhood

Audri's mind and heart centered around her daughter, Amaya. She spoke of her child lovingly and with pride. In her most difficult trials, when she was homeless during a pandemic

in the middle of a Midwest winter at age sixteen, she did everything she could, including couch surfing and stealing baby formula, to care for Amaya. She was fascinated by my role as an educator, and we spoke frequently about childcare and the importance of empathy when working with children. As mentioned earlier, Amaya was present for many of our sessions, and it was clear to me that this child was happy, enthusiastic, bright, and attached to her mother.

Empathy: The Treatment of Children

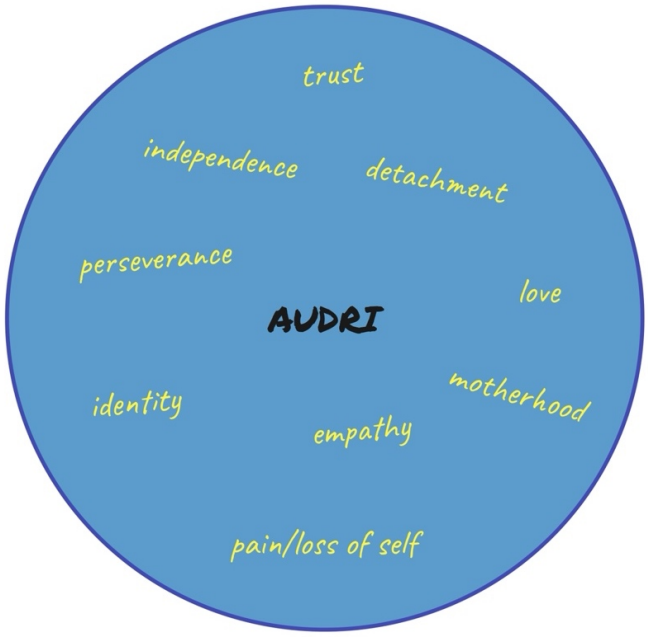
Audri had a well-developed sense of empathy and employed it in her stance on many issues. This value was evident through Audri's storytelling about loved ones who had broken her trust or other personal experiences. One example of this was Audri's views on childrearing and childcare, which she brought up during several of our sessions. Audri held a job at a local daycare and expressed frustration with how one child in particular, Greg, was treated.

> Audri: (The lead teacher) won't even let him go to the park anymore because he does not listen. *It's a park. What do you expect?* So, what they do? They just be like "Greg you need to stop doing this. Greg! Greg!" …And like, literally just be so snippy towards him. Like, what? That's why I said, like I gotta go. Before I hurt somebody.

Audri told stories from both home and school in which she had privileges taken away due to adult frustration with her inability, or unwillingness, to comply. Audri felt as though adults had not made efforts to understand her motivations in those situations. Similarly, her experiences working in an educational setting in which children were refused access to park trips and yelled at felt unfair to Audri, whose advocacy in favor of the children was not regarded by senior staff members.

Figure 5.2

Audri's Mindset



Audri's commentary on childrearing, school, politics, family, and other topics showed that she valued the importance of context-seeking, empathy, and mental health awareness. She felt that these were lacking in her own experiences, and as a result, she valued personal agency and independence for both herself and her daughter. She expressed dreams and goals for herself that were largely emotion-based and not concrete. In other words, Audri knew what she did not want – abuse, insecurity, rejection – and what she did want, loosely – stability and wellbeing, empathy, love; however, she had not set concrete short- or long-term goals for herself.

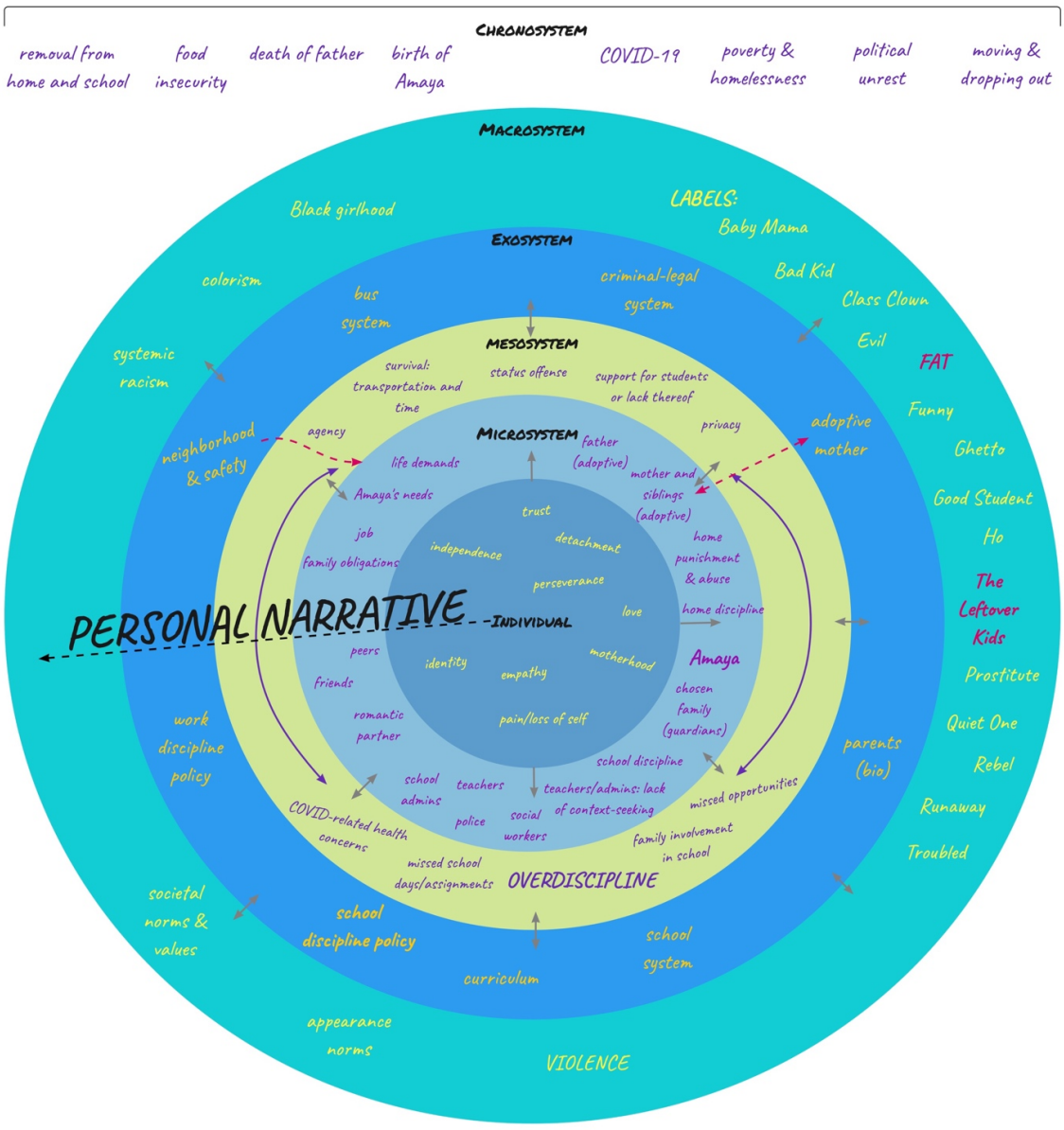
Audri's Ecological Systems

The diagram in Figure 5.3 represents Audri's individual mindset and ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as derived from the narratives that unfolded during our conversations.

Audri's personal narrative crosses all systems. Though she did not know the terms microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, chronosystem, and mindset, her dialogue and stories showed that she was aware of how various systems, settings, and people interacted within her life.

Figure 5.3

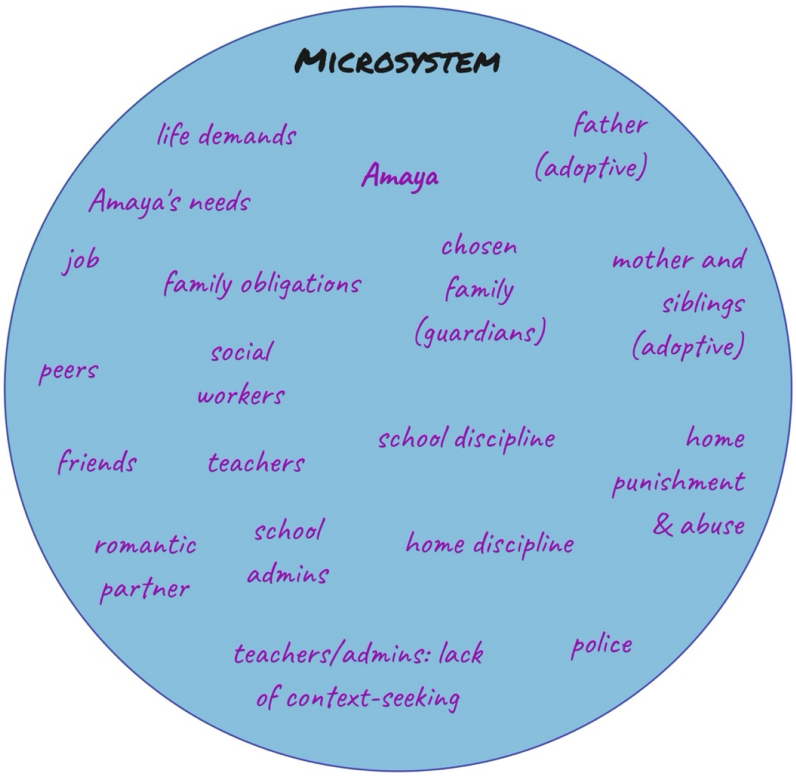
Audri's Ecological Systems



Audri's Microsystem

Figure 5.4

Audri's Microsystem



The elements of the microsystem are the activities, roles, and relationships that occur in given settings for an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The people in Audri's microsystem (Figure 5.4) included her daughter, other family members and guardians, school staff, peers, police, and the father of her child. This section focuses on the elements of Audri's microsystem which had significant impacts on her teenage development, and which she spoke of the most during this project: her mother, daughter, peers, teachers, and the police.

Audri's adoptive family included her father, whom she was very close to and who she described as the only person who truly seemed to care about her. He died of cancer in late

2020 when Amaya was one month old. Three months later, when Audri was seventeen, her mother kicked her out of the house and moved out of the state. Audri's adoptive mother has therefore transitioned ecologically from her microsystem to her exosystem, as the two had no further contact after this separation, altering their relationship (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Though she is now a part of her exosystem, Audri's mother was an important and influential part of her microsystem for the first sixteen years of her life. Audri shaped many of the ideas about who she wanted to be around not being like her mother. She expressed the desire to provide for Amaya emotionally, mentally, and physically in ways that her own mother did not.

Relationship with Mother

Resentment: "Don't Touch My Door." Audri shared multiple stories which centered the pain and anger she felt around her mother. It was a fraught relationship which became unbearable for both parties once Amaya was born and Audri's father passed away shortly afterward. In the following account, Amaya's father, Michael, had ordered food delivered to her while she was breastfeeding, because her mother refused to feed her. When the food arrived, however, her mother blocked the way.

> Audri: Like I had nothing in my room, and I'm still trying to breastfeed and all of that…I was about to go (get the food). She was just like, "Don't touch my door" …She grabbed the food, and like, she just threw it at me… *(starts to cry)* Like *(sniffles)* like you don't have to treat somebody like that.

Audri's mother's refused to support her while she was pregnant and in the months following Amaya's birth. This catalyzed Audri's drive to provide for her own child, and she told

many stories surrounding the type of support she vowed to offer to Amaya in the future. This support ranged from love to financial support, to providing a roof over Amaya's head, and even plans for if Amaya felt the need to "get away": she would send her to a family member, if necessary, but never put her out on the street.

Forgiveness and Disappointment. Much of Audri's pain and struggles with trust centered around her mother. In one conversation, Audri spoke of an attempt to connect with her mother, and how her trust was once again broken. When speaking about her mother, Audri's repetitive speech was often more pronounced. In the example below, she rambled as she struggled to put many thoughts together at once.

> Audri: So, I was at the kid's church and they're like, like, they was talking about forgiveness. And this was still like right around the time where like, where like, where like, well my mom was still, we'd get into it. Like I'm fat. That's the first thing. Like, like, she said, I'm big. It made me so uncomfortable in my body, like it was just unbelievable…
>
> But I remember, when we got back in the car, and like…we used to talk about what like, like, what we learned. And I remember I started off, and then…I said like, how like I forgive her.
>
> **And she just laughed at me.**

Audri paused in that moment and then said, "Wow. You just opened something up in me. I just realized why I don't forgive people." A recurring theme for Audri (for all three girls, as will be revealed in later chapters) was a need for understanding, specifically when interacting

with adults. In the above revelation, Audri discovered that she had difficulty forgiving people because when she did so with her mother, this forgiveness was rejected.

Audri learned from home that some adults could be harmful, and so she learned to protect herself from that harm by not opening herself up to potential breaches in trust. When she became a mother herself, she was determined to change this pattern.

Relationship with Amaya

Flipping the Script. The most important person in Audri's microsystem was her daughter, Amaya. One of the most frequent themes in Audri's dialogue was her desire not to repeat the abusive treatment that she received from her own mother. Our conversations were interrupted many times so that Audri could attend to her daughter's needs. During one session, Amaya briefly choked on her water, and Audri displayed enormous pride when Amaya began to pat herself on the chest, mimicking the approach her mother would use when patting her back to soothe her. For Audri, motherhood was her world.

> Audri: Just a lot of things I want to do different from my household…Like, people say how like they bring things from like their different household, like to raise up their kids? Not mine. I'm starting completely from scratch.

"Start from scratch" and "flip the script" were refrains during my conversations with Audri. I got a sense of great fear from this young mother that there were many factors at play in her world that might serve to disrupt Amaya's innocence, and she wanted desperately to prevent these dangers from reaching her daughter. At the same time, she had also considered that there were risks she could not prevent.

Audri: …That's what I have to tell myself: "It is okay. Amaya is gonna fall. Amaya is gonna cut her hand. Amaya is going to get boo boos. It is okay."

Relationship with School Staff and Police

Overdiscipline: No Christmas, No Six Flags. Clearly, Audri felt an intense need to be understood. From her stories, this need often manifested in the form of wanting teachers and parents to consider her circumstances before labeling or condemning her. As an important part of all children's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), teachers spend hours with young people and, ideally, provide a secure base and a safe haven in which they can thrive (Stern et al., 2021). However, if trusting relationships with teachers are not built, or if teachers break the bonds of trust, this can have a devastating effect. In the following narrative, Audri described an incident in middle school that combined a lack of context-seeking or understanding from both her classroom teacher and her mother. It altered her ability to relate to her teachers and to school and is something that she has carried with her into her young adulthood.

Audri: I remember when I was in seventh grade, and it was literally so close to Christmas…And it was like a hard teacher…I remember I was in a different classroom trying to get like my work all caught up because like, like they had an incentive at the end of the year like if you had no DRs no ORs (discipline referrals or office referrals)… then like they will take us to Six Flags.

(The teacher) claimed how like he did not know where I was at, when the student teacher saw me in the classroom. I told him before I even went…He said, "Okay." And then, and then, then that's when like he still wrote me up and call home. So then, so

then, like, I literally got my Christmas taken away. And I didn't get to go to the Six Flags trip…

In middle school, most frequently in eighth grade, Audri began to be removed from class and suspended. This seemed to snowball, and she was expelled in her freshman year. Though it is not possible to tell if the incident above was the single catalyst for Audri's increasing discipline issues, for Audri it was significant. She shared that this was the incident that led her to become uninterested in school.

Overdiscipline: Kicked Out of Class for Non-Participation. Audri shared that she was "kicked out of class" many times. Curious about exactly what was causing Audri to be removed from class so often, I probed further. Audri described herself as the class clown and being sent from the classroom for making people laugh. She also stated that she was sent from class for "just sitting there" or not listening, rather than doing her work. She explained that the strategy of removing her from the classroom for non-participation began, at least for her, in the seventh grade. This is consistent with research showing that Black children are frequently removed from school spaces for non-violent offenses (M.W. Morris, 2012).

Arrested for Going to School. The police played an integral role in Audri's relationship with school. They are placed in her microsystems because they were present at her middle school and high school, regularly interacted with her, and altered the course of her life through their role in overdiscipline practices. Audri shared the story of when she was arrested for "trespassing" at her own high school, during school hours. Prior to this incident, Audri had already skipped school for several days and then had an altercation with her mother. She left

the house and went to a friend's home to get away, but her mother reported her to police as a runaway.

When Audri returned to school the next day, she unfortunately chose not to follow proper school procedure, arriving at lunch time and asking a friend to let her in. She wound up in an altercation with the hall monitor and police.

> Audri: I was trying to explain to them, I'm about to go upstairs to go call (my mom) and figure all this stuff out. Cause like I'm confused. Like why did she call me like, a runaway and all of that? Why is all of this basically happening?

Audri had attempted to go to school for the first time in days, but she was arrested and later expelled, due to her altercation with police that day. This led to her placement at Okunye, and more issues with her mother, who was embarrassed and angry that Audri was attending an alternative school for "bad kids." This will be discussed in the macrosystem section of this chapter, which addresses societal norms and values. Audri expressed confusion and bitterness when recalling this memory: she admitted that she had been "a skipper," smoked marijuana regularly, and had trouble caring about her classes. Yet, she repeatedly returned to school and showed that she valued her education and personal success in doing so. Audri felt that no one afforded her the grace or time to explain the reasons for her absence from home and school.

Relationship with Guardian

The support of Audri's guardian was vital to her daily successes. This woman, a teacher at Okunye, maintained contact with Audri throughout the summer that Audri was homeless, couch-surfing, and struggling to provide for herself and Amaya. The two shared a bond, as

their children were just a week apart in age, and so at the end of summer, she offered for Audri and Amaya to move in.

Audri referred to her guardian as her new mom. She was prompted to get up for school, return my calls, and meet other obligations by her guardian quite frequently. I noted that this caregiver not only picked Audri up from the bus stop after work but also was working to help her get her driver's license and secure an apartment. When Audri suddenly disappeared, I spoke with her guardian, who informed me that Audri was struggling to navigate the many new responsibilities she had so longed for. It seemed to both of us that, although she had received much support for many months, Audri had been less prepared for independent life than they had hoped, and school was deprioritized.

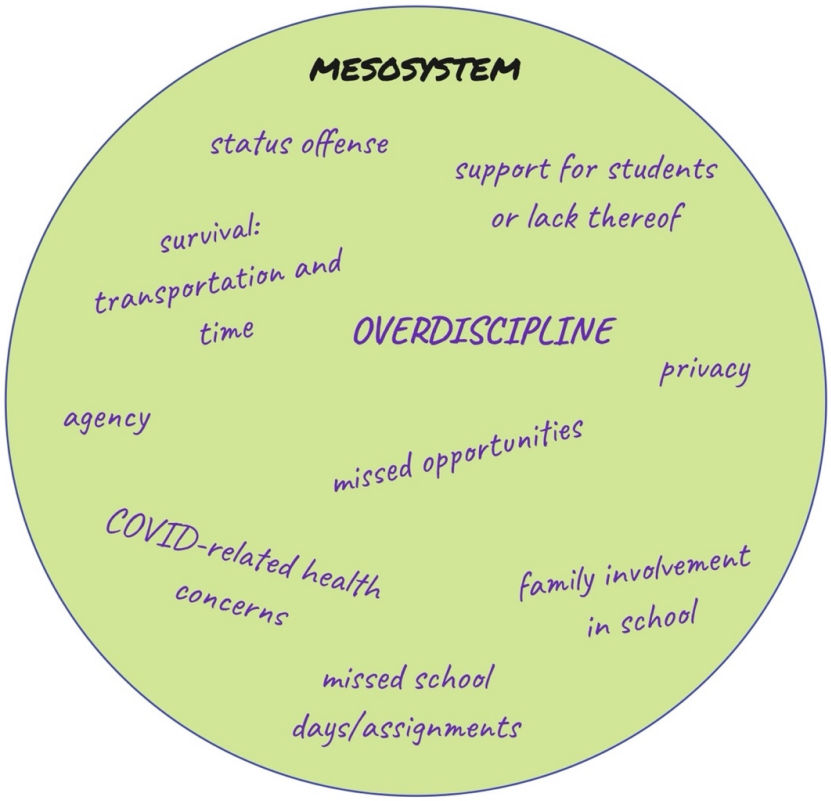
The people, relationships, and situations within Audri's microsystem were important factors in her development. Values which grew out of Audri's experiences within her microsystem became important themes which in turn resonated throughout her overall ecosystem, as we will see in the next sections.

Audri's Mesosystem

The mesosystem was where interactions occurred between settings, people, and other elements within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The concept of privacy, which Audri's mother violated when interacting with her daughter and other adults, belongs in the mesosystem, along with agency, transportation issues, and family involvement at school. Of perhaps greatest impact for Audri within her mesosystem was her encounters with *overdiscipline*.

Figure 5.5

Audri's Mesosystem



Overdiscipline

Audri had multiple experiences with overdiscipline, which occurred because of interactions between herself, her peers, teachers, administrators, and/or police as well as the thoughts the adults held regarding children and discipline. To restate, overdiscipline is defined for the purposes of this study as discipline which is enacted upon an individual as a result of an imbalance of power, intersections of discrimination, a refusal to listen to or recognize the agency of a child, or the negation of the context of a given situation. Overdiscipline, being an interactive mechanism between settings in a child's microsystem, is therefore a concept which belongs in the mesosystem.

Status Offenses. In my analysis, I have placed status offenses in Audri's mesosystem. This is due to the interactions between police, parents, and school staff, as well as codes of conduct which allow children in schools to be punished differently from adults. Girls of color are frequently arrested for status offenses (Baumle, 2018). A status offense unfairly punishes children for things they often see adults do with no repercussions. For example, in my interviews with them, Audri's social workers pointed out that when she chose to go to her friend's house after fighting with her mother, she was practicing a healthy approach to dealing an altercation. Rather than punching a wall, drinking, or escalating the argument, she stepped away. Had Audri been an adult, there would have been no legal consequence whatsoever for her decision to go to her peer's house. However, because she was underage, her mother reported her as a runaway, and the police became involved.

In-School Suspension: The Leftover Kids. From a discipline standpoint, Audri's experience during elementary school was largely uneventful. She was suspended for the first time in middle school, and the suspensions increased in frequency by the eighth grade. By her freshman year, Audri was cutting school and being sent out of class for non-participation. Audri was suspended out of school in both middle and high school; she also received in-school suspensions (ISS). Audri described ISS as a room full of "leftover kids" who were left to the whims of teachers who may or may not care about their academic success.

Jadyn: So, you're in there all day, what are you doing in there?

Audri: Nothing…And it's really wishy-washy because that's how it is now in high school. Sometimes they might bring your work, sometimes they might not. I look at it as like

the leftover kids. Like, like "those kids" are clearly in there for something. So, "they get their work, they get they work. If they don't, oh well. Gotta move on."

From Audri's viewpoint, the disciplinary system within her schools was set up to privilege the children who followed set norms and values and to shuffle aside the children who did not conform to these norms or follow the rules. Audri was proud of her uniqueness and resisted conformity for conformity's sake, resulting in dissonance between herself and the aims of the disciplinary code of conduct. The children who found themselves in the ISS room were not just removed from the classroom but often cut off from learning, thus increasing the likelihood that they would fall behind in their classes and wind up back in ISS, since students who did not participate in class were frequently sent there. This interaction between teachers and their students, along with administrators and the set disciplinary system, illustrates how overdiscipline acts within the mesosystem to harm children. This harm is consistent with literature on the discipline of Black children (Baumle, 2018; M.W. Morris, 2012; Wun, 2016a).

Audri's Exosystem

Audri's exosystem consisted of elements outside her immediate setting that affected her but that she may not have interacted with directly (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The bus system, the discipline policies at her job and at school, the Walgreens whose receipt her parents found which led them to discover her pregnancy, and even the school curriculum were all part of Audri's exosystem. Though they were outside her immediate sphere of influence, Audri was deeply affected by these elements.

Figure 5.6

Audri's Exosystem

Within her exosystem I placed Audri's biological parents and her adoptive mother: though they at one point resided in her microsystem, they removed themselves outside of that space. Audri was adopted at the age of six weeks, and from a comment she made during a session, it appears that she visited her biological parents until she was about twelve. However, Audri reported that her biological parents stopped contact after she became pregnant with Amaya. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), this represents an ecological transition, in this case from her microsystem to her exosystem. Another parental ecological transition occurred when Audri's adopted mother kicked her out and then moved out of the state, cutting off both contact and support.

The systems and policies in place at the various schools Audri attended, along with their codes of conduct, were placed in the exosystem as well. For example, Audri interacted with hall monitors, administrators, and school police within her immediate settings – her microsystem – on a regular basis who policed her actions and administered punishment for acts that ranged from fighting to not paying attention in class to attempting to enter the school building the wrong way. But the code of conduct and other policies gave them the legal right to do so, and these policies were created outside of Audri's immediate setting, at the district or state level, in her exosystem.

Audri was often removed from the classroom due to boredom with the curriculum as well as discipline issues. She also described in detail how her bus riding schedule affected her daily life. It is these three elements of her exosystem that I focus on in this section.

School Curriculum

Some Days I Wasn't Feeling It. In the following conversation, I was curious to know why Audri had not been doing her work, which she cited as the reason for being removed from class many times. Unsurprisingly, she responded like a typical teenager: in a nutshell, Audri was bored.

> Audri: Some days I wasn't feeling it. Just didn't care about it. And that's like everybody. That's understandable to have bad days.
>
> Jadyn: Was it interesting work?
>
> Audri: (*shakes head "no" adamantly*, *smiling*) No, it wasn't interesting, and that's like what I really don't like about work…With kids, you get to explore that like that little mind and stuff. But then once high school starts…you need to read this thousand-page

book and give me a whole four- or five-page essay about it. Like, no…And it's crazy because (now) I don't read unless I have to.

She shared that at one time, she loved to read and was praised for her reading skills. She also said she enjoyed writing to the extent that she would come to school only for writing class and then skip her other classes. Sadly, Audri was frequently sent out of class and/or suspended for not working, the result of which was to distance her further from school, her teachers, and her educational goals.

School Discipline Policy

"Running Away" vs. "Taking a Break": Delinquency vs. Choice. Audri's expulsion came after she attempted to return to M.W. High School after missing several days and tried to access the building through a side door in an effort to avoid questions from administrators. Her mother had reported her as a runaway when she left the house after an altercation.

Audri: I basically just left the house…And then like, also wasn't going to school…At M.W. High, like, they call and just be like, your child such-and-such missed first, second, third, fourth, and like they would list all the periods. So, like (my mom) was getting that call like every day.

The school attendance system was typical of that in many schools across the country, set up to report when students missed classes or were absent from school altogether. As such, it is not necessarily oppressive or harmful. Parents and guardians should know when their children are missing from school or any other institution entrusted with their care. Lacking broader context for why Audri was skipping school so much, this part of Audri's exosystem caused further strain between her and her mother.

The student code of conduct for the local school district (District, 2021) was developed outside of the school itself, but the teachers within the school – in Audri's microsystem – were obliged to follow it. In fact, the *student* code of conduct contained sections listing *staff* rights and responsibilities with regard to their students. Therefore, when Audri refused to participate in class, the code of conduct was used as a device to support her removal from the classroom.

Transportation Issues

Audri's determination to pursue her GED, work, and care for Amaya could be seen in the way she navigated the other institutions and structures within her exosystem that caused tension in her life. One day, she detailed to me exactly how long it took her to take multiple buses to get from work to the bus terminal and then to the Walmart one town over from where she lived, where her guardian would pick her up and bring her home. This extended transportation time affected Audri's ability to study, spend quality time with her daughter, get a decent amount of sleep, and even to care about her job and schoolwork. Though she had no control over the bus system, it nevertheless was a crucial part of her ecology. Nevertheless, she completed these trips daily in pursuit of her goals.

Audri's Macrosystem

The macrosystem consists of ideologies within culture, subculture, and society that affect an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For Audri, labels and societal expectations were most prominent within her macrosystem. She described these when she told of being labeled as "fat," "runaway," or "bad," but she also spoke of the frustration and discrimination that came with the labels she knew she was saddled with as a member of a group: Black Girls. Audri's frustrations with labeling and treatment were consistent with the kind of identity threat

and stereotype threat that many Black girls experience (Townsend et al., 2010; van Laar et al., 2010). Audri named herself a class clown, evil, a rebel, and she discussed how she felt society viewed Black girls ("ho," "prostitute"). At the same time, when asked "Who are you?" she responded with labels such as "mother," "friend," and "listener." All of these labels are examples of cultural and societal discourse and belong in Audri's macrosystem as representative of ideologies that she felt were used to define her, either inclusively or exclusively.

Figure 5.7

Audri's Macrosystem

Audri frequently described feeling misunderstood and misrepresented. She felt discouraged that her mother and others viewed the students at Okunye as "bad kids," when her personal experience showed otherwise. Audri's wish for understanding and empathy focused on many issues within her macrosystem.

Societal Labels

"You're Fat." Among Audri's stories were several involving body image. She was often told by her mother, her peers, and even the father of her child that she was overweight, and this affected her self-esteem.

> Audri: Like, they can't say I'm ugly. I'm not ugly. All they can say is just like, "You're fat. You're fat." And I'm not really fat. It's just I got a fat…breast area, okay? *(Both laughing.)* Literally I had a kid like a year ago…Like, did you just expect me to shrink back down to a pencil that fast?...Like, hi, um, this is how pregnancy works. That's when like, I started feeling comfortable in my body.

Audri struggled with her body image and self-acceptance. However, after her pregnancy she began to embrace a more positive image of herself and her body, and as she shared above, she began to reject others' negative comments.

"Bad Kids." After her expulsion from high school in her freshman year, Audri was sent to Okunye, located in the center of town. The move to this program proved to be a positive one for Audri. Her mother, however, disapproved of her daughter attending a school for "bad kids."

> Audri: I was telling them how I didn't want to go back…to M.W. High. Too crowded, like, I don't know how any of those students learn at that school, and that like, Okunye

is quiet. Sometime it's drama free, sometimes you might have a little drama. You'll always have people talk. That's how I look at it. Like. There's always gonna be somebody talking.

Classes was a lot smaller. More one-on-one time. Like it was just a lot better. You can get more connections with like the teachers, outside of school…I highly recommend it. My mom was just trying to make it seem like Okunye's for bad people. "Okunye is for bad kids, Okunye is for bad kids." But in reality, it's not. It's really not. We don't have no shootouts. Nobody in there tryin' to stab nobody. Like, it just really be calm. It just like, what the students did to get there. But why you gotta believe what the black and white paper say? **Why can't you just look at me for me?** And I will admit. **Yes, I made mistakes, *plenty* of mistakes. But that doesn't define *me*.**

This last statement, the assertion that her mistakes do not define her, was a crucial one in Audri's worldview. Many times, she reflected on her decisions and actions, the actions of others, and her ability to learn, grow, and move beyond her past. She displayed frustration at the fact that people in her life seemed to want to hold her to her past behaviors as though her self-definition was static.

Societal Views of Labeled Groups

Empathy: Not Bad Kids, Just Bad Decisions. Continuing with her theme of calling for empathy from the adults in her life, Audri spoke during one of our conversations about the frustration she felt being branded as a "bad kid" for not having been successful in a traditional school.

Audri: My mom…had to be like that type of Black woman that had to be up there, like with white people. And that's what like, like, like, she basically forced upon us. Like, like, when she found out how like I wanted to stay at Okunye, like she was just so mad. Like she wanted me to go back to M.W. High, **even though I was progressing at Okunye**…

I don't think there's really any bad kids. We just made bad decisions. But what do you expect? We're kids. We're learning.

According to Audri, her mother equated success with Whiteness, or keeping up with the white people that she knew. Her mother's own grappling with stereotype threat (Townsend et al., 2010) in her attempts to conform to the whiteness around her did not sit well with Audri, and it is likely that Audri's placement at Okunye disrupted her mother's attempts at crafting a family appearance that lived up to her own expectations of white, middle class family life. Repeatedly, Audri's happiness, wellbeing, and ability to thrive operated in direct conflict with her mother's personal agenda. As a Black woman herself, Audri's mother did not seem to consider the social dynamics at work, within her own interactions with Audri, at school, or in broader society, as her daughter struggled against the grain.

The Truth About Black Girls. During one discussion, I asked Audri how she felt society viewed Black girls. Her response revealed a strong perception of identity threat (van Laar et al., 2010) from those around her. Many negative images and labels of Black girlhood had been imposed upon Audri in her interactions with others.

Audri: (Society) just views (Black girls) as troubled people, prostitutes, and all of that. When I was working at (a local restaurant) in town…Like one of the white girls…this girl's fifteen years old. Me and Amaya's dad, we've been together for like, three years.

> Like, (the white girl) was just like, "I didn't know that Black couples stay together that long" …I was just like, okay, like, that's how like, society views us.

In Audri's experience, Black girls were viewed by society in an extremely negative light. However, later in the conversation she noted that white people are not free from "drama" and can be "ghetto," but are not often saddled with these labels the way that Black people are. This is an important aspect of the macrosystem that bears noting: the discourse in which society engages around Black girls is troubling. As children, Black girls are aware that they are thought of as prostitutes, troubled, dramatic, loud, and many other negative stereotypes. When they point out that other children act similarly, these claims are often ignored (Wun, 2016a). For Audri, this type of stereotyping led to anger, frustration, and detachment from her peers, teachers, and even her mother.

> Children and Childrearing. Audri: I really want to change for the better. I don't want to be angry anymore. I don't want my baby to be like that because my fear is her having a temper. Because mine is hereditary, I got it from my biological dad because he has a temper. So, I'm praying, like, "Please don't let it happen to my little one, please." Because like, like she's just like me. She has a very soft, beautiful face, so it will be easily misinterpreted. Like it just be like, now Amaya is good or whatever. But in reality, Amaya could be *so evil*. And that's why I'm trying to pray that it's different for her.
>
> …And say like if Amaya is like, tripping or whatever, I just won't be like, "Yeah, yeah. Amaya's tripping." I'm just gonna like, talk to her…There's obviously a reason why. So, I'm gonna get down to the bottom of it…

> I pray to God that Amaya never gets pregnant at 16, but even if she do, I'm not gonna throw her out. I'm not gonna stop loving her. That's why I'm gonna tell her my life story. I'm not gonna tell her, like "Yay, it was so much fun!" Yes, it was fun, but it was also so hard trying to finish school…Like, I'm gonna let her know the pros and cons of it.

In the above conversation, Audri again used the word "evil," this time in reference to her daughter. Many times, she discussed her own temper and her fear that it would "rub off" on Amaya. Audri wanted to provide the type of emotional stability that she felt she had not received, and in doing so, prevent harm to her child. At the same time, she recognized that there were factors outside of her control, such as others' perception of Black girls, that could affect Amaya. In this realization, Audri was preparing for a future that might require her to give additional supports to her daughter.

Criminality: "Just See Me." One day during the natural flow of our conversation, the topic turned to the illegality of marijuana and the problems this causes for various groups. Ultimately, this line of discourse led Audri to a simple statement: "I am me."

> Audri: So, when they do get (marijuana) legal, what about all the people who've been in jail for…Do you know how mad they will be when they be like, "Okay. You're free to go." Like, that's crazy. Like, like they probably sat in a cell for like three years, like four years…
>
> Jadyn: It's unjust. And I really like (what you brought up), this image of…Justice being blind, with the blindfold.

Audri: That's what she's supposed to be like, isn't that the woman? Right? With like, the thingies in her hands, for equal. It's supposed to be equal.

Jadyn: Last time, you talked about…when you do your portrait you could be looking (at the camera) and you said something over your eyes of saying like, "see me." What did you say?

Audri: "I am me." Yeah, why you gotta see my color? Just see me. **When you look into my eyes, I want you to see me and not my color.**

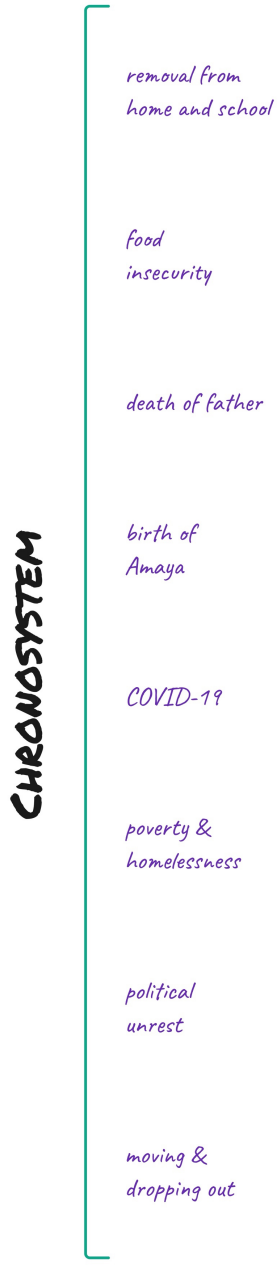
This idea, "just see me," "I am me," and also the opposite but similar statement, "that's not me" came up repeatedly in this study. Audri felt judged by the people in her life. The values and norms by which Audri was judged, dictated by white society or the "dominant culture," unfairly held her to standards she did not fit (Basile et al., 2019; Camangian & Cariaga, 2021; Wun, 2016a). From her hair to her body type to her voice and demeanor, Audri was marked as deviant by not only the teachers and administrators in her school but her mother and peers as well. She asked in this passage for people to "see me and not my color," something that our white-dominant society is not set up to do.

Audri's Chronosystem

Overarching Audri as an individual, along with her microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, was the chronosystem: changes and continuities over time (Nadal et al., 2021). Significant life changes, such as the death of Audri's father, the birth of Amaya, their subsequent separation from Audri's mother, homelessness, and poverty during a worldwide pandemic were all part of Audri's chronosystem as major changes in her life. The move to her own apartment and dropping out of the GED program at Okunye were significant

Figure 5.8

Audri's Chronosystem



life events and were therefore also part of her chronosystem. Many of the above events have already been discussed. Therefore, this section covers three important factors in Audri's

chronosystem: her lifelong struggles with food insecurity, the COVID-19 pandemic, and political unrest in 2020.

Food Insecurity

Audri experienced food insecurity throughout her life. Her mother withheld food in anger and as punishment, though their family was not poor or in need of food. As a result, Audri developed a habit of eating when food was available instead of eating for nourishment. This continuous negative relationship with food impacted her body image and self-esteem. Through the birth of Amaya, Audri began to reconcile her body image within herself and practice positive self-talk. Though we did not discuss this specifically, I argue that the separation from her mother, coupled with time spent with adults who reinforced positive thinking, helped Audri begin to reframe her own self-image.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

As stated in previous chapters, this study was conducted during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Raising a small child in pandemic conditions was yet another stressor for Audri, but she was also concerned about other children's home circumstances and the repercussions of the quarantine for everyone.

> **Empathy for Teachers and Children.** Audri: I'm not a teacher but like, I just feel like the teachers are probably, like, sad. It's a loss for everybody, not just the teachers, not just the students…because if you think farther and deeper into that, what about, like, the students or like, the little kids who gettin abused at home? And this was like, their go-to…Everything's just shutting down. It's just like a lot of what-ifs.

Amaya. As a childcare worker, Audri made well-planned efforts to keep the virus from her daughter. She considered the possibility of sending Amaya away to protect her, and she was anxious about health and safety.

> Audri: I'm stressing enough. And like, especially with me working with kids. Oh my god. I get more terrified just by the day. I been washing my hands, using hand sanitizer, I don't pull down my mask if we're gonna be all together. I don't even like the kids to joke around about touching my hand. No, keep your fingers to yourself. I got a baby to go home to…Like, if I be sick, then I could send Amaya away, and I'll be fine. But I don't want both of us to be sick cause I don't know how it's gonna affect her. She can barely talk. She won't be able to be like, "my head hurts, my stomach hurt" or anything.

The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have yet to be unearthed, and we may not know for many years how children who contracted the virus might reveal signs of later damage. Audri demonstrated, through her careful attention to her own behaviors, that she considered the long-term repercussions of the pandemic on herself and Amaya.

Political Unrest

Audri's chronosystem included political unrest: the January 6, 2021, insurgence on the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. occurred during one of our sessions together and eclipsed our conversation. Audri worried about the state of the country and commented on how Black Lives Matter protesters were treated differently.

There were certainly many happy memories in Audri's life, some of which made a lasting impact such as the birth of Amaya. However, many of Audri's stories centered around painful incidents. She felt as if her struggles influenced her in both negative and positive ways.

She was catalyzed by the mistreatment she received and expressed desires for herself and Amaya that countered these negative experiences. The death of Audri's father motivated her to value her own small family. The homelessness she endured solidified her need to provide a home for her child at all costs and a set of childrearing standards that she viewed as contrary to her mother's.

Significance

Throughout our sessions together, Audri's refrain was "I'm going to break the cycle." Though her stories, memories, and reflections held pain and frustration, Audri's identity as a mother shone through her smile and her pride-filled stories about Amaya. She railed against the feeling that she was inherently not a good person. Labeled by her mother as "fat" and a "bad kid," Audri was desperate to uplift her own daughter.

Removal is a pattern in Audri's life. She was shown by many adults that she was not worthy to be in the same space as others. Placed for adoption as an infant, Audri felt rejected by her biological parents. She was repetitively removed from the classroom until she was ultimately removed from her school entirely. It is not surprising that Audri developed an increasing sense of detachment from school and her teachers as these removals increased. Naturally, she felt a sense of attachment to Okunye, the school that embraced her.

Audri was removed from the home into which she had been adopted at a time when she most needed support – when her own daughter was very young. While she was given support by a kind family several months later, she detached from everyone completely when she found her own living space. It is possible that Audri was ready to let go of the people who

might possibly fail her or let her go in an attempt to rely on only herself or to prove her ability to live independently.

CHAPTER 6: SAMARA

Figure 6.1

Samara, artistic rendition by J. Laixely

If you say I can't do something, okay I'm gonna show you, just because you underestimated me. You try to say I can't do something, and I know for one, it's not wrong, for two, I can do it. Who are you? For three, I'm just gonna show you like, I can do it. Why can't I do it? This is what I enjoy. I'm a kid. Let me let me be happy. Let me do me. You know how many times I heard, "Cause you a girl"? That don't mean nothing!

Samara, December 9, 2020

Nearly every time that Samara and I met over Zoom, she apologized about her hair. She had a heavy-set build and dark, smooth skin. When deep in thought or adamantly speaking, she would contort her face into a frown which signified that deep wisdom was about to be dispelled, especially when coupled with a deep intake of breath and the word, "*Okay*…" I looked forward to our conversations: Samara had spent time thinking about the systems and structures that arranged themselves in her world. She was quick to laugh and had a beautiful smile that carried to her eyes and lit up the screen. I was able to meet Samara in person just once when I came to the school to drop something off for her. The boisterous personality that she ordinarily displayed on Zoom dissolved into shy smiles as she buried her face in her hands. When I asked her about that in our next session, she said she did not expect me to be so excited to see her.

Samara contracted the COVID-19 virus two months into the project, and this took a toll on her health. While she made it to the group session with Audri and Indigo and contributed enthusiastically, this was the last I heard from her. She ceased all communication with Okunye as well, and so her social workers had no information on her whereabouts. However, Indigo worked with Samara for a time and was able to tell me she was showing up to work, which eased my mind about her safety. Lacking a final conversation with Samara to determine all the circumstances behind her decision to leave school, I am unable to know whether she was "pushed out" of this school due to perhaps a shortage of support services following her illness (M.W. Morris, 2016) or if it was an informed decision based on her own priorities. However, on interviewing the social workers, I was able to establish that the school had very limited

resources for working students. Job skills training that Okunye provided required students to enroll in a course and therefore a time commitment for already overextended working children.

Before her sudden exit, Samara was excited about this project and took time to consider the ideas and questions we discussed in each session. I began to know her as "The Thinker" and would almost hover on the edge of my seat, waiting to hear her thoughts on topics from discipline to family to identity and more. At one point early on in the study, Samara paused, saying, "I don't always think this deep. This is hard." Given how much Samara contributed each time we met, I found this hard to believe. However, I think the essence of Samara's statement is that adults did not often have conversations like this with her.

Samara's Mindset

Samara was an intellectual thinker who valued empathy and understanding above most other things. She reported that she had been branded as a fighter as a child by teachers and administrators, and this label stuck with her throughout high school, including her transition to Okunye. Fighting led to her expulsion from high school, but Samara was adamant in declaring that she was not a fighter. We discussed the concept of "fighting" vs. "fighter" at length. Samara parsed these two concepts out in her mind separately: "I will fight, but I'm not a fighter." She often repeated this conviction. For Samara, fighting was about survival and something she felt compelled to do. It was not a choice.

The pillars of her mindset, as derived from the analysis of her stories and our discussions during our Zoom sessions, included empathy, relation to others, fighting, and deep thought.

Empathy: Just the Littlest Things

The topic of empathy – and more specifically, considering the stories of those around her – came up frequently in my discussions with Samara. She would often return to this theme, even if we were discussing something that seemed to be unrelated. Samara related this to her own life when we were discussing the concept of discipline at school.

> Samara: You don't know like what that person was told (at home). You don't know what happened to that person…So don't go off the actions of what you think. Don't think about how *you* think about it. You got to think about how *they* think about it. What happened to them? Like when I was younger, my mom told me if somebody hit you, you hit them back. Because…you let them hit you that one time, they will keep hitting you because they know you're not gonna hit back.

Samara understood that not all people or families have the same values, and that it can be harmful to judge or discipline children based on one set of values. In her family, Samara was taught that other children would take advantage of her if she did not defend herself. This will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter. She was also taught that she should be helpful and care about the people around her – even those she did not know personally.

> Samara: **Just the littlest things of help can matter so much…and you might think it won't.** But deep down. Like, and I really go based off how I've felt before…Like, one day…I was at the bus stop. This man forgot his money, didn't have a bus pass, and he was on his way to court. He was like, "dang, I forgot my stuff, dang!" I'm like, "Imma use my school ID, you hold my phone, you show them my pass, just give it back when

you're done." And he was so happy. he was thanking me the whole way…I'm like, it's okay, like that's what I would have wanted somebody to do for me.

When asked what she wanted people to know about herself, Samara said she was a nice person who cares about people. She felt that she was misread as standoffish or mean. Contrastingly, Samara often considered the needs of others above her own.

Relating to Others: "I'm Not a Friendly Person" vs. "I'm Really Nice!"

Samara valued empathy and helping others, but she frequently found herself in situations where she felt forced to fight. She described herself as often being on the defense. This led Samara to be quite guarded when dealing with both peers and adults. During one of our sessions, she shared that she was in the habit of not talking to people she did not already know. This contrasts with the group conversation below between all three participants, in which Audri brought up how Samara was often misinterpreted by others. Because all three girls in the study attended the Okunye alternative school, and Audri and Samara were close in age, they attended some classes together.

Audri: She's very funny. Samara is the most funniest girl I ever known.

Samara: That too, and I'm nice. Like, I'm really nice. People be thinking –

Audri: Even though she does have the resting bitch face, she is very nice. I do give her that.

Samara: …Yeah, people be looking at me and like don't wanna talk, or like think I'm mad or something. Like, no. Like, once you talk to me, like my face not gonna be like that no more.

Audri: I kid you not. Like, walking in the halls, it's just a 50/50. Like, do I say "Hi" or do I just keep walking? (*laughing*)

Samara: You say "Hi!" (*exasperated*) I don't be mad. Like, honestly, I be annoyed at my face.

In this conversation, Audri shared that Samara's outward expression could be off-putting. This was frustrating to Samara as she recognized that her facial expression could lead others to believe she was angry or did not want to be friendly. Perhaps her assessment above that she was "not a friendly person" was a result of others' assumptions. It is possible that she placed walls up that she would rather take down. Samara articulated many times during our sessions that she wished for others to see her as caring, understanding, and friendly rather than combative or unapproachable.

Fighting: "If You Don't Fight, You Scared" vs. "I'm Not a Fighter"

Samara struggled with the paradox of being labeled a fighter and finding herself in situations where she had to fight – through her own or others' fault – and adamantly stating that she was not a fighter at all. Her stance on fighting was conflicted, but it was clear that fighting played a large role in Samara's mindset, whether she wanted it to or not.

Jadyn: You said, "back then I had no choice but to fight." What did you mean by that?

Samara: Like okay, where I used to live, my whole life I lived over there. If you don't fight, you scared. Like if you don't fight, people just gone do whatever they want to, say whatever they want to, about you. So, you gotta fight. And then it's just like, ooh, I got like, a little temper. And if you make me mad…

… I used to live in (poor neighborhood in town). It really started, like, I used to go with my granny to church every Sunday. Good girl. Good girl. And when I moved, it was these like, younger girls, they tried to basically bully me and my sister. And we like, "Who you think you is? Like, you ain't nobody." And like, it started from there. And they went to go get these girls. Just real tough, and it's just me and my sister. And we stood up for ourselves. Like, my mama didn't even know. Cause…we kids, we outside. I used to love being outside. Like you say something to me, Imma say something back. You wanna fight? …I ain't gonna let you beat me up. So, you go tell everybody.

Here, Samara says, "I wasn't a fighter." However, she got into her first real fight in the first grade on the school bus outside her elementary school and slammed the other girl's head into a bus window. This began a long history for Samara of being labeled a fighter in school. After several suspensions in her freshman year at M.W. High School, Samara was sent to Okunye, the alternative school in town. She reflected on her experience arriving at Okunye, where the label of "fighter" had preceded her arrival, and her general feelings about fighting. This is one of the first times that Samara brought up a concept that we labeled "the story following": a negative story about herself, following her, which she felt incapable of escaping. It was not the first time this had happened to Samara and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Samara: If you talk to me, I'll talk respectfully. A story I can remember, like when I told you about…when I got to Okunye. And (a teacher) told me she didn't like me. She didn't only say she didn't like me. **"Aw yeah, you're a fighter. That's the fighter."** A lot of people there, like, told me, "Oh, you the fighter. Oh, you be with the drama. Oh, you crazy."

I don't even try to be intimidating, but most kids, people my age, respect me. Cause they know I'm not no pushover. Everybody know, I don't start stuff. I'm cool, but don't start with me. Because you not gonna like it then.

Jadyn: Would you agree that you're a fighter in that sense because you're not gonna back down from a fight? If people are calling you that, is that accurate? What would you say?

Samara: **I'm not a fighter.** You know, people be young, they do stuff. Like, when I fought before, it's probably been because of me. But most times it hasn't. You know? Everybody not perfect. So, a couple times, on my end, I probably started it…But most times I really – then I be trying to avoid it. **So that's why we fight for real. I try to avoid it. You won't leave it alone.**

And, my opinion…A lot of stuff result into a fight. So honestly, I wouldn't say I'm a fighter. I wouldn't. I *will*. I ain't fought since New Year's. And then before that was the last fight when I got expelled. **I don't fight. That's not me.**

In Samara's experience, many – or even most – situations had the potential to lead to fighting. But this did not mean she was a *fighter*. The statement "that's not me" was a refrain for Samara. At the time of this discussion, which was December 16th, she had not fought in nearly a year, and before that, it had been at least another year (freshman year when she was expelled) since she had fought, by my calculations. Similar to Audri, she was attempting to rewrite a narrative that she felt had been written for her. Samara was a "fighter" who did not fight but felt repeatedly compelled to defend herself.

Deep Thought: My Brain is Older Than Seventeen

As part of her constant state of self-defense, Samara also felt the need to defend her thought processes and even her ability to think and work. She was often bored at school and completed her work early but was challenged by her teachers when she wasn't actively performing "busy work." This will be revisited in the mesosystem section. In the conversation below, I asked Samara to give me one word to describe herself. After thinking for a while, she said, "Different."

> Samara: Different all the way. Yeah, different. There's so much I'm different in…My brain (is) older than seventeen, I don't know how. Like, I really be thinking about stuff. I just sit back and think of life.

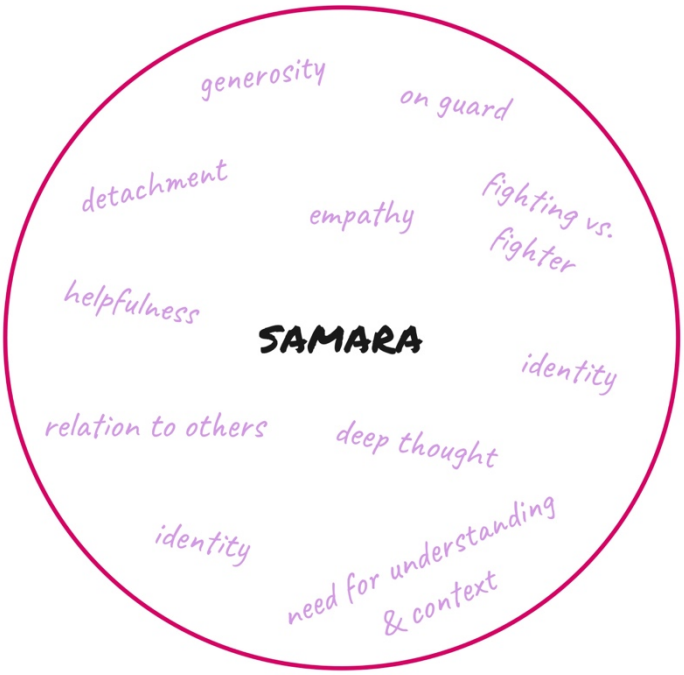
This was one of the only times that Samara acknowledged the fact that she spent time thinking, in this case about "life." Samara expressed frustration at the idea that anyone would be surprised that she was fully capable of intelligent thought, finishing her work at school, or having a solid work ethic at her job, to name some examples.

The concept of "understanding" was another refrain which came up in our sessions and speaks to the first pillar of Samara's mindset: empathy. Many times, Samara returned to the concept of seeking context and understanding for both herself and for those around her. This was an imperative for Samara. She felt that she had been placed in situations in which she was overdisciplined, abused, forced to fight, and thus labeled a fighter – and that many of these situations could have been avoided, had adults and peers in her life taken the time to understand her. As a result, Samara had difficulty connecting with others. Samara's four pillars –

empathy, connecting with others, fighting, and deep thought – drove how she operated on a daily basis.

Figure 6.2

Samara's Mindset

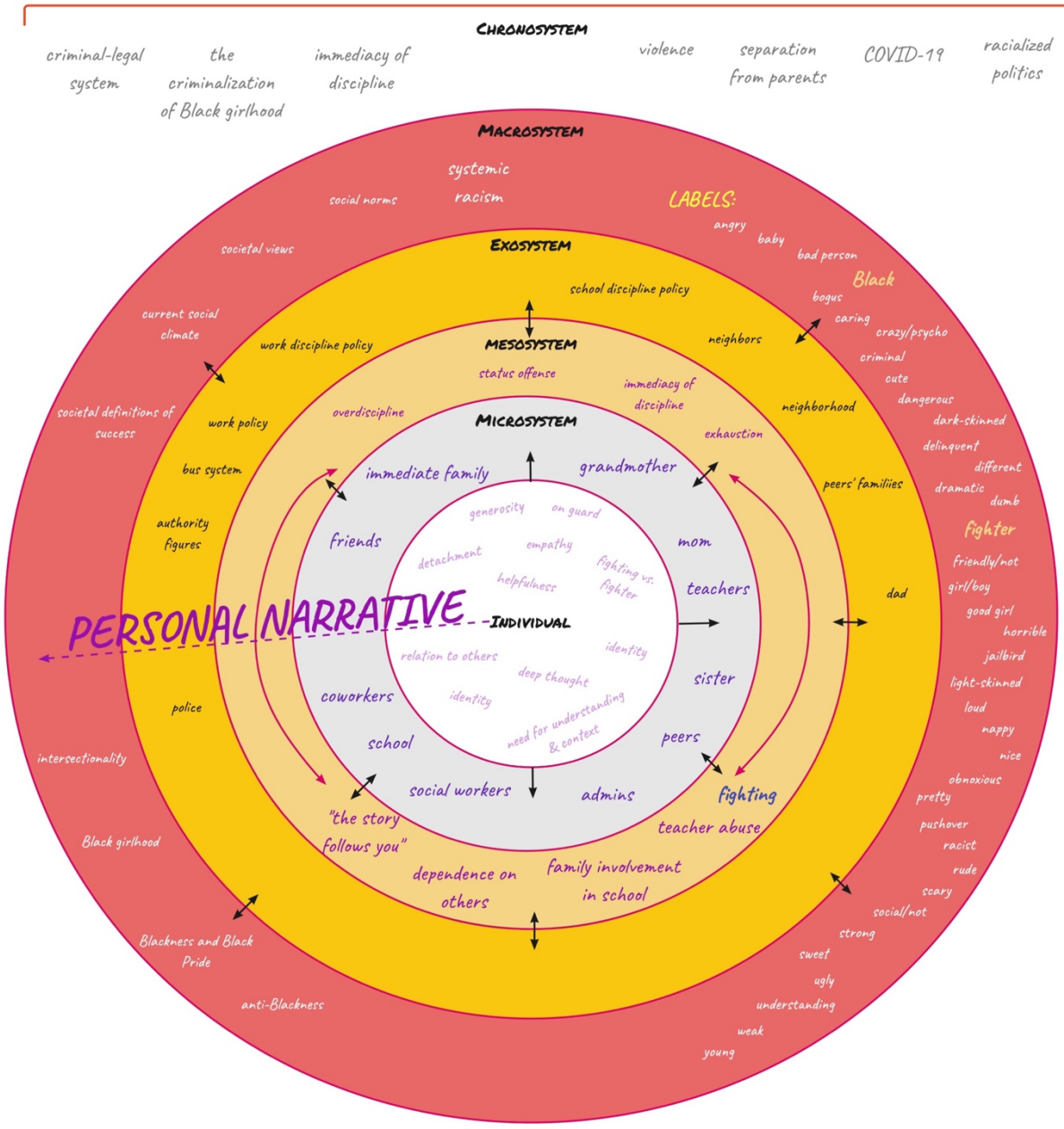


Samara's Ecological Systems

The diagram below (Figure 6.3) represents Samara's individual mindset and ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as derived from the narratives that unfolded in our conversations. Samara's personal narrative, like in Audri's diagram, cuts across her microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, chronosystem, and her own individual mindset. The personal narrative arrow shows that through her discussions and stories, Samara recognized the interworking of multiple systems, settings, and other elements.

Figure 6.3

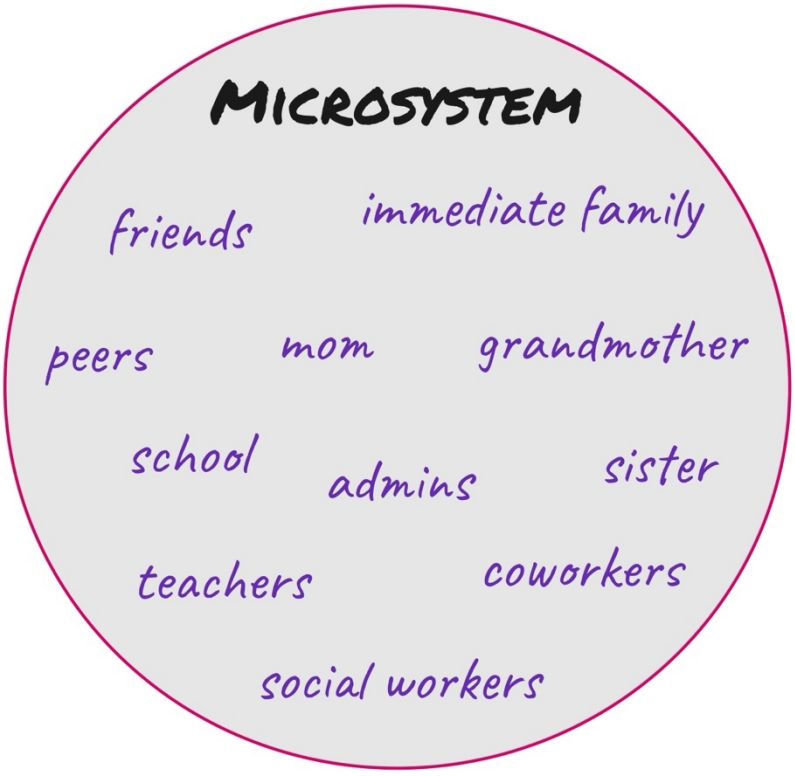
Samara's Ecological Systems Diagram



Samara's Microsystem

Figure 6.4

Samara's Microsystem



Relationships in Samara's microsystem included her mother and grandmother, immediate family including cousins she was close to, friends and peers, teachers and other school staff, coworkers, and neighbors. Samara worked late hours at a "big-box" store and was emancipated from her mother. She reported that she lived with her boyfriend, and she depended on the bus, rides from friends, family, and coworkers, or Über to get to and from work. Samara attended Okunye school at the time of the study, though she dropped out in early 2021 and did not return.

Lessons Learned from Mother

Although Samara did not live with her mother, they were still quite close emotionally and saw each other when they could, as they lived in the same vicinity. Samara spoke of her mother fondly and reported that she learned many lessons from her that she valued.

You Don't Sit There. You Just Help Them. One of the primary pillars of Samara's mindset was empathy, and she credited her mother for this trait. In the following story, Samara described how her mother taught her to care for her friends when they experienced loss.

> Samara: Where I lived, like there used to be shootings. One of my friends, somebody had got shot in they family. And my mom told me – cause you know, you young, you try to feel how your friends feel, you know, trying to be like your friend - my mom told me like "You need to see if you can be strong for your friend…Make sure like, you don't sit there crying with your friends…Try to help them as much as you can. Invite them over. Ask if they need anything." When she told me, "See if they need anything," she told me, "What I mean by that, like, see if they need to say how they feel." Food, like anything. She would literally just break it down to me. Just to see if I'm strong.

Samara's mother taught her that caring for others included being strong. This was a common theme during Samara's reflections. Strength, self-defense, independence, and not showing weakness were traits valued by both her mother and grandmother.

I Defend Myself Automatically. Samara maintained that many of the fights she found herself in were not her fault, and she felt trapped into fighting by her peers. I commented during one conversation that if I had been suspended repeatedly as a freshman, even when

other people started the problem, and nobody tried to support or help me, I would feel helpless or like there was a target on my back.

> Samara: Yeah. Like, that's how it is for real. Like my mom like she would like, tell me, "Do better. I understand it's not your fault but like that's what it is." Like, she was about the only one that really say something about it. Really try to help us because she know. And then like where I grew up, like you don't have no choice like (in that neighborhood) you had no choice but to defend yourself. Like you not just gonna just let nobody do that to you. You finna defend yourself. So…like it was really natural for me. I defend myself automatically.

To Samara, there was no choice whether to defend herself physically or not. Her mother showed support at home but was not in the habit of going to her school to speak up for her daughter. According to our conversations, Samara was in charge of any problems that arose at school. Unfortunately, zero-tolerance school policies, which did not tolerate fighting, conflicted with the values that revolved around survival, self-protection, and strength in Samara's home. As a result, Samara was frequently punished at school, surveilled more often, and saddled with negative labels ("fighter," "angry," "mean") that did not accurately reflect her inner disposition ("kind," "empathic," "good girl") or the more complex motivations behind her actions.

I Rode That Bike. Samara described her mother's "tough love" techniques with admiration. When I asked her to share a story about her mother teaching her to be strong, Samara thought for a minute, took a deep breath, and began with the word I came to associate with stories of importance for her: "Okay…"

Samara: Okay, so it took me like a real long time to learn how to ride a bike. So, my mom know I can't ride a bike. She took the training wheels off. She took everything off. "Go."

I fell. ***"You strong enough. Get up."*** Like, she don't show no emotion. "Get up. You can do it. Get up. Get up." She just kept telling me, "Get up. This how you do it. Do this." Just to see if I could do it. Cause you know most kids (*whining*) "I can't do it. I can't do it." And the mom just, you know, babyin' them, (*high pitched motherly voice*) "Do this. Do that."

(*Voicing her own mother*) "You can do it. You can do it." And…I could do it. ***I rode that bike.*** And she said, "I know you could do it." Like, physically like I'm hurting myself. I'm falling off this bike. I'm mad. But I'm thinking like, "My mom told me I can do it." Basically, like anything you want to do, you can put your mind to it.

For Samara, her mother and grandmother symbolized strength and determination, and she referred to these two women often when she spoke of her own perseverance and independence, qualities in herself that she valued. These two women were valuable people in her microsystem who helped her to define herself and to defend herself from harm in other areas of her ecology.

Relationships at School

From a young age, Samara had periodic difficulty relating to others at school. This included peers and school staff. Though she described herself as a "good girl," "quiet girl," and "good student," she felt plagued by situations in which she was forced to fight, and the negative results of these circumstances.

The Walk-a-Thon. During one session, I asked Samara if she got in trouble for fighting in elementary school. What followed was an account of a deep-rooted memory – an incident involving the same girl from the bus incident, but this time during the school's Walk-A-Thon event. Here is once again the concept of being "followed": in this story, adults seemed almost to be hovering, waiting for Samara to do something, and they stopped her before a fight could start.

> Samara: Like…they follow you. I swear to God. Like, I think this was second grade… Nobody liked her. She used to think she was just all that and a bag of chips. So, I was like, we gone show you. It was the girl birthday that did it. And I think somebody hit her. And she done hit me, done swung on me! I didn't even touch her. And when I say **they grabbed me so fast** (*grabs her own shirt to show this*). Like soon as she hit me, they instantly grabbed me. I couldn't hit her back. I was so mad.
>
> And this was the Walk-A-Thon. Everybody used to love that. Like, it was so fun. And everybody I used to hang with, like my cousins, stuff, we all in the office. I'm getting in trouble! Everybody like "She ain't even hit her! She missing her Walk-A-Thon!" Like, I was crying. Like they had me missing the Walk-A-Thon…You get T-shirts…I made sure I made it during the Walk-A-Thon. They said cause I banged her head at first, like I was guilty. "Guilty by association" (*chuckles*). I was so mad.

The incident between Samara and her peer could have ended with the adults intervening and then allowing the children to continue with their day. However, Samara wound up in the school office, missing the Walk-A-Thon, along with her family members who attempted to explain the situation. Samara, who had been taught to defend herself and fight

back in order not to be taken advantage of, was punished for a fight she did not start. Years later, she expressed that she had been angry for two reasons: missing the Walk-A-Thon and not being granted the opportunity to punch back.

You Wouldn't Defend Me if You Could. Samara attended traditional high school for just a few months before being expelled and moved to Okunye. She was distrustful of teachers because of her experience at M.W. High – this will be shared in the mesosystem section – and when she arrived at Okunye, she found smaller class sizes and more one-on-one time with her teachers. Social workers were available to support her. Her view of Okunye, like Audri's, was very positive. However, not all the school staff at Okunye were supportive or culturally responsive to their students' needs. In one discussion, I asked what it was like to be a Black girl in school, and how she felt the teachers viewed her. This brought up issues Samara had with her U.S. History teacher and fear she had surrounding his political and racial views. The class session she recalled was shortly after Breonna Taylor had been killed by police. Samara found herself and her classmates unknowingly arguing the concepts of stereotype threat and identity threat with their teacher.

> Samara: I said to the teacher, "Why do we have to feel like we have to be extra careful, so (police) won't shoot us, they won't kill us?" And he had nothing to say after that. Oh, the Breonna Taylor situation. (*Assuming angry teacher voice*) "Why would you shoot? Why would you shoot?" For one, the man said the police did not acknowledge theyself. They just came in them people house. And then, that man probably had his reasons. You don't know the neighborhood they live in. You don't know they everyday life.

These last two sentences were a refrain for Samara: a call to consider the lives of others, and also to consider that we may never understand the full experiences that another person is living and therefore should remember to always be kind. This examination was something Samara attempted to do in her everyday interactions with others. Samara continued:

> A white kid tried to tell (the history teacher) he think Trump is racist. (*Voicing the teacher)* "Why do you think that? We can bet money!" *(Samara looks disgusted.)* You're trying to bet a kid money to prove somebody's racist? Then he just think Joe Biden's just this horrible, horrible person that shouldn't even live. And I be in there laughing cause it's like, you really think this way. It be like the whole class against him. Every… time a Black person die, he try to justify the police.
>
> Jadyn: How does that make you feel? What are some feelings that pop up during class, besides angry? I feel like that's the natural feeling.
>
> Samara: Scared! Because, if you a police officer - and this Okunye. Kids fight, kids do stuff all the time. Cause they got expelled, so. Kids do stuff all the time, anyway, expelled or not. **If something happens, you would kill me. Off the bat!** You wouldn't even think twice about it! Scared! Even if you not a police. Police come up here for something, **you wouldn't defend me if you could.** You wouldn't even help the situation if you could. *(Gets lost in thought for a second, frowning.)* Like I be scared, for real.

By Samara's account, multiple students in the class were upset by the teacher's views on the current political and racial climate. Her description of other students' comments showed they were disturbed by the conversation. As a vital part of children's microsystem, teachers who cause their students to feel scared to be placed in their care during dangerous situations

are seen as liabilities by those children (Reynolds, 2019). Samara felt that her history teacher might fail to protect her or even cause her life to be at greater risk in the event of police or peer violence at school. She considered such violence a likely possibility on any given day, and the beliefs expressed by her teacher led Samara to feel unsafe at school.

Workplace: Y'all Don't Know Everything About Me. Literally

Samara worked at a big box store across town several days per week. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the workplace is in a child's exosystem. This is because he did not account for children working themselves; parents' workplace, separated from their children, belongs in the exosystem. However, when children work, their workplace and coworkers become part of their immediate sphere of influence – the microsystem.

As an emancipated minor, Samara worked hard to support herself and was proud of her work ethic. She brought up a frustration she experienced regularly at work due to identity and stereotype threat.

> Samara: It's like crazy, cause like, some people that work there – like I have a whole (work) vest on. They be watching some of us, like we stealin. Cause you know like, we zoning *(working in certain departments to neaten up the aisles)*, so it's like we probably like, bend down, we like close to the aisle, trying to reach to the back and get everything. They be trying to like peek and look at us like we stealin or something. Like, you think I'm finta steal from my job. Y'all don't know everything about me. Literally. *(Laughing*) You think I'm gonna steal from this place? *(Shakes head.)* So weird.

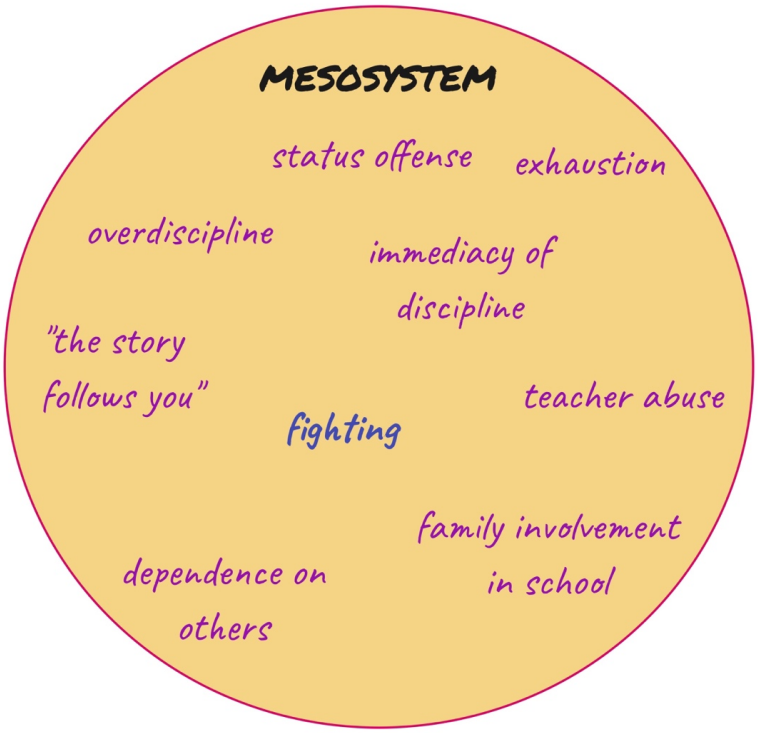
Samara used laughter frequently when expressing surprise, frustration, anger, or resentment – feelings that were not humorous. In the above narrative, she laughed while

describing her coworkers or supervisors surveilling her while she was practicing a diligent work ethic. Being watched and followed was something Samara had come to know as part of being Black, being a girl, being a young person, being herself. She felt that this surveillance – a form of identity threat (van Laar et al., 2010) – affected her life in many ways, including her ability to perform her job. Other stories featuring Samara's take on being a young, Black female will come later in this chapter.

Samara's Mesosystem

Figure 6.5

Samara's Mesosystem



The mesosystem, where interactions occur between microsystem settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), includes stories from two main concepts for Samara: overdiscipline, and the need for understanding and context. These two topics go hand-in-hand. I have

selected two stories in which Samara shared incidents of extreme overdiscipline: one occurred at M.W. High School, and the other at Okunye. Finally, a concept I have termed ***the immediacy of discipline*** also comes to play in the mesosystem.

Overdiscipline and the Need for Understanding: Did He Really Just Slam Me?!

The following story describes the incident that resulted in Samara's expulsion from M.W. High School. Prior to the beginning of this excerpt, Samara shared that the fight began when a peer approached Samara in class, stood in front of her threateningly, then attempted to hit her and almost missed, just grazing Samara's face.

> Samara: After that, *(resigned, shaking head)* she just was getting beat up. And then so, we fighting her…Mr. (substitute), he get in between us…he pushed me out the room...**Then he slammed me like so hard**, like, I never got slammed before *(laughing)*. He don't even know us, like, body slammed me, for real *(laughs)*. Right by the lockers, I was just so shocked after he did that, I was like *(makes shocked face)*, *Did he really just slam me?* …The girls I was fighting still in the room so *(nodding sheepishly)* **I tried to go back in the room. I was, a little crazy.**
>
> **And slammed me again!** I was like… *(chuckling, surprised)* He slammed me! So, I'm on the floor…**he sitting on top of me.** Like, I never got sat on before! ...I look up. Everybody else walking free!

During an unquoted portion of this story, Samara explained that before the substitute teacher intervened, she and her peers had been fighting in the classroom for five minutes. Questions one might ask could include: what made the substitute teacher feel that he had the right to tackle a child of any age, how had the girls had been allowed to fight for over five

minutes without any intervention, or where were the administrators? Unfortunately, there are no clear answers to these questions. The code of conduct for this school district does allow for teachers to physically intervene and restrain students, though it does not provide information or guidance on how to do so appropriately in varying scenarios (District, 2021). It put in mind for me the incident in which a similar girl was slammed by school officer Ben Fields in 2015, as mentioned in Chapter 1 (Reynolds & Hicks, 2016).

Samara might have been severely injured during this event, which brings into question the wisdom of a document granting physical rights to teachers who have not been properly trained. In Indigo's chapter (Chapter 7), the code of conduct is discussed in more detail, including the "right" of teachers and staff to use force on or restrain a child.

This incident, crossing multiple settings and people within Samara's microsystem, led to the school administration calling police, involving yet another set of players. Another educator, Mr. Fisher, came to their aid.

> Samara: Mr. Fisher helped us out, though, cause the police officer wasn't there, but we was all finna go to jail. They told us, "y'all all shoulda go to jail," but he told us. He was like, "Go, because they on they way right now."
>
> So, we go outside. (The police) were pulling up fast…Me and my friend, we pull our hood down…And then we went to go hide at (a nearby neighborhood). So, they call our parents. "Yeah, y'all suspended." So that's when they was like, "Y'all getting expelled." Like, what?

Samara and her peers were made to stay of school for two months. Without looking into the deeper context of how Black girls are misread, surveilled, overpoliced, and

overdisciplined (Love, 2019; M.W. Morris, 2012; Winn, 2011; Wun, 2016a, 2016b), this punishment may seem understandable from the perspective of the school staff and the district. The district had a code of conduct and policies that fostered a zero-tolerance policy stance on fighting. However, Samara was very intent on keeping up with her work. She had never been suspended out of school for so long, and she valued her grades.

> Samara: We calling them like, "Can we get some work? Can we, like, what can we do? Mind you…like we're not calling. My mama callin, like "Can they get some work? Can they get something? Cause they just out of school."

Samara, who viewed herself as a good student, was staggered by her expulsion and confused by her teachers' refusal to recognize her desire to do well. After waiting so long for her work, Samara was expelled from M.W. High. She was sent to Okunye, where, told previously, she encountered a teacher who branded her a fighter before she entered the room.

"Immediacy of Discipline" and Resistance: I'm Not Going to Her Class

Samara valued her academic progress and her work ethic. Therefore, she struggled with teachers who were quick to label students with lazy. The next story involves the Okunye teacher who labeled Samara as a fighter. From this account, it seems that this teacher continued to harbor preconceived notions about Samara. This judgment led to a standoff between them that lasted for days and involved other staff members. The story below was preceded by Samara falling asleep in class due to exhaustion and boredom: she had worked a shift at her restaurant job until 10:00 PM the night before. When Samara woke up at her desk, the paper she had been working on had been collected.

Samara: So, I wake up. No paper, everybody gone. So, I just went to my next class, I don't know how late I am. But before I left, I asked for my paper. So, I think I had finished it halfway.

So, I came in the next day, to finish it before class start. So, she walked up to me, *(voicing teacher)* "You're doing that wrong." I'm like, "Why you ain't tell me that?" *(Affected teacher voice, loud, upset)* "Oh because you went to sleep. You were asleep! You didn't do your work!" …Mind you, she's asking us like how we feel, and I'm like, "Yeah, I'm just tired, you know, I've been working every day." You know, so she knew. And we was cool, but you know, what she said about me still was in my mind. So that took me there already.

…So, she just kept going off, and then she was like, "So you can leave." I said, "I wasn't even saying nothing to you, but I sure will."

And then they tried to send me to mediation…so (I could) come back to class. I said, "I don't want to do it. I don't." Because, like, something like that, you made it into something it even wasn't…And I told them, "I'm not going to her class."

In this school district, children who are suspended must be mediated back into the classroom. It is unclear why Samara was sent to mediation in order to attend this teacher's class, since she was not suspended but simply left after an argument with the teacher. I did not get a chance to pursue further details with her about the reason for mediation; however, I can assume, based on the continuation of Samara's story, that she refused to go back to that class, which is why the social workers attempted a mediation.

Samara: I didn't go to her class for like a whole week. Sure didn't *(giggling)*. So, she brought my work (to another classroom), slammed it on the desk *(looks amazed)*. Like "BAM" *(makes slapping gesture in the air)* …She walking out the room. I'm like, "Okay. Samara be cool, be cool."

Samara finally agreed to do the mediation with her teacher. Another teacher helped to mentor Samara, guiding her on what to say, "so she don't feel like you getting smart or nothing."

Samara: I let her talk. I didn't interrupt her. I didn't make no faces…Cause I don't want her to feel I'm doing nothing wrong…She said I did something, I didn't even like, "No I didn't! *You* did that!" I'm lettin her talk. I didn't make no face. I looked at her, eye contact.

So, okay, it's my time to talk. *Okay, I let you talk. My turn.* Didn't get smart. I was a little sarcastic *(laughs)*…For one thing, she's not even looking at me. *She walked out* in the middle of me talking. I'm like *(jaw drops)*. The lady I was interviewing with, she's just looking at me, we just looking at each other. Like, "You seeing that too?"

This last part of Samara's story is especially problematic for several reasons, not the least of which is the fact that Samara was coached in the norms and values of (white) behavior so that, while defending herself and her right to learn in a classroom and with a teacher in ways that are not combative, she was not perceived as combative herself by the adults in the room who had power over her. Samara noted that she did not interrupt, made eye contact, and did not make faces, even when she felt the teacher was telling her side incorrectly. She had been groomed to not appear threatening during the mediation (Townsend et al., 2010). The teacher,

on the other hand, walked out of the room when it was Samara's turn to speak, asserting the power she had to not listen respectfully, as Samara had been so carefully instructed to do. The teacher apparently received no consequence for her refusal to show equal respect to Samara during the mediation, while it seems evident that the teacher who mentored Samara did so to save her from any consequences of being perceived as antagonistic.

For a child who already felt trapped into fighting, the incident above did nothing to lessen this outlook, and the situation was left unresolved. Samara frequently asked questions during our discussions about the immediacy of discipline: in her experience, children were set up for instant punishment, but adults were seemingly untouchable even when displaying problematic, racist, or even abusive behavior. Samara's perception was that teachers received no consequences and had full rights to treat the children in their classrooms any way they chose. The immediate discipline that children experienced seemed especially harsh when they demonstrated agency through resistance, as Samara herself discovered.

In their examination of resistance, Solorzano and Bernal (2001) listed four behaviors that children practice to combat structures in school – reactionary behavior, conformist resistance, self-defeating resistance, and transformational resistance. These four behaviors were mapped out according to the students' awareness of oppression and desire for social justice, with reactionary behavior being the least cognitive response and transformational resistance being the behavior most likely to achieve desired outcomes of change (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Solorzano and Bernal (2001) conducted their research with Chicano/a students. The analysis of resistance requires great care when considering the complex ways Black girls interact with the elements in their ecosystems. Such analysis would be appropriate for a paper unto itself.

However, it is useful to view Samara's responses to the people and settings around her through the lens of resistance.

Samara practiced resistance when she recognized that situations involving her personal agency, autonomy, safety, or individual freedoms were threatened. This resistance showed up in varying ways: examples included speaking out in protest of specific school or class policies, refusing to conform, standing up for herself verbally or physically, and living and speaking truthfully. Ultimately, she dropped out of school, a form of resistance that Solorzano & Bernal classify as self-defeating. However, Samara's view of Black girlhood was transformational: in her macrosystem section, I share in more detail that she viewed her existence as a Black girl as having to prove herself to everyone, all the time. According to Solorzano and Bernal, this form of thinking is transformational because it demonstrates a child's recognition of negative stereotypes, the desire to counter the stories that have been told about them, and their persistence in navigating the educational system not only for themselves, but for others like them. The fact that Samara dropped out in the end is only one part of her story and fails to account for the years of resistance she practiced up to that point.

The mesosystem incorporates interactions between settings in the microsystem. For Samara, stories, whether true or fictitious, followed her from setting to setting and set her up for uncomfortable and combative situations. Teachers, who should assume a protective role and serve as examples for children, became part of Samara's surveillance system: they watched for signs of "bad" behavior and looked for ways to squash it or even punish it before it had a chance to surface, rather than searching for paths to understanding. Samara's comments, both

above and to come in this chapter, frequently focus on why adults do not seek context when working with children.

Samara's Exosystem

Figure 6.6

Samara's Exosystem

Samara's exosystem, settings that affected her but did not actively involve her (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), included the bus system, work and school discipline policies, police, neighbors, and peers who did not interact regularly with her. I placed Samara's father in her exosystem, as she had no contact with him. School policies, including the discipline policy, incorporated the code of conduct, which was implemented by teachers and administrators in an attempt to compel Samara to behave according to standards and values that were deemed acceptable to society but did not necessarily mesh with her values. Additionally, other peers'

families have been placed in her exosystem, due to the values upheld in these homes that may or may not have played a part in Samara's encounters with social or disciplinary issues at school. For this section, I will focus on three main arenas: the workplace, transportation, and school discipline.

Workplace Policies

Samara often worked until 10:00 PM or later on school nights. She frequently overslept and missed school and our project sessions. Ultimately, she dropped out of both the project and school entirely, and though I never received an explanation as to what happened, I knew enough about Samara's schedule and life demands to wonder whether she simply reprioritized her life. Samara contracted COVID-19 during the study, and she reported that it exhausted her even after she was cleared to go back to work. One morning, about a week before Christmas, Samara and I had a session, and the first thing she did was complain about her work schedule.

> Samara: You know what they did? So, okay, you know it's the holidays. They got me working five days straight before the holidays. Okay cool. I don't have no problem with that. So, mind you, (the store) is closed on Christmas…Then *another* five days straight! I'm not working that (*laughing incredulously*). No, no. Like, that's almost 10 days straight…I'm gonna be so tired.

Samara explained that the corporation who employed her used a points system which penalized workers if they missed work. Employees incurred a double penalty if they missed a day during the week of Christmas. The workplace attendance policies were set up outside her immediate sphere of influence, but they nevertheless had a significant impact on her wellbeing. Citing that she was still in high school, she had asked repeatedly for an earlier shift,

only to be ignored. The universal corporate policy of closing the store on Christmas but not counting it as a day off (or paying employees holiday pay) and working employees five days in a row before and after – and counting it against them if they called out sick – were detrimental to Samara, as a student and as a developing teen who needed sleep. It was nearly impossible for Samara to make a living as an emancipated minor and to attend her classes in the morning while working at this job. However, she reported in an earlier story that she had previously worked at McDonald's, also until 10:00 PM. It is unclear whether Samara had tried to look elsewhere for a job with a more manageable schedule. However, as a full-time student living on her own, there is no scenario in which Samara could have worked during the day, allowing her to be asleep earlier to get enough rest before her morning classes. This life/school/ workstyle was untenable for Samara, and yet it was one that she had to navigate in order to survive.

Transportation Issues

Exhaustion was a theme for Samara. In addition to her demanding work and school schedule, Samara did not own a car. The local bus system was not set up to support workers who worked late at night, with most bus lines ending their routes before 7:00 PM and service halting altogether on major holidays. This placed Samara in a position of dependence on others for rides to and from work so she could make a living.

> Samara: Like, I literally be having to ask everybody for a ride home. What if one day, nobody gives me a ride home? I'm just gonna be stuck.

Samara lived in a relatively small city, but a fifteen-minute car ride became an hour-long trip by bus and a desperate search for a ride home each day, often leaning on people in her

microsystem for favors. Her last option was to give her hard-earned money to an Über driver to get home. All of these scenarios involved time-wasting for Samara, who needed time to study, sleep, and care for herself. I have wondered if this was a contributing factor in her decision to stop attending school.

School Discipline Policy

The district discipline policy was upheld to varying degrees by Samara's teachers and administrators at M.W. High and was similar to the policies of many districts throughout the country (M.W. Morris, 2012). The code of conduct, which will be discussed more in depth in the next chapter, laid out lists of rights and responsibilities for students, parents, and staff, along with a long list of possible "gross disobedience and misconduct" infractions that could possibly warrant student suspension, expulsion, or jail time (District, 2021). The document did not, however, draw direct connections between the rights and responsibilities of students and those of staff members. According to Samara, this missing link was ever-present in school, where rules were often cited without reason or explanation.

Who Are You to Say How Everything Gonna Go? Because this project centered on the overdiscipline of Black girls, naturally I brought up this topic on more than one occasion in different contexts. In one conversation, I asked Samara what questions came to mind when she thought about discipline.

> Samara: I want to know like, who idea was it? Who mind was it to like say like, "Oh, yeah, this is how it's gonna go, and it's gonna go like that." Like, who are you to say how everything gonna go?

Here, Samara asked a reasonable question: Who was the first person to decide the rules, and how do they apply to me? This was an enigmatic idea for her, as often she was told by her teachers to "behave" in ways that did not make sense. Working quietly, not resolving arguments in ways she had been taught, continuing to do "busy work" when she was finished and bored, and other confusing norms were frustrating when the only explanation was that it was "proper" behavior. When she resisted these directives, she was often punished, exacerbating her confusion and anger.

I Don't Do What They Do. I Don't Move How They Move. Samara pondered the concept of discipline and norms further in a later discussion. The thought process led her once again to the idea of seeking context when interacting with children.

> Samara: Another thing about discipline in school. Like, the teachers, the principal and stuff like that. They don't know what a kid just came from. **Like a facial expression, them not talking in class, them not interacting in the class. You don't know what happened to somebody for y'all to just, "Oh, I don't like that."** You('re) just disciplined for whatever they think you did. They never know what you done came from. Some kids probably just came from getting beat on. You never know. And do you know what that'll do to somebody? They don't know that, and they don't think about that…
>
> I feel like that's really what it is in school discipline. If (teachers) feel like they don't like it, you can get in trouble. A teacher can really say you did anything. Write it down, and you get in trouble for it. **Cause at the end of the day, they ain't gonna take your word over that teacher. They not gonna believe that student.** (The teacher) gone

say what happened. When that teacher speak up and say you did something? Aw, that's the story. That's finalized, you getting disciplined. And that needs to change.

By this point in her reflective process, as Samara was describing the paradox she perceived between how children and adults were held accountable (what came to be known as "the immediacy of discipline"), she was irritated. Situations she had found herself in had given her first-hand knowledge of the types of mistreatment she was describing, and she finished this discussion with a plea for teachers to treat every child as an individual. It should be noted that she was now not only describing treatment she had received at M.W. High but at Okunye as well.

Samara: And then that's another thing. Sometimes you get disciplined for how others…like they try to compare you to like, the good students. "Oh, this person did this." I'm not that person. You can't say what they did cause I'm a whole different person. *I don't do what they do. I don't move how they move.* And kids be getting disciplined based off how another student act.

I tell my teachers, I'm that kid, like I got manners. I do my work. I'm respectful. …**Don't use me as an example…I see what you're trying to do, but don't use me.** Now you gone have them kids thinking they have to do what I do. I don't like that.

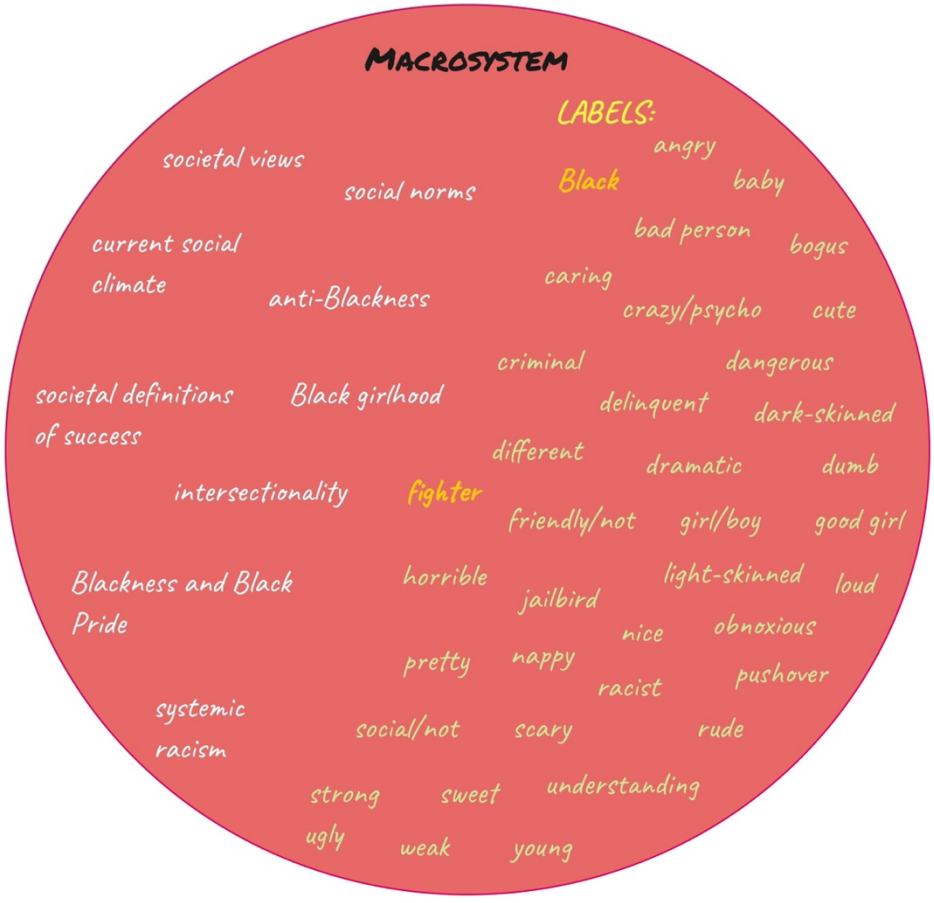
Samara had spent time thinking about the concept of discipline, having been harmed by the disciplinary policies within her school district. However, she indicated during our initial discussions that no one had asked her questions like this before. No one had simply said, "What questions do you have? What thoughts come to mind? What should teachers understand about discipline and Black girls?" When I asked these of Samara, her responses

came in waves such as the one above. Resistance was ever-present in her narrative, though she did not use this word to describe it. When she pushed back against her teachers for using her as a good example, she resisted, because she understood the nuance in other students' experiences.

Samara's Macrosystem

Figure 6.7

Samara's Macrosystem



Samara's macrosystem (Figure 6.7) included many labels, which she discussed at length during our sessions. Most of these labels are the result of societal values: for example, the definition of a "good girl" is defined by societal expectations of what is good, and typically

what is female (E.W. Morris, 2007). The labels derived from my discussions with Samara were used in many contexts: the judgment she felt by her peers or teachers as described in stories she told; in the internal dialogue Samara used to describe herself and those in her microsystem; and when she described how she felt she and other Black girls were viewed by larger society. This larger society, and the views, norms, and labels by which Samara felt constrained, were a part of her macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These views and norms are dictated by the current social climate and societal definitions of abstract concepts such as "success," Blackness, anti-Blackness, intersectionality, and even what it means to be a girl. For Samara, being labeled and judged by others, having certain stories follow her, and the definitions of girlhood and Black girlhood were themes within her macrosystem.

Judgment: I Shut Down. I Get Nervous

Samara grappled with the desire to be herself and meet her own needs while also feeling judged for doing so. At times, simply stepping away to get some space was enough to annoy the people around her and throw Samara into a resistive or defensive stance.

> Samara: Too many people make me nervous…And you know, like every time you can't just leave and remove yourself. Like sometimes you somewhere, you just can't help it. I get quiet. I don't really talk.
>
> Jadyn: And do people try to judge you for that?
>
> Samara: Yeah, you can say that…because like I know a lot of times, like my natural face, I'll just be sitting there. *(Voicing others)* "What's wrong with you? Why you mad?" Nothing be wrong with me…It's not that, it's just you know, I don't like being around too many people. I shut down. I get nervous. So…yeah you can say people like, judge

me about it. But you know, I really don't care. Cause it's like, that's just me. What I'm posed to do?

Samara's ability to vocalize that she could get nervous and shut down in large groups was a sign that she knew herself and could take the time to step away, rather than force herself into situations that would cause her anxiety. Given her history with fighting and her desire not to engage in this behavior, it is understandable that large crowds might make Samara uncomfortable. Her experience was that others would rather she endure these awkward situations rather than take care of her own needs. She referenced her "natural face" – what Audri referred to as "resting bitch face" – and this was something that Samara personally railed against. The pressure to perform in order to lessen the discomfort of others was the result of macrosystem expectations of social behavior. Samara felt that this pressure often centered around her facial expression, which she did not purposely affect to offend, rather than the overwhelming nature of the events themselves. In other words, Samara felt her own anxiety-driven discomfort was rarely considered over that of others in the room, whose irritation at her face was superficial at best.

The Story Follows You

Adichie (2009) outlined the "Danger in a Single Story" by warning, "the consequence of the single story is this: it robs people of dignity…it emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar." In Samara's case, the persistence of others in maintaining the story of "Samara the Fighter" served to rob her not only of dignity but repeatedly stripped her of the agency to change her own narrative.

They Was Ready for Me. Below, Samara explains the helplessness she felt when she entered Okunye only to find out that her story had preceded her.

> Samara: When I walked in…they basically was ready for me. They heard about me, they heard what happened…So, **they expected me to be loud, obnoxious, fighting everybody**, arguing with everybody. And that's not even the case. I was in that school not talking to nobody…At Okunye when I went to go sit by myself, and you know, you at a table, there's not really much you can do to stop people coming by you. So, it's like they kept on just lookin. Like, what? …And then I don't really say too much. I don't want nobody thinking I'm just rude, mean, don't want nobody to talk to me…but it's not me.

"(That's) not me" was repeated frequently by Samara in our conversations. She hoped that attending a new school might provide a new setting in which to redefine her narrative and the problematic ways in which she had been compelled to interact with others. However, she found that her peers – and some of her teachers – were determined to lock her into an old narrative.

Everybody Just Had This Story of Me. The teacher featured in the following story has been introduced earlier in the chapter – she is the teacher whose interactions with Samara landed them in mediation and who walked out before hearing Samara's side. This story, in which Samara first encountered this teacher and others, highlights the damage that labels and single stories or stereotypes – crafted by societal and other structural forces and resulting in identity and stereotype threat – can do (Townsend et al., 2010; van Laar et al., 2010).

> Samara: When I came to Okunye, I missed first hour, second hour, and maybe third hour because people pulling me in they office. "Are you going to do this? Are you

> going to do that? Are you okay? Can you sit in this room? Can you sit in that room?" Like that's not me, like, yeah, I may have fought, but that's like, not me. Like, I don't go around just fighting people for no reason.
>
> …And then, like a teacher even told me, "I (don't) like you." Like the second day. I'm like *(incredulous)* "You don't like me? You don't even know me!! Whatchoo mean you don't like me??" So, it was like it was just like, hard. I couldn't go in Okunye, like meeting new people. Everybody just had this story of me. Like, "Oh, she fought this person. She fought that person. She did this. She did that. That's who she is." No. Like, why…I guess I think that's the question: Like, why do they make it hard? Why do they discipline make it harder?

Samara brought up the idea of the story following her and repeated the "that's not me" refrain several times. She also brought up the difficulty she had in meeting new people due to her story preceding her. The language that the teachers and administrators used when speaking with Samara, by her account, implied values and judgment: by questioning Samara's ability to sit in certain rooms and asking her about her ability to control herself, they established that they did not trust her and felt she may have been dangerous. Samara was just arriving at an alternative school, with teachers and staff who were experienced at working with children who have been pushed out of school. Many of the children at Okunye had been involved in fighting or other behavior that "violated" the district code of conduct, which made the initial staff response to Samara strange. It is possible that she was discriminated against for other reasons than past conduct: Samara had dark skin, was heavier-set, and did not conduct

herself in typical "feminine" ways. As a child, she was often told by others that she did not act the way girls "should behave," and this is discussed next.

Girlhood and Black Girlhood

Naturally, conversations during this study came to questions about girlhood and Black girlhood, as all three participants were Black girls and had been overdisciplined. Given that Black girls continue to be disciplined at much higher rates and more severely than their white peers (Baumle, 2018; E.W. Morris, 2007; M.W. Morris, 2012), I was interested to know Samara's thoughts on her identity as a Black girl.

Embracing Yourself: Black Girlhood. I asked Samara, "What is being a Black girl?" After some thought, she at first said that she didn't really think about it, "because it's me. This who I've been my whole life." After quietly reflecting for a minute, she added:

> Samara: I feel like being a Black girl, like you gotta prove everybody wrong. Cause you know there's so much stuff people say about Black girls. "Oh, they always angry." …All them things people be saying about us. You gotta like, prove em wrong.
>
> …It's a lot when like Black girls become successful. Because, you know, it's like, really men that become successful in general. But Black girls, like that's not really a thing. When I heard Kamala Harris became Vice President, that was a lot. First Black girl Vice President…I know when she was doing that, a lot of people going, "Oh, you not gonna make it. You not gonna become Vice President. For America? No." And she proved to everybody that she could do it. Yeah…you just gotta prove everybody wrong. That's what being a Black girl to me is.

> And like, showing off our skin. Like…that melanin…that right there? I just love it. Embracing yourself. That's what really it is to me. Like, embracing yourself…cause… some Black girls, they don't feel pretty. Sometimes they feel like, so dark. And, you know, dudes be like, "Oh, I like light skinned girls." …Dudes say "Oh yeah, I only like lighter girls. *(Shaking head in mock disgust)* Mm mm. She too dark for me."
>
> …My mom, like she always told me being my color was good. "You're pretty. Don't let nobody ever take that from you." Like my mom always made sure I felt pretty. So, it's like, whoa, like, "I'm too dark?" *(Incredulous)* I never understood what that meant. Like "you cute." Like, is dark skinned people ugly or something?

Like in the stories where she taught her daughter to be strong and independent, Samara's mother also helped to instill in her child a love for her own Blackness as well as self-confidence. However, in school Samara learned that not everyone valued her dark skin the way her family did. Because her darkness was prized at home, she was surprised to learn that dark skinned girls were viewed as "ugly" by some of her peers. Samara learned that fellow Black people can become the purveyors of identity threat due to the norms that are pushed by white society (Nadal et al., 2021). Rather than accepting this, Samara carried the pride in her dark skin and a love for herself that she learned at home as a personal and collective act of resistance.

"Girls Don't Play in Dirt." Samara explained that, as a young girl, she enjoyed doing "non-girly" things such as playing in dirt and riding bikes in unconventional ways. It was not until she encountered people in her neighborhood – usually adults or older children – that she learned her behavior did not fit with the norms of acceptable girlhood.

Samara: It was this one dude…He knew my mom. And I was like doing a little seat thing (on the bike). *(Voicing neighbor)* "You need to get down. You a girl. You gonna hurt yourself." But like, a boy can hurt theyself too. Just cause I'm a girl, you trying to say that. A boy can hurt theyself doing the same thing…So, why nobody saying nothing to them? Like *(tilts head*, *wrinkles face in confusion)*, I don't really get that. And then I used to like *(chuckles)* try to play in dirt *(laughs)*. *(Voicing older peers)* "Girls don't do that. Girls don't play in dirt…You can't do that."

I'm not doing nothing inappropriate…So, I can't do that just because I'm a girl? It made me want to do it more. Just the fact you told me I can't do it. And I feel like still to this day that apply to me. Like if you say I can't do something, okay I'm gonna show you, just because you underestimated me…For one, it's not wrong. For two, I can do it. Who are you? For three, I'm just gonna show you like, I can do it…This is what I enjoy. I'm a kid. Let me let me be happy. Let me do me. You know how many times I heard, "Cause you a girl"? That don't mean nothing!

From our conversations, it was clear that Samara knew who she was and what she valued, and she was not afraid to express it. Her family raised her with the strong conviction that empathy, strength, and independence were more important than societal expectations. Therefore, when she was told by others that she should stop what she was doing because she did not fit their expected norms, her response was to double down. Samara was self-assured, and she was frustrated that her teachers and school administrators – at both M.W. High and Okunye – frequently undervalued this strength and even punished it.

Teacher Mindset: "Oh, the Nappy Hair…" Our discussions led to what teachers see when they think of Black children or when they are working with them. I asked this question because the girls in the study had often received lengthy punishments for "infractions" that may have been overlooked had the girls been viewed more favorably. I was curious what Samara felt her teachers saw when they looked at Black children.

> Samara: It's some teachers out there at school, like how they act towards the Black people out there, like they really love us. Like, they don't like to look at us as bad people. But it is those teachers out there (who think) Black people are like *(puts on an affected expression)*, "Oh, the nappy hair, come to school looking all bogus, the fights the drama. Loud, all that." Like that's what I feel (when) most teachers look at us.
>
> But, you know, I've never been that. So, it really never affected me. I always been a quiet girl…I don't get into trouble in school. Like, that's why when I got expelled for fighting, everybody was like so shocked about it *(shocked facial expression)*.

Samara felt as though teachers viewed Black students as loud, unkempt, and dramatic. However, she felt she did not fit this description. She described herself as a "quiet girl" who generally did not talk in school. The idea that "good girls" or "quiet girls" could not or should not get in trouble, or that the loud students with nappy hair were more prone to bad behavior, is a problematic one, though certain behaviors or appearance can be an accurate predictor for how children are disciplined at school (Blake et al., 2011). Children who fit the norms of good behavior – generally defined by their majority white teachers and administrators as those who participate in class, can sit still and quietly, follow directions, and do well on their assignments and tests – fare better on the discipline front than those who do not (Blake et al., 2011).

"…*and* I'm a Black Girl?" When pressed to consider whether Black girls were viewed differently by society from the way all Black children were viewed, Samara felt that Black girls received extra harsh judgment from school staff. Similar to how she discussed her treatment by older children and adults when she resisted gender norms, she explained that this carried over but was worse for Black girls.

> Samara: (There are) some people that don't like Black people at all. So, it's like, every Black person viewed bad to them. But girls, I feel like it's worse…Like, the Black boys, you know, they them. But girls, cause like, you know girls are viewed different anyway. No matter the color, the race, age, none of that. Girls are viewed different anyway… people look at it like, "Oh, you a girl, you not supposed to be doing that." So, if you do something somebody feel like only a boy should do, that's another thing they viewing you bad about…and you like, "*and* I'm a Black girl?" …It's just like, you a Black girl, they already view you as some things. Then you doing something they think you not supposed to be doing, so it's just like added to it.

Samara demonstrated a fairly nuanced understanding of intersectionality based on her own experience and without, to my knowledge, having studied the concept at all. To Samara, Blackness and girlhood were two forms of identity that society could judge and oppress at will, with little more explanation than, "because we said so." She felt the pressure to be a "good girl" in order to avoid the compounded scrutiny that, in her experience, was an inevitable byproduct of being a Black girl.

Blackness and Labels

The labels discussed thus far in this section include gender tags as well as "good," "quiet," "dark," "nappy," "dramatic," and "loud," to name a few. There were more to unearth as Samara and I continued to explore her sense of identity, the norms and values society expected, and her views of herself.

Dangerous. Psycho. A Criminal. During one discussion when Samara and I had engaged with the topics of gun violence, police shootings of young Black people, and politics, I asked Samara what types of labels she thought that society places on Black children, that make police feel the need to shoot them so quickly.

> Samara: Dangerous. Psycho. A criminal…Gotta gun in your hand. You're a criminal off bat…A danger to society. **Dangerous is the most, the main part for me.** Because you know when Laquan McDonald…He got shot sixteen times…We watched the full tape (at school). They get a call in. Somebody out here breaking in cars. He not right for that. He wrong for that, one hundred percent. But before the man even seen Laquan, he heard a Black male, he said…straight up, "We're gonna have to kill him."

Continuing with this line of thought, I suggested that perhaps society thinks of Black people as scary. Samara responded:

> Samara: Yeah. They hear "Black," "Oh they scary. Dangerous. We gotta get ready to kill." And I feel like with that situation, you start shooting soon as you pulled up. You were ready for that. Then they try to use the excuse, "Laquan was walking to them." ***When I say I watched that video like a hundred times, trying to see where he at least attempted to walk towards him?*** He was walking towards the gate…So, y'all shot him a

decent amount away from him, and y'all shot him after his life was like, you see his body literally smoking, jumping. Jumping, jumping. Where was that necessary at? Then when he (the cop) went to jail. *He got two years. Because Laquan was expelled. He was at alternative school. He got suspended*.

Jadyn: So, delinquent?…His past somehow gets to come back and give the police officer a pass.

Samara: A pass. You get two years *(looks disgusted and angry)* for shooting somebody sixteen times? *Sixteen times. You get two years (looks around the room in disbelief).*

Samara had spent hours diving into the details on the case of Laquan McDonald, who had been shot and killed by police at the same age Samara was at the time of these sessions. Samara was angry about the lack of empathy or care that had been displayed by police as they encountered McDonald. McDonald had been suspended in the past and was attending an alternative school, and this information was used to exonerate the police officers who had shot him as though his school history had earned him a death sentence. As a student at an alternative school herself, Samara felt unsure that the adults in her life would protect her from a similar fate, as she stated in an earlier story about her U.S. History teacher at Okunye.

Systemic Racism

Among the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the notion that systemic racism and power imbalances are pervasive in our society and will never be completely erased (Burrell-Craft, 2020). Additionally, CRT maintains that "interest convergence" happens when racial equality benefits the interests of whites/dominant groups, not necessarily when Black folks need it most, and that Black people, especially Black girls, undergo multiple and intersecting

types of discrimination (Burrell-Craft, 2020). Black girls are positioned to be discriminated in multiple ways, often simultaneously across race, gender, and class. They experience schooling and discipline in an educational system predicated on a history of white-centered norms (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2021). Samara resisted these norms in multiple ways. She faced peers who judged her Blackness, teachers who assumed she was unwilling or incapable of doing her work, and neighbors who told her she should not be herself because she was a girl. She developed a sense of self that was built less upon what she wanted to be and more strongly centered what she did not want to emulate.

Difference: I'm Gonna Be Better Than Him. It was important to Samara that she be different from others, and that others could view her as different. She did not want to be lumped in with everyone in her peer group, and she was especially frustrated with the continual misperceptions placed upon her based on people's assumptions and obsolete stories. When I asked Samara what made her different, she again returned to the concept of empathy, stressing that individuals handled life situations in their own way. She then went on to tell another story of her mother and grandmother preparing her for the strength she would need to face the world.

> Samara: Your identity really come from like your mental, like how you think. Your mind. And that's where it start like, different things do different things to people mind. See, like a really big thing that like made me **different** was like seeing people around me. Like I never honestly had a **role model**, but I just had people I didn't want to be like. Like I'm **little**, but I always been like a **smart** girl…Like, I'm looking at everybody. I don't want to be like her. I don't want to be like him. **I'm going to be better than him**…And

then the way I grew up, my mom, my grandma and them, it's always like, "You gotta be strong. Don't let nobody see your weaknesses." Like, they really enforced it with me. They probably even put some situations on me just to make sure I was strong.

…I told you I lived with my grandma. For a long time, I was the good girl, quiet girl, always been that. And then when I moved back with my mom, like she seen I'm the quiet one, nice one, sweet girl…I really didn't like conflict. I didn't like problems. She like seen what could happen. We was outside, like for instance, she seen a situation she could have stopped, could have prevented. But she told me like, "Oh they want to fight, go fight 'em." She wanted to see, like I could be strong, like, stand up for myself. And then, I told her people tried to bully me when we switched schools. She didn't call up there. She didn't tell me to go fight at school, either, but she like, "I wanna see if you can stand up for yourself. You ain't gotta fight, but I wanna see if you gone come home crying every day. I wanna see if you can handle what you going through."

Systemic racism, with its embedded white norms and values that Samara, her family, and her Black peers encountered on a daily basis set them up for a life in which "that's not me" was a necessary phrase to be uttered regularly in order to resist identity threat (Nadal et al., 2021). Samara reflected that her mother found it necessary to test her strength against a world set up to knock her down, both literally and figuratively. Being "sweet" and avoiding conflict was unacceptable in her mother's world, and she retrained Samara to better meet the challenges ahead.

Samara's Chronosystem

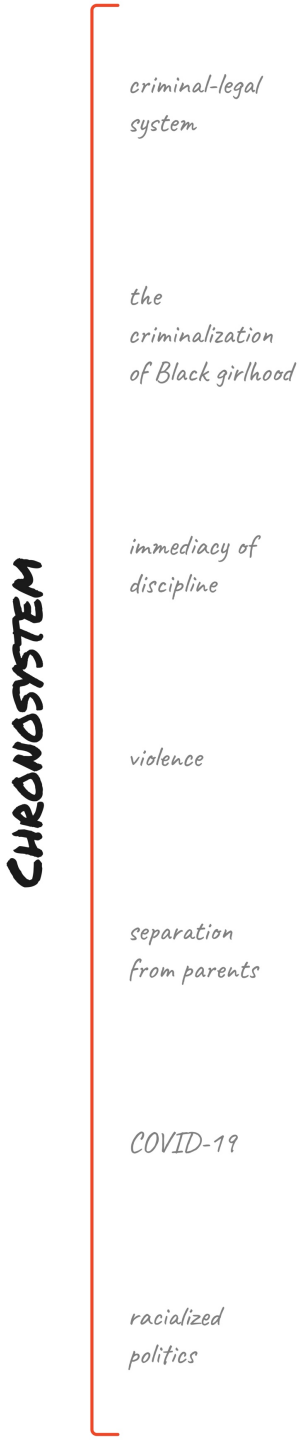
Samara's chronosystem encompassed changes and continuities over time (Nadal et al., 2021) and affected all the layers within her ecological systems. As an emancipated minor, the separation from her parents was a part of her chronosystem. When I asked Samara why she decided to leave her mother's home to live as an adult, she replied that she preferred to be alone and not around a lot of people. This is consistent with the story from earlier in this chapter, in which she described the anxiety she felt when being in large groups. Samara had no relationship with her father and discussed him just once, during the group session, in which she described him as someone she felt no connection with.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which affected Samara directly when she got sick, was another change in Samara's chronosystem that affected the rest of her ecosystem. The violence she encountered in her neighborhood, the immediacy of discipline dilemma at each of her schools, racialized politics, the criminalization of Black girlhood, systemic racism, and an oppressive criminal justice system were all continuities within her chronosystem that served as stressors and pushed at the pathways in her life no matter how much she resisted. Such pathways included overdiscipline, school choice, academic success, and peer relationships.

The criminal justice system played crucial roles in Samara's life, and this factor is discussed below.

Figure 6.8

Samara's Chronosystem



The Criminal Justice System: It's Setting You Up to Fail

According to scholars such as Baumle (2018), Stovall (2017), Meiners (2011), Love (2019), and Michelle Morris (2012), America's public schools are set up to mirror the prison system that many Black children statistically will interact with at some point in their lives. This school and prison nexus is noticed by Black children, whose classrooms reinforce white norms and values. Samara was keen to discuss not just schools' involvement in Black children's pathway to prison, but the climate in some homes as well.

In her reflection below, Samara lamented the treatment that some children receive from their parents and how it can lead them directly into the hands of police, whom she had already established could cause further harm.

> Samara: Even with Black parents. Your son, or something, you don't like what they do. *(Voicing parents)* … "Kick 'em out! On the street." Anything could happen to this boy. Anything. But you don't want the police to do this to them, do that to them…but you put your kid out on the street…Like, what do you expect to happen?
>
> And another thing. You go to jail one time. They just set you up to be "a criminal," as they call it. I feel like it's setting you up to fail! You got a felony, *(affected voice, almost sorry)* "Oh, you can't get a job." But you have to get by though. You gotta live. So, what you gone do though? I honestly feel like…the system is set up for people to fail. You see the people that's making it? They worked extra hard. Everybody might not be capable to do that…Then you got the people in (jail). "Oh, you'll be back. He'll be back." So, it's like it's just a never-ending cycle. See, that's why I calmed down,

cause I was finna go to jail for fightin. Woooo, I can't do it. Can't do it, can't do it, can't do it *(shaking head, waving hands back and forth)*.

Samara had made many life decisions based on the possible negative trajectory she saw for herself: potential jail time and the major limitations that this would cause her down the road. However, as an empathic person, she did not endorse a criminal justice system that "sets anybody up to fail." Her experiences in school, in which her branding as a fighter had set her up to have difficulty academically and socially, mirrored this system. Recognizing this oppression and the implications for social justice in these systems, Samara resisted in multiple ways, not the least of which was her refusal to conform.

Significance

Samara's mindset, evident in much of her narrative, centered around her empathic desire for people to seek context before judging others. She had known peers and family members to experience homelessness and abuse and was providing for herself as a teenager living away from her parents. This viewpoint, along with Samara's struggles in school to connect with peers and with her teachers, led her to consider the needs of children and adults in multiple contexts, including discipline, identity development, home life, and politics. Her tendency toward storytelling in our discussions provided a nuanced look into how she viewed the world.

The pillars of Samara's mindset were built around her interactions with the people in her microsystem. She empathized with others and felt pulled to do what she felt was right in most situations. This contrasted with how she felt she was viewed by many teachers and peers: macrosystem labels such as combative, non-social, and unwilling to work. Samara considered

the ramifications of certain child-rearing practices she had witnessed, such as putting children out of the house in punishment, and she had resolved never to do this to future children she might have.

Samara thought deeply about how her life had been affected by the actions of adults – teachers and administrators being the most impactful figures – and she wanted answers to the questions she had for the people in power (exosystem). These questions focused on the norms, values, and rules (macrosystem) that were placed upon both children and adults by faceless authority figures (exosystem and chronosystem) who did not know the life circumstances of those they sought to control. For Samara, the world was an unwelcoming space with arbitrary rules set against people like her. Yet, she continued to resist as she searched for a place in it where she could be herself (mindset).

CHAPTER 7: INDIGO

Figure 7.1

Indigo, artistic rendition by J. Laixely

You know how like, you want something ***so bad,*** and somebody asks you, "Do you want it?" and you ***still say no***?! That's me. That's the type of person I am…And I really wanted it, and I probably really needed it, but I'm gone get it on my own with my own money just because I wanted to say no to *you*!

I think the pride is what makes me say no even if I need it...But it's also empowering because I don't have to depend on nobody for nothing, and I'm always gonna make sure I'm straight…You never know what happen, life is like a gamble. Like, it's a dice roll. So, what if one day my house get caught on fire, you know? And if you ain't straight, then you shit outta luck.

I'm always prepared for a downfall.

Indigo, January 27, 2021

Of the three participants in this study, I spent the most time with Indigo. She was sixteen years old, at times soft-spoken, and had a gravelly voice that sounded road-weary and wise. If I close my eyes and remember her voice, I might imagine this young child lounging as an old woman in a rocking chair, cigarette in hand, spouting stories about lessons learned from years of hard work and life lived. Yet, Indigo's face was smooth, and she was quick to smile, and we held one of our Zoom sessions from her work, where she efficiently checked coworkers for COVID-19 symptoms as they entered the back of the building and conversed with me at the same time on her phone.

Indigo had built up so many protective walls around herself that at the end of some sessions I felt as if she had told me nothing. However, when pondering Indigo after each meeting, I realized that I had learned much from the little she seemed to say. Indigo possessed and shared many forms of laughter, from a high-pitched giggle, to a rhythmic sort of "courtesy laugh" when responding to my silly jokes, to a loud "ahhhhh" or full and hearty chuckle when she was startled by something she found truly funny. She became quiet and shy when revealing things about herself that she rarely shared, such as how she felt about her parents, both of whom lived in town but not with Indigo, or her thoughts on what love should be.

Like Audri and Samara, Indigo attended Okunye. She had been expelled from her high school, City High, as a freshman the previous school year just after quarantine was instated for the COVID-19 pandemic, and after a long suspension (to be discussed later in this chapter). Also like the other two girls, Indigo had no desire to return to traditional high school, though she expressed that she missed her friends and found difficulty making new ones at Okunye.

As with all sessions in this study, Indigo and I met over Zoom, and I worked around her busy calendar, which included a work schedule that required her to stay after 10:00 PM on many evenings. Indigo worked the same shifts with her older sister, who had a car, at a big box store across town. The late shifts disrupted Indigo's ability to wake up in the morning. Often, I had to reschedule our sessions because she had overslept, and I learned that early afternoons were best for her.

One of the most amusing things for me about my time with Indigo was how she appeared on screen. Nearly every time I saw her, she only revealed the top half of her head. Most video recordings showed just the top half of her glasses, her forehead, and her hair, which she always wore in a poof on top of her head. When I would ask if she could adjust her camera, she would move it ever so slightly so that I could see perhaps a centimeter more of her glasses. During one session, Indigo was at a friend's house but kept her appointment with me. She moved into a darkened room and kept the light off, and I stared at darkness the entire time. I will discuss in the mindset section of this chapter the ways in which Indigo guarded herself. The limiting of her physical image on screen is an example this.

I enjoyed my time with Indigo immensely. We shared a love for the Grey's Anatomy television show and a shyness in opening up to people we did not know. She stayed with the study until the end and even reworked her own part of the project once Audri and Samara became unresponsive, choosing to focus on the district code of conduct, which had been used as a device to harm all three girls. Indigo and I continued to remain in contact for months after the project ended. She graduated early after opting into a special accelerated program through Okunye.

Indigo's Mindset

Indigo's general demeanor was characterized by quiet and guarded behavior. She described herself as feeling older than her sixteen years, and she had developed her own approaches to cope with emotional trauma. However, Indigo was quick to laugh and held deep beliefs about empathy, understanding, kindness, love, justice, family, trust, pain, and many other topics. Still, Indigo had difficulty opening up and struggled to connect with her emotions. She had compartmentalized many painful events in her life and viewed them as unchangeable and therefore not worth bearing in mind. She commented more than once that she did not feel it was worth spending time worrying about things that would not change. I observed that Indigo had not been afforded much time to spend considering the true impact of some very damaging incidents, including deaths of friends and family members, separation from her immediate family, and overdiscipline which resulted in her expulsion from high school. As a result, there was a limit to how much Indigo could – or would allow herself to – share.

Pillars of Indigo's mindset included self-reliance and independence, pride and shyness, kindness and generosity, detachment and guardedness, and a quiet but resolute adherence to her personal definition of love and respect.

Kindness: Generosity of Spirit

In my first session with Indigo, I asked her a simple question: "Who are you?" This was followed by an invitation to share what she would like people to know about her that perhaps others had been unable to learn yet. Her response was an imploring to see past her temper and acknowledge someone who is generous and kind.

Indigo: I just want to let you know it's an amazing person underneath that short temper that they see, or that they saw. I'm fun. I'm outgoing. Oh, I'm really helpful. I'll put other people needs before mines. Like, (if) we really connect. I'll make you happy before I make myself happy. Like, say I'm going through something, and like, somebody was going through something too. I won't even tell them. I'll…help them through with theirs. So, like, they won't even know something wrong with me.

That happens a lot. Like, I could be going through a lot, and nobody would know. Cause, I'm helping you. You know…I don't want people to be worrying about their problems (and) worrying about mines. *I'd just rather worry about yours.*

This last statement prompted me to wonder how often Indigo was able to open up to others about her own problems. I asked Indigo what she would want people to know she had been going through, she replied, "A lot. I've only been alive for like, sixteen years, but those sixteen years felt like more. I've been in a lot of situations and positions that most sixteen-year-olds haven't dealt with." When pressed further, the only response Indigo gave was, "Um, I mean, the resource officer situation[3], law situations, family situations, stuff like that." This conversation occurred in our first session, and she was not ready to discuss more about the situations that had led to her comment about feeling older. Indigo had built many protective walls around herself, and this led to short answers at times that appeared to end a line of

[3] The incident involving a resource officer – a school police officer – was the one that led to Indigo's expulsion, and this will be discussed later in the chapter.

discussion. She was never rude when she stopped giving information but merely appeared through small shrugs and other body language to not be interested in sharing more.

Generosity: I'm Too Friendly

Despite her description of herself as helpful and selfless, often at the expense of her own wellbeing, Indigo resented when people took advantage of her. During one session, we explored discursive identity, or the ways in which people are identified though the discourse in which they and others engage (Gee, 2000). The way I described discursive identity to the girls was: "If you were the only person on earth, you might not think of yourself as fat, skinny, funny, serious, or difficult, for example, because no one would be around to interact with and tell you things they think about you." Indigo reflected on how others related to her.

> Indigo: People always come to me when they need something. I don't like that.
>
> Jadyn: What do you think that says about you as a person?
>
> Indigo: That I'm too *friendly*. Which, I get that a lot…I don't know…if somebody, you know, talking to me or something, I'm going to talk back, (I'm) not a *rude* person. I'm not just gonna sit there. People say I'm too friendly for that. Or like, I'm too *friendly* with my things. I like to give stuff away.
>
> Jadyn: So, do you feel like you're generous?
>
> Indigo: Yeah, *generous*.
>
> Jadyn: I think if you were the only person on earth, that would (not) be a thing.
>
> Indigo: Yeah, because **I wouldn't have nothing to give to nobody. And I think I would like that!**

Indigo felt that she was gave a lot, and perhaps too much, to the people in her life. The labels she used during this conversation – "friendly," "rude," and "generous" – are discursive concepts which Indigo attributed to herself based on the way she perceived that others responded to her. She did not want to be perceived as rude, so she spoke to people even when she was uncomfortable. She was generous with her things and felt this was a natural part of herself, but she also felt that people were likely to take advantage of this kindness because they would view her as "too friendly." As someone who felt the need to protect herself, finding these traits within herself raised red flags for Indigo.

Pragmatism: Defining the Parent/Child Relationship

Indigo lived with her grandmother and her older sister, while her younger brother lived with their mother. Her father was not in her life, and this was Indigo's choice. She had firm boundaries around her conceptualizations of love and commitment, including family relationships, and she shared this during a session when we were examining photographs from when she was very young. I paused on a photo of Indigo's father holding her, taken when she was eight months old. I mentioned that she had not told me a lot about her dad. When I asked where her father was currently, she replied, "I don't know. In (town)." She shared that she had spent the most time with her father when she was in the third grade, but they no longer communicated because she did not want to.

> Indigo: We just had different views on what a daughter and dad relationship should be like…His views is that he just think he can just buy me everything, and it'll be okay, which it's not. My view is that we spend time together, not just, oh you come give me money or some other stuff and that fix a relationship. And it don't.

The expectations that Indigo had of a loving parent-child relationship included spending time and effort, which was something her father was either unwilling or unable to provide. Indigo presented as unemotional in her assessment of her father's parenting style. It seemed that separation from one's parents at such a young age might be cause for feelings of sadness or other feelings. This question came up when discussing her mother as well. When looking at another photo, I asked if her mother was in her life. She replied, "Sorta," and explained that she did not really have a mother figure. I asked how she felt about this.

Indigo: Not bad because I have my grandma, so I just really don't care.

Jadyn: I think some people would.

Indigo: I used to, but as I got older, it changed. Cause to me…it's just like, all these years, it's just, it's been the same. So. Not gonna keep pushing myself down for something I can't change.

This sort of pragmatism was a hallmark of my experience with Indigo. She rarely expressed emotion other than detachment. To Indigo, it was pointless to get upset about things she could not change. Indigo had developed an approach to viewing her family that allowed her to be realistic about these, and perhaps future, relationships. I considered that this stance also facilitated a numbing from the pain of loss of kin who, idealistically, might prioritize her needs above perhaps their own but chose not to.

Care: Love is a Bond

I was curious to know about her siblings, one of whom she lived with and another, younger brother, who lived with their mother. Indigo's immediate family was quite scattered,

but she did see her mother and brother on occasion. The following exchange was indicative of a theme that came up for Indigo, in which she felt that she had no stories to tell.

Jadyn: Tell me something about your mom.

Indigo: I don't got no story about my mom.

Jadyn: It doesn't have to be a *story* story.

Indigo: I don't got nothing.

As it turned out, she had seen her mother that day, for the first time in a while. I inquired about what types of things she would do when she visited her mother and discovered that they spent very little time interacting together. Indigo spent most time on her phone or playing games with her brother while she was at her mom's house. To better understand this relationship, I inquired about how her mother showed love.

Indigo: I don't know, she don't, to me. I know she love me. I know.

Jadyn: How do you know that?

Indigo: Because I'm her child.

Jadyn: But you don't think she shows it to you?

Indigo: She don't show it, but I know. I never show *her*, but *she* know…I asked her, she told me she don't know how. I showed it, and she don't know how to, but I know she love me. So, after that I was like, okay.

Jadyn: So, for you. What is love?

Indigo: A bond.

Jadyn: What does that involve? How do you create a bond?

Indigo: You can tell that person things. You can go to them when you need help. They got your back.

Indigo defined love as something that was shown through acts of trustworthiness and support but did not have to be explicitly expressed in words. Her mother admitted to Indigo that she did not know how to show love. Perhaps she gave Indigo other forms of support, and this is how Indigo felt loved. Indigo had drawn a physical boundary line by not living with her mother for various reasons, some of which she chose not to share. Still, she accepted the relationship as it was with a similar pragmatism to what she exhibited when speaking of her father.

Guardedness in Storytelling: I Don't Got No Good Stories

When I first met with Indigo and explained the aims of the project, Indigo expressed great interest and asked when we could start. She was intrigued by the idea that Black girls' voices would be valued and would be placed at the forefront. However, when it came time to share her own stories, several times she expressed that she had none. I asked her what makes a "good" story. She replied, "Something that actually happened that was good. Like I don't got nothing."

Indigo struggled with the conceptualization of the word "story" and felt that her personal narrative was uninteresting. Once she got to talking, however, she had many stories to tell and had insightful opinions on her own and others' experiences. Many times, I called attention to this and asked why she felt that her stories were insignificant. In these moments, Indigo would backtrack to her original position, explaining that her stories were not "good." Though we discussed the subjectivity of the word "good" and even tackled the idea that

societal norms dictate the stories that get told and suppressed, she remained unmoved in the perception that hers were not worth hearing.

I was unable to determine whether Indigo could not believe that her stories could be of value to others, if the walls she had built around herself prevented her from seeing the worth of her own perspective, or if it was me that she could not open up to. Perhaps it was all three. It is quite possible, given her lived experiences – many of which are shared below – that the messages she received from others caused her to conclude that her stories were not worth telling. She did share stories with me, and much of her narrative is included below. However, perhaps she may have been more comfortable opening up to someone more like herself.

Though Indigo expressed that it was important to her that the stories of girls like her be told, she presented as less comfortable discussing or even pondering her own feelings and her place in the world. As the youngest participant, she had attended Okunye for less time than Samara and Audri and had less practice sharing in these ways. The social workers at Okunye led group and one-on-one sessions with students, during which social and emotional skills, including conversation skills, were practiced. Because of her limited ability – or willingness – to share, my sessions with Indigo often had a more interview-like style than the two older participants, who appeared eager to speak at great length on various topics and engaged in relaxed conversation.

Self-Reliance: I'm "Straight"

A theme in Indigo's mindset was a sense of self-reliance and being prepared, or what she referred to as being "straight." The opening story to this chapter highlights how she grappled with her inability to accept help from others, even when it was freely offered, because

she would rather rely on her own resources. She felt both empowered and disempowered by this trait. During this conversation, Indigo shared with me that she regretted having a job but not the money that went along with it, saying, "I'm heavy on not asking nobody for nothing." She went on to explain that she felt the need to be prepared for the worst at all times.

> Indigo: Honestly that's the type of person I am. Like, if I know I'm doing something I ain't supposed to be doing, I'm the motherfucker that's gonna ask a whole bunch of questions, give a whole bunch of scenarios, and see where your head at. What if this happened? Well, what we gone do? That's the type of person I am. I'm always be prepared for the worst. Need to know the plan.

When describing herself, Indigo spoke as though she was preparing for battle. Black girls who exhibit qualities of resilience – being "loud" or "defiant" or other traits in response "to the combined effects of racism, sexism, and classism" (M.W. Morris, 2012, p. 9) – frequently are repaid in the form of exclusionary discipline practices (Blake et al., 2011; M.W. Morris, 2012). I got the impression that if there was ever a fire, natural disaster, or attack on a building, she would be the first one out the door and know exactly how to reach safety.

Guardedness in Interactions: I Won't Talk First

A personal struggle I felt when working with Indigo was attempting to engage in easy back-and-forth dialogue. I had become accustomed to this with Audri and Samara, but Indigo seemed to wait for me to *make* conversation happen, which felt awkward. In the following discussion, Indigo indicated that she refuses to speak first in conversation, and I asked if it was because she was shy.

Indigo: I don't think I'm shy, but I just don't like talking first. Like, I'll talk. I'm just not gonna talk first. And then I can think that goes into like a little pride, too…cause it's like, I *can* do it…It's just my pride won't let me do it…It's like saying, why would you talk to them first? They could talk to you first because if they really want to talk to you, they'll talk to you.

Indigo felt that pride kept her from making the first move in conversation with others. She felt that if people really wanted to talk to her, they would. From what she said at the time, Indigo would lose no sleep if people did not talk to her. That was not always the case, however. In another conversation, Indigo again brought up the fact that she did not talk to people first, and she pondered how she was able to make friends. I described a former student I had in high school who would enter the classroom shouting his presence to the class. Indigo and I each shared that we both felt introverted on the inside but could hide it when necessary.

Indigo: Like, if I know you, or if I'm cool, like if I walk into a room and there's a whole bunch of people I know, I'm comfortable. (If) I walk in the room like (your student) did, like I'm comfortable like that. But if I just don't know you, I'll come in and not talk to nobody, get on my phone. Unless I'm spoken to. Yeah, so. **I don't know how I made friends.**

Jadyn: I wonder…like is it a trust thing, or is it part our nature?

Indigo: I don't know, like – maybe – maybe it's both. Maybe it's just probably what we prefer. Or like what we comfortable with…Like, I know people that just talks to anybody. But…I don't know what makes you just want to go and be friendly with

everybody. And I never asked that person that, but now I kind of want to know. Like, what made you go out there and just be so friendly?

Jadyn: What if I would pretend to be a completely different person for one day and just – get all in people's faces, like start asking them weird questions about themselves?

Indigo: Yes! And like, I could be wanting to ask somebody something for the longest but just won't do it, cause – I just not comfortable with just going up and just – Like at school. I just don't talk at school…Sometime, I be wanting to join in, but I be looking like, what if they look at me weird?

Indigo demonstrated that she had given a lot of thought to her own comfort level when opening up to various people. She worried about being judged when approaching peers she didn't know. She also raised a point about the authenticity of different relationships and interactions ("what made you go out there and just be so friendly?"). Though Indigo was quick in the beginning to chalk her reserved behavior up to an unwillingness to bend, it was evident that shyness, guardedness, and natural introversion were at play as well. In the next section, Indigo revealed her philosophy on attachment, which most certainly would have played a part in her ability to socialize and build relationships with peers.

Attachment: I Don't Need Anyone

In Indigo's mindset, love and respect were built on trust. Her physical and emotional separation from her parents was tied to her inability to trust them – or as I found in our conversation below, to hold her trust. Indigo had developed a guardedness that extended beyond her parents to others who were close to her. In the conversation below, I had asked

Indigo if she could trust her mother, and she replied, "No, not tell her certain things," and then shared that she did not trust her grandmother either.

Jadyn: So, who do you talk to?

Indigo: I don't. I don't gotta talk to nobody.

Jadyn: Would you say, for you…Do people need other people?

Indigo: No. You don't got to…As long as you got your own money and you straight, you don't need nobody. I mean I form bonds, but like I don't need them. That's what I'm saying. Like, if they leave, okay. I don't need them. Like its cool to have a bond. I'm not saying there's nothing wrong with that. I'm just saying you don't have to have that in your life. It's not necessary. It's not something that's a priority to me.

Figure 7.2

Indigo's Mindset

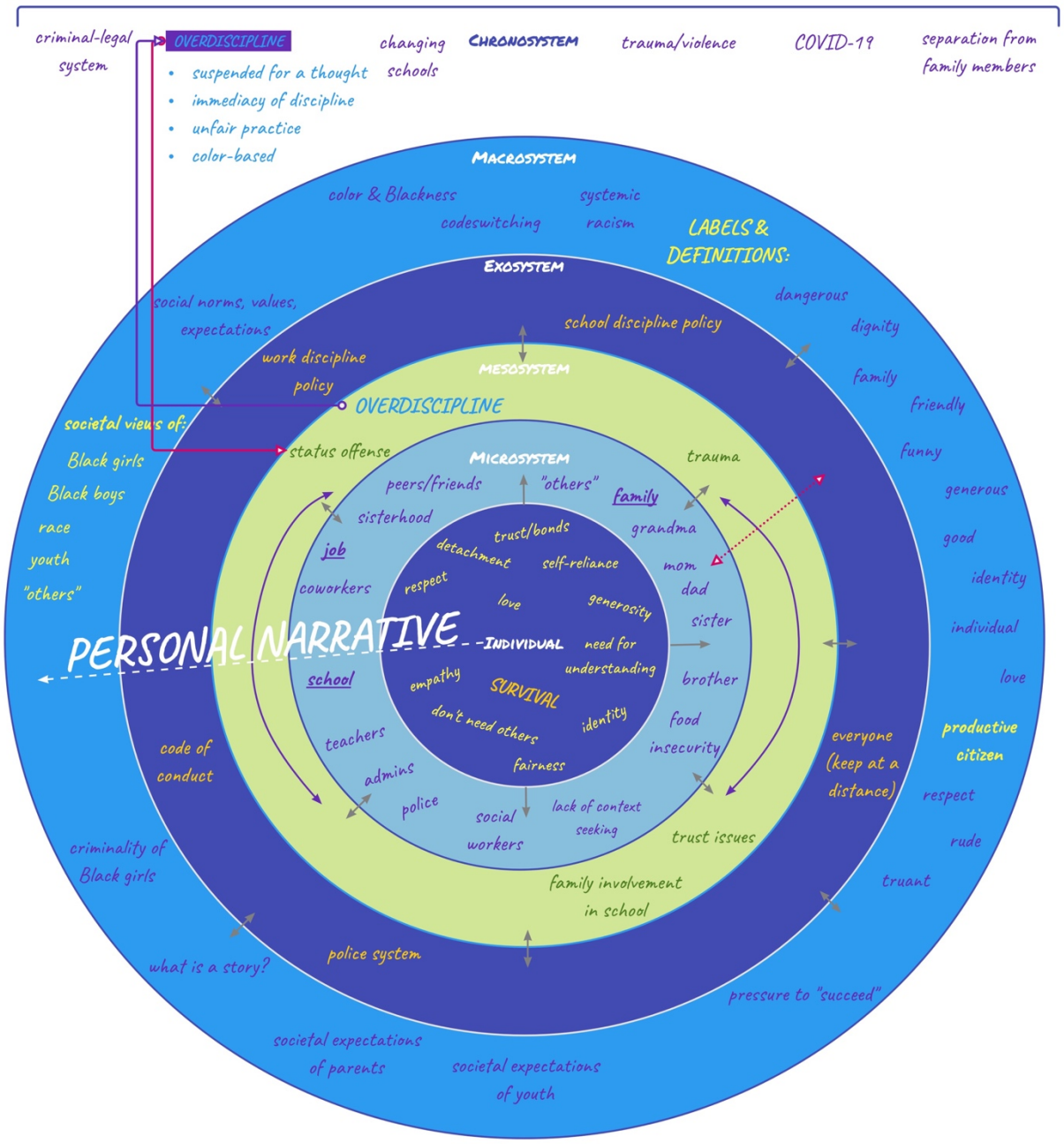
Indigo had developed the mindset that while bonds were good – and essential for love – they were actually unnecessary for anyone. For her, independence ("I don't have to depend on nobody for nothing"), self-reliance ("I'm straight"), and the ability to remain unattached ("you don't need nobody") were extremely important and lessened her chances of emotional injury. Making enough money to be comfortable and always having a plan ("I'm always prepared for a downfall") were essential for her personal security and emotional safety. As I reflected on and analyzed our discussions, Indigo's patterns related to relationship building revealed that relationships were almost frivolous to Indigo ("if they leave, okay. I don't need them") – in theory. However, Indigo shared with me that she did have close, trusting friendships. I believe this part of her mindset to be protective and idealistic – in that idealistically, she hoped to protect herself from further emotional harm – rather than hard-set.

Indigo's Ecological Systems

The diagram below (Figure 7.3) represents Indigo's individual mindset and ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as derived from the narratives that unfolded in our conversations. Indigo's personal narrative, as with Audri and Samara's diagrams, cuts across her ecology, indicating that her stories involve a complex interplay between her microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, chronosystem, and her own individual mindset.

Figure 7.3

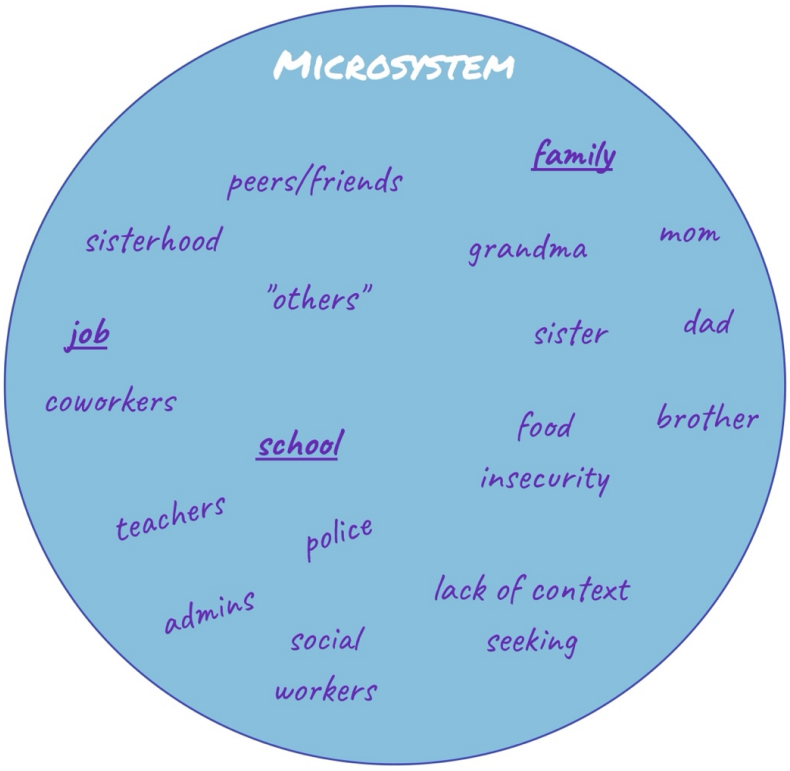
Indigo's Ecological Systems



Indigo's Microsystem

Figure 7.4

Indigo's Microsystem



Indigo's mindset was deeply affected by the people and settings in her microsystem, particularly the trust that she felt she could not place with her parents. Other members of her microsystem included her siblings, teachers and administrators, social workers at Okunye and police officers at City High School, and various school and home environments. Friends, peers, and coworkers also existed within Indigo's microsystem, along with situations within various settings. For example, Indigo felt a persistent lack of context-seeking from teachers and administrators when facing discipline at school, to be discussed later in this chapter. This resistance to seeking context can be seen as a macrosystem issue: teachers and other school

staff grapple with and act on their own connections to white social values, norms, and expectations when interacting with students. These values, norms, and expectations are the purview of the macrosystem. However, Indigo had to navigate this lack of context-seeking from her teachers and school administrators frequently at school – most specifically at City High – and this was in her microsystem.

Indigo drove to work with her sister several days per week. This gave her reliable transportation, and she depended on her job to provide her with an income and the associated independence this afforded her, which she greatly valued. However, her late work schedule affected her ability to wake up early and attend school consistently. She was hesitant to quit her job in favor of her academic progress, and by the middle of the spring semester during the study, she stopped attending school. The old adage, "it takes a village to raise a child" was put to the test: many adults rallied behind Indigo to get her back on track. Social workers picked her up at home to take her to school, her teachers and administrators met with her and her grandmother, and I even began calling her more often to check in. Indigo eventually did quit her job, resumed classes, and started an accelerated program that suited her better. She graduated early, at age seventeen, with her high school diploma as a result of her own hard work and perseverance and the support of many adults within her microsystem.

Relationship with Family: Separation and Detachment

Indigo was close to some members of her family and detached from others. The detachment from her parents was partially by choice, and she generally showed little emotion when speaking about anyone in her family. During the group session with Audri, Samara, and

Indigo, I asked if she wanted to share about her separation from her parents, as the other girls were also separated from their immediate families.

> Indigo: They had a choice to get out my life. They made a decision which led to that. Which it kinda made a difference in my life. Well, it *did* make a difference. Because now it's like, since they did make that choice, **now they kind of distant because they don't have rights to me**. So, it's like, kind of like they don't gotta do nothing they don't. But I still love them…**I just wish I had a connection like other people had with they moms and they dads**.
>
> Audri: I don't got a connection with my mom. She did me dirty.
>
> Samara: My daddy, like, when I go around, it be weird, like so weird! …Like, he just another person, "Whassup?"
>
> Indigo: I feel like they somebody I just go around, just cause…I got to.

Indigo felt a sense of obligation to see her family, but she longed for the type of connection that she knew other children had with their parents. Like her discussion of the baby photo in which her father was holding her, she spoke of her parents in a matter-of-fact way that revealed no pain. Still, she acknowledged that their decision to give up rights to her had affected her life.

Relationship with Peers: I'm Generous to a Point

Indigo's microsystem contained her peers and friends. At times when describing herself, she said that "people" called her generous. I asked Indigo to expand on this idea of generosity, and she explained that she was generous with the people she was close to – to a point.

Indigo: People say I'm generous because like, if I'm with you, I'm spending the money. So, that's why they call me generous. I'm always spending my money on other people.

Jadyn: But also, yourself?

Indigo: Yeah, kind of, but mostly on other people. That's why people call me *too* generous. In that way, I am. …Like, me spending money on other people and stuff like that…Yeah, I'm generous with money.

Jadyn: I feel like there's a "but" there. What things are you not generous with?

Indigo: Uhhh – I feel like I'm okay with a lot of things that I shouldn't be – But I'm trying to stop that. So, yeah.

Indigo trailed off at this last sentence and did not elaborate, and it took some pondering on my part during analysis. Picking it apart as a response to my question regarding what she was NOT generous about, I interpreted her "being okay with things" as a form of generosity that she was trying to stop. What exactly she was no longer willing to be okay with, she did not reveal. Perhaps she felt taken advantage of by friends or family. Often, it took reading the transcripts and rewatching the videos several times for me to come up with a reasonable interpretation of the meaning behind Indigo's words. She said very little when compared to Audri and Samara, who were ready to tackle most topics at length. What was left unsaid could be viewed as an unwillingness to say more, but I came to view it as an economy of words. Again, it's very possible that Indigo may have said more to a different researcher – perhaps a Black woman. However, when all three girls got together, Indigo was notably quiet but paid attention and weighed in with nods and vocalizations such as "Heyyyy" in response to what Audri and Samara said. Above all things, I took Indigo at her word when she said she was

rarely the person to speak first in any conversation, and I noted in all of her sessions that she was an excellent and responsive listener.

Generational Differences

Indigo expressed frustration with being misunderstood by adults and having her stories taken out of context. When she exhibited skills, she had built around self-advocacy and agency, she was often read as defiant and punished for actions that did not meet standards of conduct that required her to accept rules that did not resonate with her situation. She felt that she was pitted against adults who did not take the time to get to know her. These adults were part of her microsystem: teachers, school administrators, and school police officers whom she saw and interacted with every day at school. They held the upper hand in a power imbalance and disciplinary structure that felt unfair to Indigo, and she included her peers in this narrative.

During the group session with all three girls, Indigo, Audri, and Samara discussed feeling lumped together as "kids" without having their individual needs – or generational differences – considered. This was a form of identity threat (van Laar et al., 2010).

> Samara: Kids be like, so different like in so many ways. Go through so many different things, *been through* so many different things…So, I don't like how (discipline is) just one set thing…
>
> Indigo: And I hate how adults compare like, our school to how they was back in the day. I hate that.
>
> Audri: Whooo preach…
>
> Indigo: We a whole different generation than y'all.

Indigo recognized that her generation is different from those that came before, and they have a valuable point of view that is worth paying attention to (Zembylas, 2002). The three participants collectively and individually expressed that they were treated differently both as young Black girls – in intersectional positionality that they recognized as unique. Indigo shared frustration with being lumped together with other groups, calling for better attention to their generational needs.

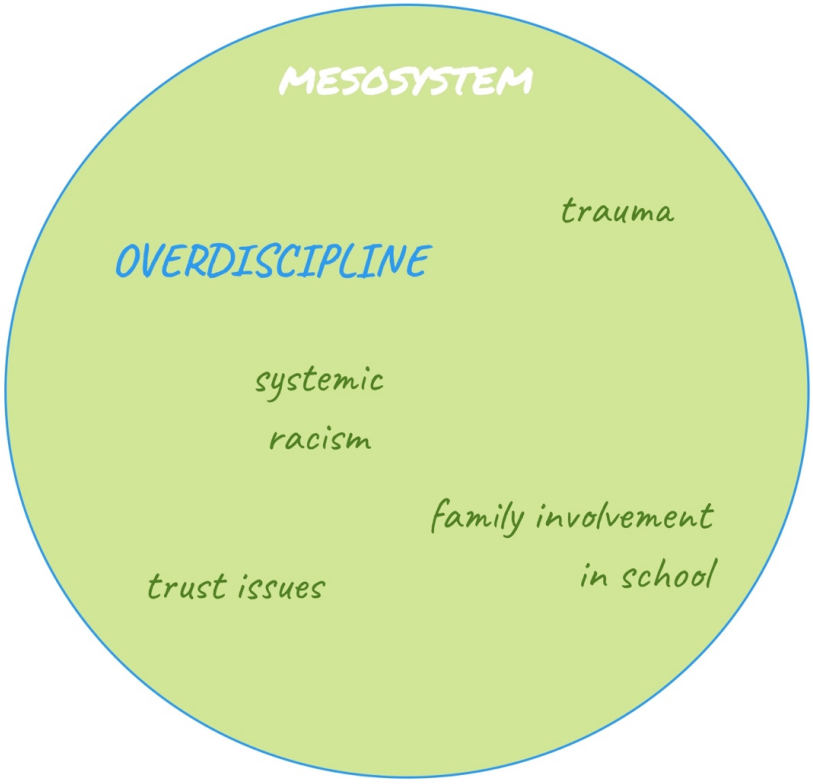
Indigo, like her fellow participants, had become highly skilled at advocating for her own needs, surviving her particular set of life circumstances through fierce and unbending independence, and filtering the information she shared with others. These skills were not always viewed as strengths by the people in her microsystem, and her status as a minor at times made her vulnerable to the whims of adults in power. The next section discusses situations that arose within her mesosystem as a result of this tension.

Indigo's Mesosystem

The mesosystem included the results of certain interactions between people and settings within Indigo's microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Overdiscipline and her grandmother's need to be involved at school, certain trauma responses, and trust issues are results of people and institutions within Indigo's microsystem interacting together and upon her despite her strides toward independence. The mesosystem interaction that intimately affected Indigo the most and will be discussed in this section is overdiscipline, including status offenses.

Figure 7.5

Indigo's Mesosystem



Overdiscipline

Indigo did not experience discipline issues until she entered middle school. Similar to Audri, she began getting suspended for what seemed like minor issues in the 8th grade, and things escalated quite rapidly once she entered high school. By March of her freshman year, Indigo was suspended for three weeks and subsequently expelled. What follows is an account of three incidents in which Indigo was disciplined in school, due to the confluence of teachers' lack of context-seeking, zero-tolerance policies within the district code of conduct, and/or unfair and inequitable discipline practices.

Suspended for Laughing. In the conversation below, Indigo and I were discussing the types of school discipline that she had been subjected to. Indigo had been placed in ISS (in-school suspension) many times. I asked her what kinds of reasons she was put in ISS.

> Indigo: One time I got sent to ISS cause…I guess we was sharing what we was scared of. And this was…the first day of my 8th grade year. And it was my last class…And there was this boy, said he was scared of spiders, and that was just funny to us…And then that's when, we got sent to ISS for it. Which, I don't know, probably a situation it's like, why are you laughing at what we scared of? …But I can't help that made me laugh…I guess they say, I'm makin fun of him. But it wasn't making fun of him. It was just…the way he was saying it…like it was a big deer coming out there.

Though Indigo and her friends were laughing at a fellow student for sharing his fears during an activity on the first day of school, she reported that they did not mean any harm by it but found his description legitimately funny. Perhaps their laughter was deemed too loud, or the teacher failed to regain control of the class. Black girls are frequently penalized in school for "perceived loudness" or "aggression" in the hopes that discipline – including instructions in "ladylike" behavior – will lead to more "acceptable" qualities (E.W. Morris, 2007).

Suspended for a Thought: Wanting to Fight. Indigo was suspended at least twice in scenarios I began to call "suspended for a thought": she was removed not just from the classroom but from school for days or weeks because of the idea that she might cause – or could have caused – trouble, with no evidence of actual wrongdoing. In the story below, Indigo recounted being suspended for wanting to fight, but not for actually fighting. She began the story as we were exploring the interlocking concepts of identity, labels, school, and discipline.

Indigo: Um, I don't know…how to say. Like, I don't know…I feel like my color just goes into that…I just feel like something that I did, and another person that do (it), they wouldn't have had what my consequence was.

Jadyn: Okay so, meaning that like if you had been white, you wouldn't have had the same –

Indigo: Yeah, in some situations yeah that'd happen, not all. Because **in some situations I can say that I did overreact** and kind of took it overboard. **But other situations, I just think it was just pointless.**

Like…before I got expelled…I was in PE class, and I went to the bathroom. I took my backpack with me. And some kids, like two of my friend, they wanted to play and joke around and take my backpack out the bathroom and hide it. And somebody else found it and **took everything out my backpack. And they stole everything I had**.

…I got suspended though, for wanting to fight because they took my stuff. They didn't get in trouble. I just feel like I got in trouble for no reason, because I didn't even touch them yet. I was going to. I was looking for them.

Jadyn: Oh really? So, you got suspended for *wanting* to fight?

Indigo: Yeah! I didn't even get a chance to see them. Like I was looking for them, and then a whole bunch of kids just started following me. And then, I guess (the administrators) saw a whole bunch of kids following me so then they intervened.

Indigo understood that identity threat was inherent in the way disciplinary action was taken based on race at City High. Though the other students around her prevented her from fighting, she was punished as though she had carried out the action. This seemed unfair to

Indigo, and she felt that the more appropriate response from the administrators would have been to let her go back to class. While the boy who stole Indigo's backpack was also Black, she felt that she would not have been suspended had she been white.

Suspended for a Thought: They Heard I Had a Lighter. This last story in the mesosystem section involves Indigo being once again "suspended for a thought" – this time the idea that she may have had a lighter.

> Indigo: So, I think before I got expelled, I got suspended like three times. And then, like, outta them three times like one of the times, it was for like two or three weeks. It wasn't supposed to be that long, but it stretched to that long.
>
> … (A student) told and said I had a lighter. But they didn't find a lighter on me…I think (the student) saw it. Like I just had it.
>
> Jadyn: …Somebody *said* you had a lighter, you weren't *using* a lighter? But you got suspended?
>
> Indigo: I guess they claimed it was a safety thing. And they it didn't find it on me, so…I guess they wasn't able to check the cameras and stuff. I…couldn't come to school until they checked the cameras. And it took them like a minute, so my grandma had to call them like, "So, did y'all check the cameras? Did y'all find anything?" They did not get back to her, my grandma had to get back in touch with them. And that was like a week after the situation. Yeah, (I was out) like two or three weeks.

Indigo's suspension overlapped the beginning of the COVID-19 quarantine after spring break of 2020, and she was eventually expelled and enrolled at Okunye. I scoured the code of conduct list of "gross disobedience and misconduct" infractions in an attempt to find which

rule Indigo violated by having a lighter and found nothing specific. The list did include the language, "Any other acts that endanger the well-being of students, teachers, or any school/district-authorized personnel" (District, 2021). Lacking a more specific violation, I can only assume this is the infraction the administrators may have cited. According to Indigo, she was not endangering anyone during this event.

Rather than being taken at her word, Indigo was made to prove her innocence while under suspension and missing valuable class time, a situation Black girls frequently face (Meiners, 2007). She admitted to me that she'd had a lighter at first but had gotten rid of it, and school officials never found it. She may have violated a rule by having it in the first place. However, the code of conduct is ambiguous in its wording (District, 2021). Some teenagers smoke (Barnes & Motz, 2018; Meiners, 2015). Suspending a student for having a lighter – whether one is found or not – reinforces the false construct of "child innocence" and penalizes them for failing to live up to it (Meiners, 2015).

I asked Indigo what she would have done differently if she had been in charge. Indigo, like Audri and Samara, valued truth and empathy, and so her response unsurprisingly called upon those traits in seeking context before administering punishment. She also provided more context to her own story.

> Indigo: Well…like they did check me out, but I woulda did that. I woulda checked. But if I just couldn't find it, I would probably just send them on their way because then like, I have the evidence…it happened in the beginning of the day, but they didn't actually come get me until my last class. So, I forgot about (it)…because it happened in the (morning)…They're like, "Oh don't you have lighter?" I'm like, *(looking confused)* "A

lighter? Who you hear that from?" …and I'm like, *(to self) Aw, yeah, I did have a lighter*…And I guess they were trying to say I was lying about it.

The administrators' unwillingness to reconsider the seriousness of the situation resulted in Indigo being removed from school for weeks and ultimately expelled – for allegedly possessing what many adults would consider an everyday, harmless item, and which the administrators never found. Audri and Samara heard the story later in the project during the group session, and their response is described below.

Overdiscipline: Group Response to Indigo

During the group session, I asked Indigo if she would mind sharing the lighter incident with Audri and Samara. She briefly described the incident. What followed, besides the shared indignance of Audri and Samara, was a discussion between the two older girls of how some students would snitch to get on teacher's good side. These students were insinuated to be white, and the whole situation was described as favoritism shown toward white students by teachers. This led me to wonder whether the girls had opinions connecting discipline and race, since I had discussed the convergence of these two topics individually with all three girls. I suggested my idea of what administrators might have done if Indigo had been white.

Jadyn: I would even kind of submit…if (Indigo) had been a little white girl, they would have been like, "okay go back to class."

Audri: Right!

Samara: Never would have even searched her.

Described previously, Samara had her own experiences with colorism and racism. Her statement that Indigo would never have been searched at all had she been white indicated that

she thought about race when it came to discipline. I then briefly stated that Indigo also was suspended for wanting to fight over a situation in which her backpack was stolen. Audri's response to this was to first empathize with Indigo.

> Jadyn: She got suspended anyway, even though she didn't actually fight anybody.
>
> Audri: Nah baby, listen. Baby, listen, cause *bayBEE*. You gone steal my book bag and you gonna let these little hooligans stop me from fighting? Oh no. I'm fixin to ***give*** you a reason to suspend me now. Cause I'm fixin to fight everybody who trying to stop me.

For a short time, the three girls were able to support and commiserate with one another over their shared anger and frustration. Witnessing the older girls respond to Indigo with natural outrage over the situations in which she had been placed, and liken her experience of overdiscipline to their own, was valuable. As they began to make connections between each other's experiences, I watched Indigo become more interested in the discussion. She leaned forward and allowed her face to come into full view as Audri and Samara talked about treating kids with respect. While she did not volunteer much in the way of conversation, she listened intently, appearing to take it all in.

Status Offenses

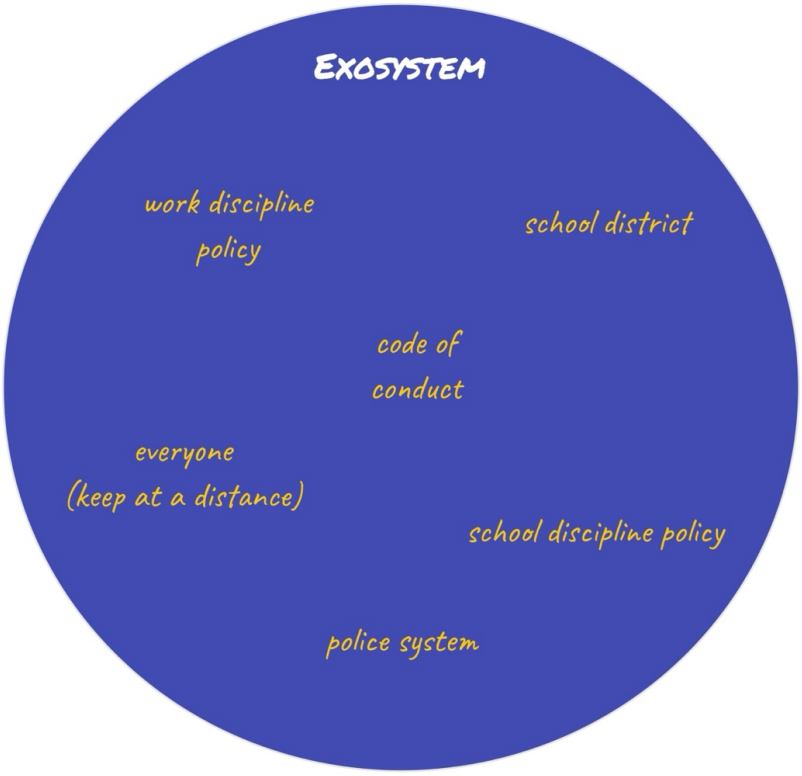
Many of Indigo's incidents in school, along with those of the other girls in the study, were status offenses – acts that were considered "violations of the law" only because of their age. Possession of a lighter would not have been an issue if Indigo had been over the age of eighteen and sitting in a college classroom or standing in line at the grocery store. A high school junior may be suspended for possession of a lighter, while her 18-year-old peer or sibling may walk next to her unmolested with the same item in their pocket. The question then

is begged (and was asked by all three girls): what is assumed by administrators when they punish Black children for infractions which can be classified as status offenses and not acts which disrupt, threaten, or harm the school, staff, or fellow students? Similarly, what are the purposes of adhering to codes of conduct or behavior standards that enforce conformity and neglect to consider situational context?

Indigo's Exosystem

Figure 7.6

Indigo's Exosystem



The exosystem is the system of settings and other elements that are outside of Indigo's control but that still have the power to affect her (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The school system, including its disciplinary policy, the police system, workplace policies, and importantly the

school district code of conduct are impactful parts of Indigo's exosystem. The process that Indigo and I took in analyzing the code of conduct document is detailed in Chapter 4. This section will focus on how the code of conduct affected Indigo's relationships.

The Code of Conduct and its Range of Influence

As detailed in Chapter 4, Indigo spent her last session with me investigating the district code of conduct. As a device used to hold students accountable to rules and standards upheld by the district and its administrators, including discipline and punishment, the code of conduct was outside of Indigo's immediate sphere of influence, even though it was wielded by those in her microsystem. It affected her relationships.

Relationships with Staff. As we were pondering what items to place on the "Bomb" (Serious) vs. "Not Bomb" (Mild) list[4], we came to the "threats to staff" infraction. Indigo felt that "just threats" were "not that serious." Because we were working to create a new list that was fairer, I felt the need to push her thinking.

Jadyn: Okay, what if it's a white student who's threatening or intimidating or calling a Black staff member the N-word?

Indigo: *(thoughtfully)* Yeah.

Jadyn: So that's more serious?

Indigo: Mm-hm. It's on. *(I interpreted this to mean it was worth fighting over.)*

Teachers are usually white, middle-class women: from the standpoint of a Black girl, "school staff" can represent power and possible harm (Reynolds, 2019). Indigo felt that school

[4] See Chapter 4

staff had broken her trust and removed her from educational spaces without consideration of her needs or listening to her story. Threats to staff might not seem like a serious infraction but rather a protective stance. When Indigo stated that threats to staff were not that serious, I considered it from a racialized point of view. I flipped what I thought might be the racial assumptions she was imagining "staff" and "student" to be. She reconsidered her stance, and I became about curious what might have happened had I approached this conversation differently. Rather than assuming, I could have asked her first what race she envisioned staff to be. Upon analysis, I still wonder about the types of interactions children have with their teachers and with each other. External factors – such as codes of conduct and other policies – could affect the way children view themselves and the adults in their lives, especially if those children are perceiving racial differences in the way they are treated.

The school district code of conduct was used as an official device by which to exclude and punish Indigo without the need for context: with zero-tolerance policies in place, certain infractions could automatically get a child expelled, regardless of context. Upon speaking with Indigo's social workers, I was informed that students had been sent to Okunye for the possession of mace, because it was considered a weapon. Schools with zero-tolerance policies may not ask questions about why a child is carrying mace. At Okunye, however, the staff recognized that many of the girls lived in neighborhoods that made it necessary for them to carry mace or pepper spray for self-defense on their way to and from school. Okunye's solution was to collect these items from students when they arrived and return them at dismissal. Administrators at Okunye actively sought ways to look beyond zero-tolerance policies and privilege the individual wellbeing of their students.

Relationships with Peers: Horseplay Leads to Fighting. In creating her new list, Indigo placed several items into the "Question" category: infractions she felt required further investigation before administering judgment or administering punishment. This included alcohol and drug use as well as horseplay. Indigo explained that just the previous day she had gotten into a fight with her friends. "Play fighting. That's how it always happens," she said matter-of-factly. What had started as play had turned into fighting and a loss of friendship, and she felt that this infraction was worth keeping on the list in some form. Indigo's willingness to keep certain items in the code of conduct showed that she valued some of the structure, and perhaps safety, it provided.

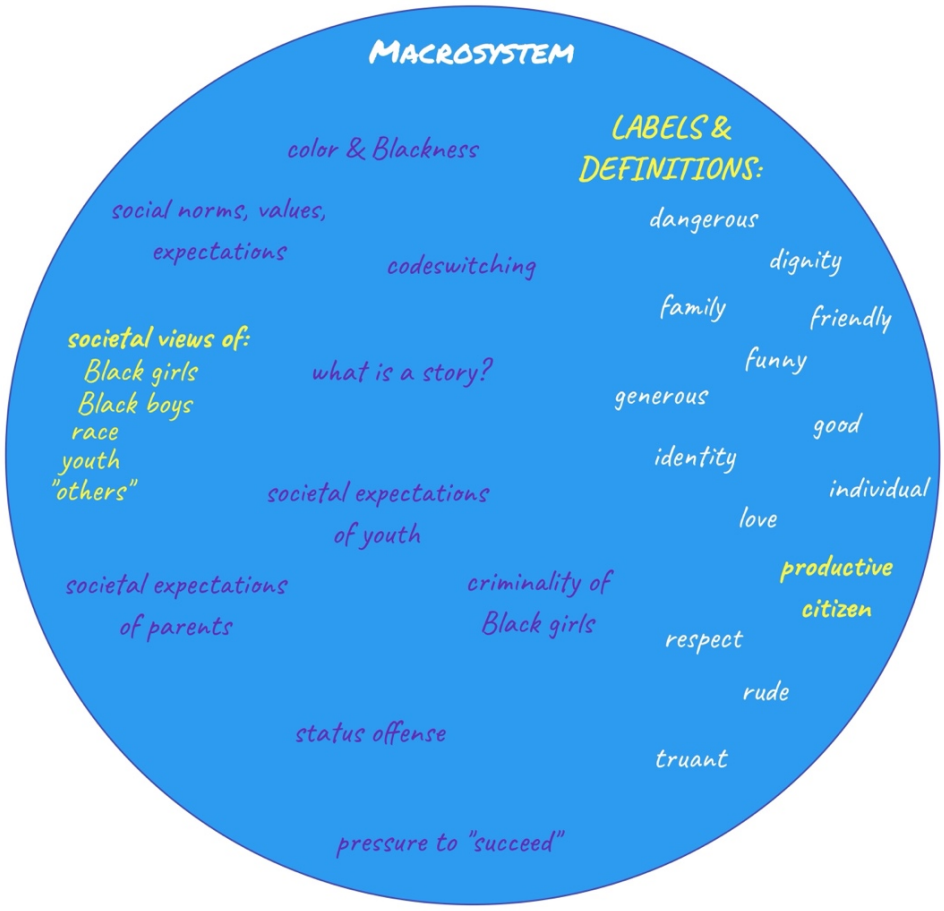
By having Indigo examine and question the code of conduct, we moved it closer to her internal sphere of influence. What was previously a document created by adults who did not know her was now something she could interact with it. At the end of the school year, we were invited to bring her questions and recommendations before a select group of senior administrators at the school district. Indigo refused to attend, but I presented her findings with her permission. The district officials at the meeting were surprised by her questions and suggestions and admitted they had not considered Indigo's ideas. They confessed they had not combed through the document as we had done to question ambiguous and problematic wording or its ability to entrap Black girls, and they stated that changes were indeed necessary. These high-level administrators were outside Indigo's immediate sphere of influence as part of her exosystem, but their influence on Indigo's life was nevertheless influential: the code of conduct they upheld had a direct impact on Indigo as the staff at City High looked to it for guidance in removing her from school spaces. However, the document did not apply to the

administrators who managed it, and so they had no immediate reason to investigate its mechanisms.

Indigo's Macrosystem

Figure 7.7

Indigo's Macrosystem



The macrosystem included social norms, values, and expectations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These elements were prevalent in structures and institutions with which Indigo and her peers came into contact, as well as the people in her life who expected her to behave and interact with them "acceptable" ways. These same norms, values, and expectations were used

in the creation of the district code of conduct. Other aspects of Indigo's macrosystem included labels; societal views and definitions of Blackness, color, race, and youth; the existence of status offenses; the criminalization of Black girls; societal expectations of parents and children; definitions of "success;" and systemic racism.

What is a "Productive Citizen?"

After examining and recategorizing the "gross disobedience and misconduct" list, Indigo decided to analyze the rights and responsibilities of students and staff in the district code of conduct (see Appendix F, Figures F2 and F3, respectively). I was curious what Indigo thought about her second responsibility as a student: "To become a productive citizen." Indigo said, "I wanna know what they mean by that." I was similarly curious. To me, "productive citizen" was both an ambiguous and subjective term. Indigo asked what a productive citizen is, and how do you become one. I had further questions.

Jadyn: What would we want them to do about this? …I mean, is it a bad goal?

Indigo: No.

Jadyn: What's your idea of a productive citizen?

Indigo: I just feel like, could be somebody that does good for themself. You don't have to go to school to be a productive…I mean **you don't have to finish to want to be a good citizen in the world**. A lot of people didn't go to school that still doin' good for themselves. **You can't just go based on what society say a productive citizen is**.

For Indigo, it was important to define that a "productive citizen" and "good at school" were not synonymous. This speaks to Indigo's rejection of a societal definition of "success" as someone who at the very least finishes high school and ideally goes on to college. In Indigo's

mindset, independence and self-reliance were pillars, and these were not necessarily achieved through academic success. She called upon the district to define what a successful citizen was or remove it from the list of student responsibilities. Additionally, she suggested that an addition be made to the list of staff responsibilities, reflecting their obligation to guide children toward productive citizenship if this was to remain on the student list.

Social Situations

I Don't Like Being Around a Lot of People. As described earlier, the original design of this study was to include self-portraits photographed by the participants, but they had difficulty with it. Indigo shared just one current photo of herself with me, which she took while she was working. Using critical dialogue questions as a guide (Appendix A), Indigo shared the context in which she took the photo.

> Indigo: Well, I'm at work, and I'm ready to *go home*, so to make me go home faster I went to go take me a little fifteen (minute break). So, I went to go sit down on the floor. The break room was full, and I don't like being around a lot of people…it be weird being in the break room. It's so quiet in there and…**I feel like everybody's looking at me and listening to me, and I don't like that**. This [photo] relate to my life and other people's lives because I know people be feeling like me: ready to get off work after having a *long, stressful day*. And especially if you a student and you got to go to school in the morning. Oof!

Indigo felt uncomfortable being in the breakroom while others were there because she felt people were watching or listening to her. This is similar to Samara's comments that her coworkers would watch her while she was working, as though she might steal something. Both

girls felt the eyes of their coworkers on them. This type of surveillance is reported by Black girls and women in varying spaces, including school, work, their own neighborhoods, and on social media (M.W. Morris, 2012; Reynolds, 2019; Reynolds & Hicks, 2016).

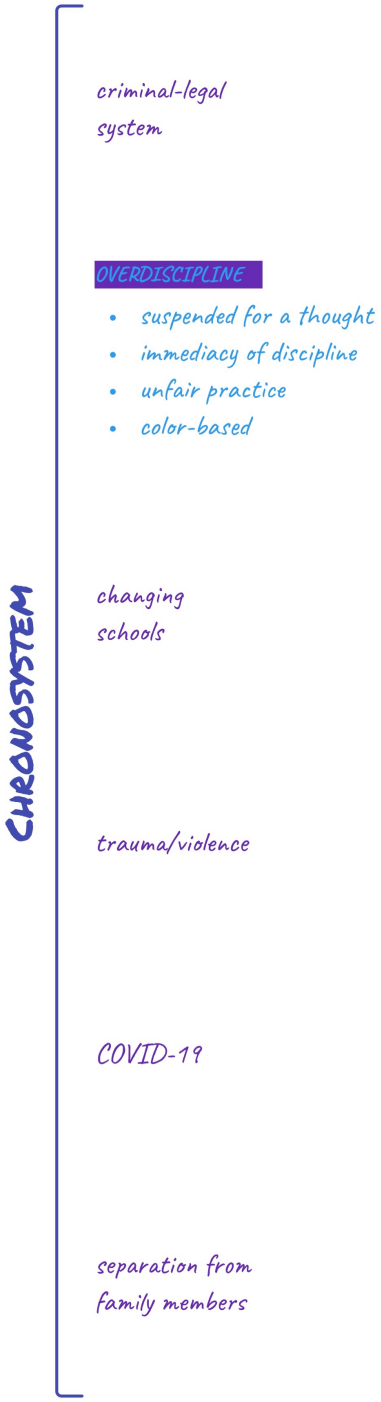
Indigo practiced being a productive citizen, according to her own definition, by working a steady job at age sixteen while trying to go to school despite hardships. She graduated early with the help of adults who rallied around her who thought outside the typical macrosystem constraints of expected outcomes and normative schooling definitions. Indigo participated in a program that allowed her to get school credit for work experience, which was a better fit for her independent personality. However, this is not a common outcome for many Black girls who do not conform to expected societal norms (E.W. Morris, 2007).

Changes in Indigo's chronosystem which impacted Indigo profoundly included her move to Okunye, trauma and violence specifically involving her family members and police, separation from her parents, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Broad continuities for Indigo within this system included the criminal-legal system and overdiscipline. Though overdiscipline is a product of intersetting interactions within the microsystem and is therefore located in the mesosystem, the overdisciplining of all three girls in this study was so pervasive that it transitioned the ecological boundaries (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Because the other elements of her chronosystem have been sufficiently covered in other sections, only two elements – the immediacy of discipline and police violence – are discussed below.

Indigo's Chronosystem

Figure 7.8

Indigo's Chronosystem



Distrust and the Criminal-Legal System

When Indigo was four years old, her cousin was shot and killed by police at the age of fifteen. When I asked why she did not trust police, she shared the following story.

> Indigo: My cousin got killed by the police…I was younger, but I remember him because he was always at our house…I still remember him. (*Her voice gets quieter*) I don't know how, but I do. I remember one story about him. We had a barbecue, so we had leftovers. I was only four. And he asked me to warm him up some. I'm like, what the heck? But…I still managed to do it.
>
> Jadyn: What about your family? Was that talked about a lot?
>
> Indigo: Well not a lot, but like, we all know. And then it's like, we know another police officer did it, but they paid another one off to leave.

As with many of her stories, Indigo shared this memory with a flat affect in her voice and little facial expression. However, her voice did take on a wistful quality as she shared how she helped prepare her cousin's food at such a young age. It seemed meaningful to her that she had this connection with him and could hold onto this memory of him.

This single incident in Indigo's life drives at something deeper and more systemic: throughout slavery and in its ongoing afterlife, Black bodies have been "structurally and perpetually subject to premature death and ongoing captivity" including high rates of police violence against Black communities (Wun, 2016a). Indigo had built walls around herself to not let people in. Her own experiences with police, teachers, and school administrators who had forced her removal from educational spaces, coupled with memories of family members who

had been harmed and killed, were reinforcements of the reasons she had to distrust others, particularly adults.

The Immediacy of Discipline: Dignity and Respect

Indigo was never given a copy of the district code of conduct, though the seventh "right" of students was to be informed of their rights, responsibilities, and discipline policies (District, 2021). The document was sixty-seven pages long and inclusive of policies for grades K-12. A child who was interested in finding the policy that applied to her would need to be exceptionally motivated to search through such a large document. Indigo had questions about the expectations placed upon students, who had never seen the code of conduct, vs. what was expected of teachers.

> Indigo: I mean, it's on there, but (it) don't mean they follow the rules. But they want us to. Like, they put all the stuff that they want. All the stuff we can get in trouble for doing…But what if they don't treat us like uh (*looking at the page*) with dignity or (as) a individual, what's gonna happen about that? Nothing…I'm saying: **What actions will be taken if they don't follow the rules,** like they tell us what actions will be taken if we don't follow their rules?

The answer to Indigo's question – "what were the immediate consequences for staff who did not follow the rules with regard to caring for children?" – was not in the document. There was language in the document that detailed the right to "due process and appeal" – but this was limited to appeals for disciplinary action. There was not a list of infractions for teachers similar to the one for students, and this stood out to Indigo, who had felt mistreated (when she was punished for being angry when her backpack was stolen), and possibly racially profiled

(when she was suspended for having a lighter that was never found). The immediacy with which she could be thrown from any educational space – and the lack of a clear-cut path for recourse – was pervasive in her schooling experience and left her questioning the precariousness of her situation ("what if they don't treat us with dignity?")

Significance

Analysis of Indigo's sessions took much longer for me than for the other two girls in this study. Audri and Samara wanted to tell their stories and were enthusiastic about most topics. While the older girls were confident in not only their ability to discuss their lived experiences but also in an audience's willingness to listen, Indigo was not. This could possibly be due to the fact that Indigo had been suspended more often than the other girls and had only been at Okunye for a couple of months by the time we met, while Samara and Audri had been there for at least two years and had more experience in a smaller class environment, with social workers who supported them, where they could practice voicing their thoughts. On the other hand, Indigo's walls prevented her from opening up to many people, especially adults, so only time will tell whether this might have improved with age and experience.

Indigo refused to attend the meeting with the district code of conduct committee, and I went with her permission to present her findings. Looking back on this and considering her mindset, I recalled that the protective devices she had developed included a refusal to hold onto things she believed would not change. Indigo's experience was that the school district was harmful to her. The importance of work of this nature includes listening and attending to the needs of Black children who have been harmed by the very systems which they may seek

to change. Taking the final step of *asking* for this change may feel impossible, and this is perhaps where adults can serve as the strongest advocates.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

I'll make you happy before I make myself happy. Say I'm going through something, and…somebody was going through something too. I won't even tell them. I'll…help them through with theirs. So…they won't even know something wrong with me.

Indigo

Like, just the littlest thing will help somebody, and you might think it won't. But deep down. Like, and I really go based off how I've felt before. What I wanted people to do for me when I had certain situations.

Samara

Why can't you just look at me for me? And I will admit. Yes, I made mistakes, *plenty* of mistakes. But that doesn't define *me*.

Audri

Each of the girls in this study exhibited traits that showed them to be empathic, determined, thoughtful, generous, kind, funny, complex human beings who valued independence, strength of character, and perseverance. They were especially determined to show that they embodied more than the stories that their teachers, school administrators, peers, and sometimes even family members constructed about them and maintained. Children who are disciplined frequently in school often acquire a reputation for meriting or even deserving such discipline and find it difficult to near impossible to shed this status (Barnes & Motz, 2018; Leafgren, 2012). All three girls developed forms of self-protection as a result of the conflict and tension they experienced as they regularly confronted hegemonic societal expectations. These expectations were enforced by adults in their lives. A punitive cycle ensued: 1) the participants developed stronger protective behaviors in response to harm that adults inflicted, 2) they were punished for this subsequent response, 3) the punishment further

damaged their trust in the adults entrusted with their care, and 4) the cycle continued as the adults failed to examine their own behavior or the needs of the child.

Figure 8.1

Combined Ecological Systems Diagram for Group

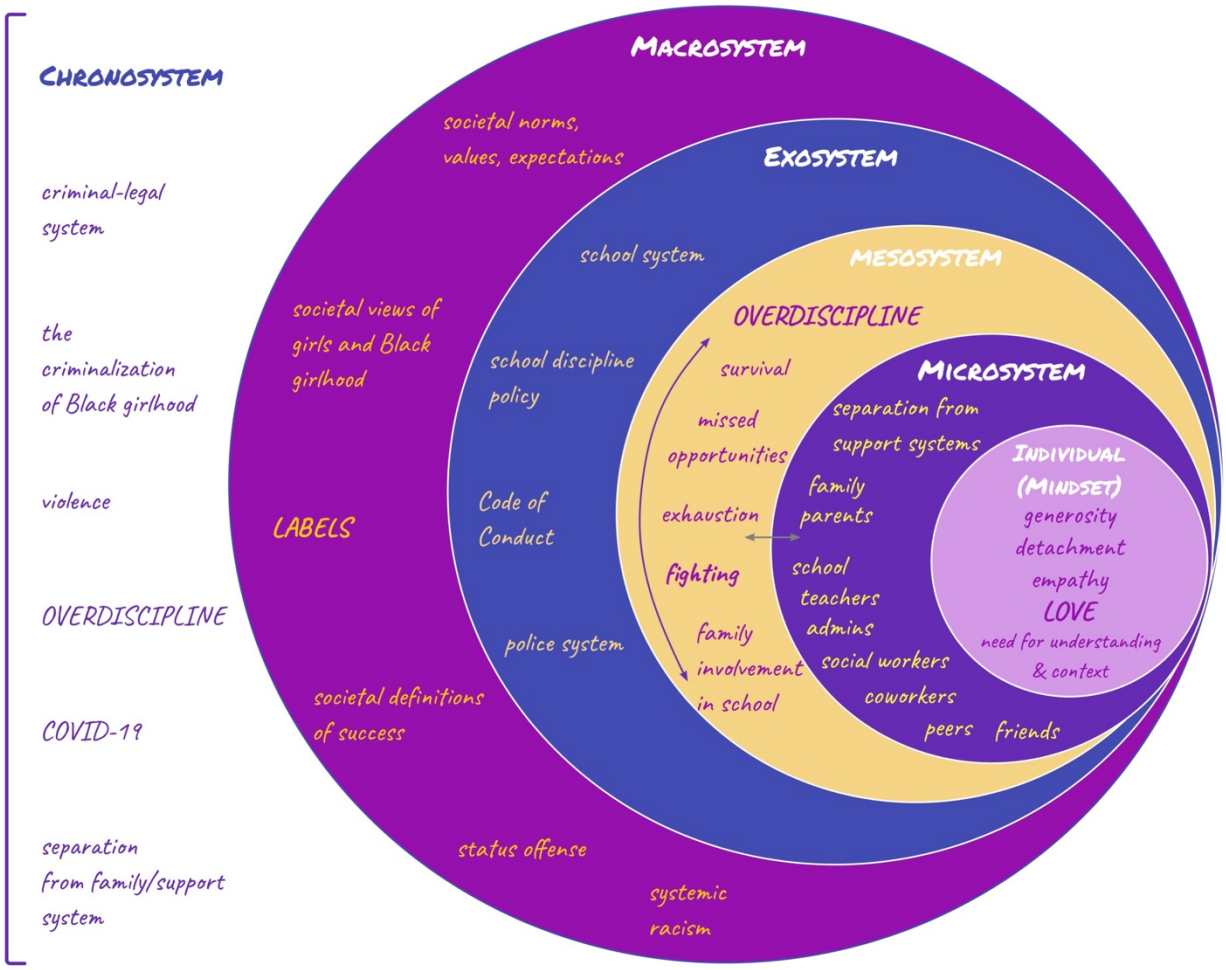


Figure 8.1 represents convergence in the mindset and ecological systems of Audri, Samara, and Indigo (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), derived after analysis of all project sessions, including the group session in which all three girls participated. This discussion chapter addresses how the eliciting of stories through qualitative interview sessions, along with the examination each girl conducted of her own mindset and the structures in her world, can lead

to a better understanding of the viewpoints of Black girls who are overdisciplined. By examining storytelling and mindset, overdiscipline and ecological systems, and the perspectives of overdiscipline of these participants, the potential for policy change is possible, which can enhance the lives of children like Audri, Samara, and Indigo. I provide implications for future action, policy change, and research.

Storytelling and Mindset

When I introduced this project to Audri, Samara, and Indigo, each of them said that what made them decide to do it was the storytelling aspect: they felt that people needed to hear the stories of girls like them who had been overdisciplined in school. They wanted discipline policies to change. They also liked that they would be exploring *themselves* and that the project put their voices first.

Both Samara and Audri commented that no one ever asked them questions like the ones they were grappling with. The deceptively simple but very complex question, "Who are you?" was confounding for Indigo, who admitted that she had no idea who she was and wanted to learn. When I asked her to tell me a story, I was met with "I ain't got no stories," even though she had joined the study to tell her story. Of course, all three girls had numerous stories to tell.

Through storytelling, I learned that Audri loved real Christmas trees, Samara could ride a bike, and Indigo put others before herself. I discovered that Samara preferred to answer questions through stories, as every time I asked her anything, I got a story in return. I found that Audri struggled – hard – against a darkness that threatened to overtake her, and she

refused to let it win. And I peeked behind Indigo's walls to find that she kept her mother close, though she could not satisfy her daughter's emotional needs.

There were common elements within the three girls' ecosystems and the ways in which they interactions with these systems, and this was learned through storytelling. For example, in telling their stories of being judged, labeled, and overdisciplined, all three girls emphasized the need for understanding and context-seeking from authority figures and peers as well as when trying to understand others themselves. They each placed a high value on empathy, trust, generosity, kindness, and independence. All exhibited emotional detachment from family, friends, and/or others close to them as a result of emotional or literal abandonment in their past. All of them felt older than their actual age – and the level of discipline they experienced for minor or nonexistent offenses is consistent with research reflecting how Black girls are adultified (Burton, 2007; Epstein et al., 2017; E.W. Morris, 2007; Reynolds, 2019).

It is through stories that context is built. These stories, and many others, shaped who Indigo, Audri, and Samara are. Black girls are the "experts in their own lives" (Reynolds, 2019; Smith et al., 2012; Wang, 2006), and it is therefore essential to listen to their stories and perspectives to gain understanding. We must solicit their ideas, perspectives, and calls-to-action when considering the impact of educational systems, structures, and spaces on their lives. However, the work of repair is not theirs to do. I discuss this in the Limitations section of this chapter.

Overdiscipline and Project Frameworks

Audri, Samara, and Indigo were involved in the direction of this project, and our sessions were semi-structured and built upon each other. Each story or narrative that the girls

shared opened new pathways of discovery in which we could examine how relationships, settings, societal views, disciplinary approaches, and significant contextual events in their lives worked together. As Samara, Indigo, and Audri asked new questions or discovered new ideas about themselves or their experiences, we were able to push the project in new directions.

By engaging in YPAR research, children do not internalize the oppressive sociocultural factors to the same degree they may have prior to their involvement in the YPAR project (Smith et al., 2012). As I analyzed the girls' stories, the data naturally stratified into the spheres of ecological systems theory. PVEST maintains that a person's own sense-making (phenomenology) of their socialization and their social position is crucial to understanding their development (Velez & Spencer, 2018). Conducting the current study through this interlocking approach – combining CRT, intersectionality, and PVEST – revealed the structures and systems of both risk and support (Velez & Spencer, 2018) for the participants and allowed them to engage with the forms of oppression they encountered in some systems. Each girl made discoveries of her own which allowed her to question unfair and inequitable policies and power structures. This included ways by which they were each overdisciplined in school. Ultimately, discoveries via storytelling and inquiry led Indigo, with my help, to explore the code of conduct and make recommendations to the school district.

As Black girls who were overdisciplined in school for many years, each participant's trust in school, teachers, and administrators was always shaky, and walls were always high or ready to be built – or reinforced. Samara's barriers at Okunye went up on the first day, when a teacher at Okunye branded her a fighter and said "I don't like you" – and these walls never came back down. This was a source of frustration for Samara since she viewed Okunye as the

possibility for a fresh start. By viewing Samara's narrative through an intersectional lens, it is possible to take a more nuanced view of her situation (Velez & Spencer, 2018). Samara was a Black girl who was raised to stand up for herself and be proud of her skin, her beauty, her worth, and her strength. This did not fit within the societal norm of (white) femininity as quiet and compliant, nor was it acceptable within a school system with vast power differentials (E.W. Morris, 2007; M.W. Morris, 2012).

To combat the historic and systemic racism that they know their children will face, many Black parents raise their children to protect themselves (Dumas, 2014). In addition, Black children often find themselves having to fight because teachers, police, and other authority figures cannot be counted on to protect them (Annamma, 2016; Forman, Jr., 2012; E.W. Morris, 2007). School districts frequently have a zero-tolerance policy against fighting, which clashes with this reality and sets Black children up for overdiscipline scenarios.

Samara, Indigo, and Audri attended schools in the same school district and were subject to the same code of conduct, which was used as an instrument to support the overdiscipline of all three girls. The document included a list of "gross disobedience and misconduct" infractions, and this list allowed for criminal punishment of protests and strikes. Black girls are frequently subject to mistreatment, misunderstanding, oppression, and systemic racism (Love, 2019; E.W. Morris, 2007; M.W. Morris, 2012; Reynolds, 2019; Wun, 2016a). A document which penalizes the right to protest (District, 2021) could silence Black girls who may need the space, freedom, and balance of power to fight for equity of treatment without fear of retaliation (Wun, 2016a).

The Microsystem: Relationships

In her immediate surroundings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) each girl had some form of separation from her support systems, namely family, and this may have afforded them an empathic understanding for others who might be experiencing similar distance or hardship. Typically, all had school staff, coworkers, and peers in their microsystem, with whom they interacted to varying degrees of success. They each expressed that they felt teachers, administrators, peers, and even family did not spend enough time or effort in seeking to understand them or learn their stories before passing judgment or punishment. This is consistent with extant research which shows that Black girls are frequently misjudged and punished for behavior taken out of context (Baumle, 2018; M.W. Morris, 2012; Reynolds, 2019; Wun, 2016).

Indigo shared through her stories that neither of her parents were able to show her the type of love that she needed, but she was generous with others, perhaps in an effort to model what she had not received from her parents. Her generosity with money, while at the same time attempting to move away from being seen as "too friendly" in other ways, mirrored the way her parents showed her "love" in the form of monetary or other tangible items but withheld emotional attachment. Literature which explores caregiver "insensitivity," particularly in Black mothers, explains that often what appears as insensitivity is a response to personal trauma or an effort to protect children from perceived danger (e.g., Stern et al., 2021). Indigo's mother was honest in admitting she could not show love in the way Indigo wanted, indicating that perhaps there were untold stories from Indigo's mother. Future research into intergenerational experiences and storytelling may reveal important discoveries for both

researchers and participants, particularly for those wishing to explore generational trauma (Reynolds, 2019) or "flipping the script," as Audri spoke of so often.

The girls in this study were deeply affected by their relationships with school staff, and many of their experiences diminished their ability to function well in school. Samara's story about the Walk-a-Thon, in which she was immediately held back from fighting even though she herself was hit, was one of her earliest memories of being let down by school staff. At age seven, Samara felt viewed as a fighter and had her agency taken from her. This is in line with Indigo's stories of being disciplined for a thought but not an action. It is also consistent with research showing how Black girls are perceived – unruly, unmannered, loud, and in need of constant surveillance (Annamma, 2016).

The Mesosystem: Overdiscipline

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), there are four types of mesosystem interaction. ***Multisetting participation*** occurs when a child splits time between multiple locations, as was the case with all three girls in this study, who frequented school, home, jobs, and visited other locales. ***Indirect linkage*** happens when a connection is made between people in two settings via a third party. An example of this could be when the social workers met with me prior to the start of the project and then contacted the girls at school to see if they were interested in participating. In ***intersetting communication***, messages are transmitted between settings. When Audri's school would robo-call her mother to inform her that Audri was missing classes, this was an intersetting communication. Lastly, ***intersetting knowledge*** involves information that exists in one setting about the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). When Samara's story followed her from one place to the next, this was intersetting knowledge *and* intersetting communication.

The mesosystem for all three girls was an interactive space where exhaustion, overdiscipline, missed opportunities, fighting, and survival often reigned as a result of a web of surveillance, direct and indirect communication, linkage, and ideas and information that adults in authority and in different settings held about girls, youth, race, power, class, and other factors.

All three girls had a family member who was involved in school affairs, advocating on their behalf, though little was accomplished through this interaction. For example, Indigo and Samara's grandmothers repeatedly called City and M.W. High Schools, respectively, to inquire about suspensions and homework. Neither girl received work, and they were eventually expelled. Audri's summation that kids who are suspended are "the leftover kids" who may get their work or may not aligns with Samara and Indigo's experiences. Taaffe (2016) notes that when Black girls are removed from the classroom and from school, they miss out on not only the opportunity to complete their work but also to participate in after school activities and claim space in creative endeavors.

Because all three girls worked, and Audri was raising a child, they found it extremely difficult to attend school in the early morning, and their "real lives" began to take precedent. Okunye had more lenient attendance policies than the traditional high schools. However, the strain of school, work, COVID-19, and other life demands was draining for all three girls. Eventually both Audri and Samara prioritized their lives to exclude school and the project. Because Indigo was younger, social workers intervened and got her back on track. This level of life demand caused them to be adultified: each of the girls assumed many adult responsibilities due to unavoidable circumstances and was likely disciplined at a higher standard due to adults' perception of them as more mature (Burton, 2007; Epstein et al., 2017). The very act of being

overdisciplined, however, negates the girls' agency and relegates them to a paradoxical child status (Epstein et al., 2017; Wun, 2016a). Any one of these girls – but perhaps most obviously Audri, who was caring for her own child and had done so on her own without help for many months – might become frustrated at being punished at school for what could seem insignificant to her in the grand scheme of things.

While all three girls experienced overdiscipline in both middle school and high school, certain instances stand out. Indigo's suspension for allegedly possessing a lighter was unnecessary. Black children learn through experience that the color of their skin matters when it comes to discipline, classroom activities, and their own safety, and they internalize messages about their own identities based on how they understand themselves to be treated as part of racialized groups (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021). Black children repeatedly witness their white counterparts walk away unpunished for similar infractions to ones they themselves have been disciplined for, upending their trust in authority figures at school and in other institutions (Stovall, 2016a).

Moreover, Black children must contend with white supremacy and anti-Blackness in the same spaces in which they are told they are safe and cared for (Joseph et al., 2021; Meiners, 2011; Stovall, 2016a, 2016b). Samara's U.S. History teacher held numerous classroom discussions in which he denied that the killing of Black children was racist. Samara expressed that she felt this teacher "wouldn't defend me" if her life was in danger at school. When Black girls feel that teachers and other adults will not protect them – or may even place them directly in harm's way – their ability to form healthy relationships can be harmed as they put emotional walls in place to protect themselves (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021; Stern et al., 2021).

The Exosystem: Structural Institutions

School districts or local governments, including policy, municipal systems such as police and busing, and other external forces, structures, and systems – including the criminal-legal system – affect children at the exosystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Newman & Newman, 2020). From a Critical Race Theory perspective, systemic racism and oppression at the macrosystem level influences any/all of the structural and systemic forces at the exosystem level (Nadal et al., 2021). Due to its profound effect upon Black girls lives, for the purposes of this study, the criminal-legal system made an ecological transition (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) into their chronosystems, as all three of them had been arrested, jailed, or had other involvement with the criminal-legal system which made powerful impacts on how they interacted with others.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), an element of the exosystem ("external source," p. 242) can impact a child when it sets off a microsystem interaction. Profoundly affecting all three participants were the institutions within their exosystems, such as the school district and its discipline policy, including the code of conduct which functioned as a harmful punitive device; the police department and criminal-legal system which served as tools to surveil the girls and remove them from educational spaces; and the local bus system and other municipal institutions which the girls relied on for support and the maintenance of their basic needs.

Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's explanation of the impact of television violence on children (p. 242), it is possible to see the effects of external sources on children. It is not necessarily the code of conduct itself, but district and school staff's use of it to surveil and punish children without explanation and without interrogation of the societal norms by which it

was created, which can cause irreparable harm – especially for Black girls (Basile et al., 2019; Joseph et al., 2021; M.W. Morris, 2012; Velez & Spencer, 2018). School behavior and discipline policies that center norms and values which privilege quiet, obedient children who do not question the work that is given to them can make for quiet, efficient classroom settings (Leafgren, 2012). However, the school district code of conduct was frequently enforced upon the girls in this study without discussion or context seeking, leading to increased disintegration of the relationships between the girls and school staff and breaking down their trust in school as an institution.

Additionally, teachers often removed the participants from the classroom for minor offenses such as non-participation, which the girls reported was usually due to boredom or exhaustion. Audri, who often felt bored in class, and Samara, who did her work but was sleep-deprived, were often punished by teachers for not "behaving" in class the way their teachers expected them to. Many educators who interacted with Audri, Samara, and Indigo seemed to prioritize compliance over child agency. The girls felt pressured to perform and behave according to set expectations which seemed to them to be arbitrarily dictated. White norms and values are often the impetus for school policy (Joseph et al., 2021; M.W. Morris, 2012; Stovall, 2016b). District behavioral expectations clashed frequently with the values the girls in this study held as crucial to their survival, including the need to defend themselves both emotionally and physically.

According to Wun (2016b), "school discipline operates as an instrument in the 'afterlife of slavery' that positions the Black girl as perpetually and involuntarily open to surveillance and control" (p. 179). Moreover, Wun explains that Black girls are denied agency, including the

ability to access or express "feelings and forms of self-defense" (p. 179). In the incident that got Samara expelled from her high school, she was "slammed" repeatedly by a teacher, who then sat on her. The code of conduct for Samara's district stated that her teacher had the right "to use reasonable physical force or restraint to contain a student" (District, 2021). There was no stipulation within the document that stated what "reasonable force" was, how to safely restrain a child, or what training was required before a teacher could be deemed qualified to do so. The balance of power in this situation was overwhelmingly on the side of the teacher, but importantly, the code of conduct reinforced what Wun describes: Black girls who feel the need to defend themselves are subject to discipline policies designed to criminally oppress this need (2016a, 2016b). Indigo discovered this when her backpack was stolen, and she instinctively wished to fight the person who did it. Considering how infrequently Black girls are protected or defended (Reynolds, 2019; Taaffe, 2016; Wun, 2016a), Indigo naturally sought to defend herself and her property.

The Macrosystem: White Societal Expectations

Many people, institutions, and elements within the girls' microsystems, mesosystems, and exosystems functioned in their surveillance and oppression, and in doing this, operated to remove them from educational spaces. The macrosystem is where "patterns of organization and behavior" are supported by "values generally held by members of the given culture" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, the driving forces behind these patterns in Western society are not the values of all its members. Rather, it is white societal norms, values, and expectations that inform, for example, the labels by which the girls in this study were judged and the policies through which they were controlled (Spencer et al., 1997; Stern et al., 2021;

Velez & Spencer, 2018). The girls used labels when telling their stories, drawn from outside and within themselves – such as Audri being called "fat" by her peers and her mother or Indigo struggling with whether her stories were "good." Audri's mother used her conception of "bad kids" – likely what many think of children in alternative school – in her attempt to pressure Audri to return to traditional high school, though Audri was thriving at Okunye.

Children who are frequently disciplined in school can acquire many negative labels from teachers, peers, parents, and community members as well as researchers. In a compiled work titled *Delinquent Girls* (Miller et al., 2012), the preface author points out problematic language used by scholars when describing girls involved with the legal system, including terms such as "delinquent, antisocial, 'deep-end girls,'" and others which imply inherent and unchangeable traits (p. iiv). Contrastingly, the author suggests that the terms "adjudicated" or "court-involved" are preferable, as they highlight "results from adults' choices, complicated policy decisions, and other forces beyond the individual girl" (p. viii). Indeed, the norms and values which reward quiet, "well-behaved" versions of femininity, for example, do not come from reality-based examples of girlhood itself but from adult, white, heteronormative, ableist, classist, and spatial definitions of it (Brown, 2009; Butler, 2018; Epstein et al., 2017; Lindsey, 2013; Love, 2016; Reynolds, 2019; Taaffe, 2016).

The girls' repeated suspensions, eventual expulsion, and even arrests, for status offenses such as running away and possession of innocuous items reflected societal oppressions on young people: their experiences mirrored extant data on status offenses for Black children, who are convicted more frequently than white youth (Office of Juvenile Justice, 2015). This lent weight to the "bad kid" or "fighter" trope the girls felt the need to combat,

and it affected their own views of themselves. This was evident in Samara's examples of "the story following" her and could be seen in Audri's descriptions of herself. Audri referred to herself as evil, the devil, and having a heart that was black, and she felt that there was no going back to her old, happier self. When Audri described the students at in-school-suspension as "The Leftover Kids," she indicated that the teachers did not seem to care whether the students there succeeded or not. According to Audri, the children in the ISS room had not just been spatially removed from the classroom but academically and emotionally as well.

Systemic racism, the criminal-legal system, and the public school system in the U.S. combine to create a school-to-prison nexus in which Black children are prepared for a life of incarceration (Meiners, 2011; Reynolds, 2019; Stovall, 2017). Black girls are and have been positioned to be exceptionally vulnerable within this nexus: Reynolds (2019) urges readers to understand that "everyone is 'deputized' to scrutinize, restrain, and assault" Black girls as "an exercise of citizenship" (p. 31). Samara, Audri, and Indigo have shared stories that confirm this assertion.

The Chronosystem: Life Events and Constants

Elements in the chronosystem include "environmental changes over time" (Nadal et al., 2021), and for Audri, Samara, and Indigo this included short-term changes such as the birth of Amaya, the COVID-19 pandemic, ecological transitions of close family members within systems, and instances of violence. These are categorized here as short-term because the girls were young at the time of this study, and there are longer-term systemic elements which also played a role in their ecology. These long-term chronosystem elements included the criminal-legal system, which imprisons far more Black children and adults than any other racial group

and which criminalizes Black girls at a high rate (Annamma, 2016; Barnes & Motz, 2018; Basile et al., 2019; Epstein et al., 2017; Office of Juvenile Justice, 2015). Consequently, the school-to-prison nexus served as a continuity throughout the girls' lives and ensured that they were pervasively overdisciplined (Annamma, 2016; Meiners, 2007, 2011; Reynolds, 2019; Stovall, 2017).

Perspectives on Overdiscipline

The three girls had strong opinions on discipline, informed by their many experiences of overdiscipline in school, and they felt the rules that were used to punish them were arbitrary. Their perspectives were well-informed and nuanced. Research shows that Black girls nationwide have similar experiences of being penalized in school and in broader society through the use of broad-stroke expectations and punishments rather than the consideration of intersectional context (Annamma, 2016; Baumle, 2018; Epstein et al., 2017). Velez and Spencer (2018) argue that intersectional context is imperative when examining the development of adolescents, and that social positionality, power structures, and categories such as race, class, and gender must be considered.

Contrastingly, the participants took time to consider not just their own viewpoint but others' as well. They weighed the perspective of teachers and administrators and what motivated their disciplinary and even curricular decisions, and they conceded instances when they knew they had been in the wrong and felt a reprimand had been warranted. However, all three girls were consistent in pointing out when they felt specific forms of punishment had been inappropriate.

Indigo investigated the district code of conduct and recommended changes. Her driving thought process during this investigation was context-seeking. In her evaluation, she recommended attempting to understand why a child committed an "offense" – or whether an act should be considered an offense at all – before administering punishment. She suggested that "possession of fireworks" did not constitute intent to use them, and that more information would be needed if a child was caught with fireworks. After consideration of Indigo's experiences and motivations, I remembered that she had lost weeks of school time while administrators waited to search video footage for the lighter they never found. Perhaps the lack of consideration that Indigo received led her to reject any idea of punishment for what might be ambiguously interpreted as "intent."

Audri's experience with school discipline also centered around a lack of context-seeking. She reported that teachers punished her for refusing to participate in class rather than attempting to engage her more fully. Samara, who worked late hours on school nights and had difficulty staying awake or making it to school at all, was penalized by a teacher for "not working," even at Okunye, a school that prided itself in being better at understanding the contexts in which students found themselves. Given that Samara generally completed all her schoolwork, it is confusing that her teacher reacted the way she did. It is, however, consistent with research that shows how Black girls are treated by teachers when they do not comply with expectations (Epstein et al., 2017).

Indigo, Audri, and Samara had a strong sense of what types of treatment and interaction they were willing to abide and what was unacceptable. The word "respect" was repeated in their rhetoric. Even as they struggled to come to grips with areas of their identities

– "I'm still not sure who I am;" "I'm still a work in progress;" "What makes a person's identity?" – they knew themselves to be strong, independent, and goal-oriented. By the time they had reached high school, they had internalized that school was a place for rule-following and fitting the norms of groups to which they did not belong, and it was not a space built for them.

Limitations

Though many implications can be gleaned from this study, not the least of which is a case for change in school discipline policy, the study was not without its limitations.

Quarantine, Attrition, and Sisterhood

The COVID-19 pandemic and its accompanying quarantine necessitated the complete shut-down of all in-school research in the local school districts. The initial plan to conduct this project in person would have facilitated greater development of trust between myself and the participants, and between the three of them, which was essential for a project that was examining overdiscipline through a racialized and gendered lens (Stern et al., 2021; Velez & Spencer, 2018). I believe that, had we been able to meet in person, we would have benefited from a more consistent response from all three girls. Samara got sick during the study, and the stress of the pandemic added to the girls' other life demands, which were already high.

It is unfortunate that the three girls were only able to meet as a group one time before Audri and Samara exited the program. Indigo spoke the most during the part of the group session in which she discussed being separated from her parents, and I was relieved that, even for this short time, she was able to meet two older Black girls who shared similar experiences. At times, Indigo spoke as though she thought her situation was static and could not change. Audri and Samara, with their determination to change and forge a new path for themselves,

provided an alternative perspective for Indigo. Unfortunately, it was exceedingly difficult to get everyone together for this one session, and we were not able to do it again. Participatory research in which Black girls are able to bond through shared experiences, forming a sisterhood, is compelling and provides support for the involved participants (Brown, 2009; Reynolds, 2019; Taaffe, 2016; Williams, 2020).

Researcher/Participant Divide

While I deeply reflected on my positionality as a white, middle-class woman throughout this study and discussed it with all three participants, it is possible that, particularly Indigo, would have found it easier to relate to a researcher who was a Black female (Reynolds, 2019, Taaffe, 2016). There will always be a culture divide when white researchers work with Black children, since they hold a position of power despite any and all adjustments to research design to account for this. White women, however, represent the overbalance of power in educational settings (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Reynolds, 2019). As such, they are a direct threat to Black girls. While I am committed to working with Black children – and specifically Black girls – in my future research, I am convinced that this work must be collaborative with other adults who more closely represent the children we wish to serve.

Vulnerability

The last and perhaps most important limitation of this study was the YPAR approach itself and what it asked of the participants. YPAR invites children to partner with researchers, becoming co-researchers, identifying problems that are important to them or their communities as well as arriving at potential solutions (Smith et al., 2012). This is vital work, as it recognizes children's expertise in their own lives. However, it also places the responsibility of

explanation on Black girls who may already feel overburdened from the multiple and intersecting forces of oppression and demand on their lives (Crenshaw, 1989; Reynolds, 2019). I set the topic for this project as "the overdiscipline of Black girls," and the stories and engagement by Audri, Indigo, and Samara were of great importance. However, in leaving many of the details and planning up to the girls, it is possible that I overwhelmed them. Future research in this arena should be planned with care to consider the current demand on the participants as they embark in co-researching with scholars. Attention should be given to how far they must stretch to accommodate the work – physically, emotionally, mentally. Research designers should plan with care when weighing the responsibility of all co-researchers in participatory action research, particularly when it comes to carrying the findings, call-to-action, etc. to stakeholders, when those stakeholders have harmed – or are actively harming – the participants.

Implications

Mindset is Shaped by Experiences

The experiences that Samara, Indigo, and Audri shared were events that they felt shaped who they were. Samara and Audri shared stories that shaped their views on childrearing, empathy, and generosity. Indigo told stories about her need for independence and her views on love and family. All three girls had experienced overdiscipline in school and/or at home that changed how they viewed others and helped them develop ideals for who they wanted to be – or did not want to be – going forward in their lives.

It is imperative for adults in authority roles – teachers, school administrators, social workers, parents – to consider children's futures when making discipline decisions. Punishments

can have lasting impacts (Basile et al., 2019; Joseph et al., 2021; M.W. Morris, 2012; Velez & Spencer, 2018), as revealed through the stories of Indigo, Audri, and Samara. While it is important for children to learn that actions have consequences, penalizing children for acting in developmentally appropriate ways, such as becoming bored in class, throwing temper tantrums, shutting down when traumatized, and running away or fighting when they feel threatened, can send messages to children that they are unwelcome, unwanted, or uninvited into educational and other spaces (Baumle, 2018). Moreover, school discipline policies which do not allow for intersectional context-seeking, as part of the school-to-prison nexus, set children up for lasting involvement in the criminal-legal system (Meiners, 2011; Reynolds, 2019; Stovall, 2017).

More Than One Story

Each girl in this study, at some point, had to contend with being held to just one narrative that was told of her, rather than being viewed in her full complexity. From Samara, who could not shake the "fighter" storyline, to Audri, whose mother saw a troubled, "bad kid," to Indigo, who was convinced she had no story at all, each of them had much more than one story to tell. Listening to them gave me insight into three kind and generous human beings who wanted the best for the people around them and for themselves. The context and content of their narratives allows others to see past the fact that they are "alternative school kids" and to realize the complex personhood within them (Love, 2016).

Context-Seeking and Understanding

When asked what they wanted people to know about themselves, Indigo, Audri, and Samara explained that they felt misunderstood. There was a repeated refrain of "That's not

me," "I have changed," and "Just see me" when they contemplated how others viewed them. All three of them felt trapped into acts – such as fighting – and then being punished for defending themselves or doing what they needed to in the moment for physical or emotional survival. Samara perhaps said it best, however, when she implored on more than one occasion for teachers and school administrators to consider what a child may be going through.

> Samara: A person could be sleeping on a stranger floor, no cover, no nothing. Have to come to school and deal with y'all…Like, they never know what somebody just came from…

The code of conduct in Audri, Samara, and Indigo's district and many others sets Black girls (and boys) up to be surveilled and entrapped (Love, 2013; Meiners, 2015; M.W. Morris, 2012). Listening to the stories of Black girls helps activists, scholars, and community members to interrogate the systemic and interlocking ways in which systemic racism – by way of white supremacist values – works to oppress them. The three girls in this study developed mindsets that centered empathy and understanding, explaining that they often did not receive this grace themselves. Their school lives before Okunye – and after – were peppered with fights, distrust in school staff, and a feeling of being watched, and this is not unlike thousands of Black girls in schools across the country (Basile et al., 2019; Joseph et al., 2021; M.W. Morris, 2012; Velez & Spencer, 2018). Instead of removal from educational spaces when a child is in distress, school staff may choose to provide mental health support or time for the child to gather herself.

Policy Change

Following the work on the school district code of conduct that Indigo and I did together, we were invited to present Indigo's findings to members of the code of conduct

committee in a special session created for this purpose. Indigo refused to attend and did not detail reasons why. At the time, I surmised that she refused to enter a space with people who controlled discipline policy – the very policy that had caused her harm. I viewed this as a form of ethnographic refusal and an exercise in agency. However, asking her to do this work may also have crossed boundaries. Indigo, Audri, and Samara were part of an extremely vulnerable population of girls: they had been pushed out of school, separated from crucial family members, experienced trauma in multiple forms, and had daily life demands beyond those of many girls their age. Perhaps setting up a space in which they could share their stories was all that was needed and asking them to push themselves to a place of increased vulnerability by extending themselves further was unreasonable.

I went to the district with Indigo's permission and presented her work, in her voice: I shared her recategorized list of offenses as well as her clarifying questions on code of conduct language and suggestions, using audio clips of our recorded sessions, so that the committee could hear Indigo's voice. The presentation induced a powerful response from the committee members. They asked me to thank Indigo and invite her to a future meeting. They had follow-up questions and asked me to present the findings to a larger group. This is a work in progress, and I have high hopes for policy change in the district. Researchers, teachers, and activists who wish to work with youth in more school districts to affect code of conduct changes could design YPAR projects with children in other schools, continuing the process of storytelling and inquiry to uplift children's voices and listen to their expert opinions on their own lived experiences.

Future Research

Larger Code of Conduct Examination

I have secured a Visiting Assistant Professor position at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. While I will have a high teaching load, the chair of my department has provided time in my schedule so that I can expand on the work I did with Samara, Audri, and Indigo. I plan to explore codes of conduct across the country and look for patterns in the language used. I aim to examine a) how lists such as the "Gross Disobedience and Misconduct" list used in this district appear in code of conduct documents in other districts, b) how the concept of the immediacy of discipline shows up in these districts (for example, a policy that lays out consequences for children but not adults and what, if any, options children and their families have for holding staff accountable), and c) how codes of conduct and discipline policy have changed historically. Regarding the latter goal, I am interested in how the 1996 crime reform bill ("three strikes" laws, etc.) – which served to increase the incarceration of Black people in this country – aligns with any changes in codes of conduct and school discipline policies in certain regions of the U.S. I plan to work in collaboration with other researchers in tackling these goals.

Testing the Theory

The PVEST approach, combined with Black Girl Standpoint, CRT and Intersectionality, can be used to frame the experiences of Black girls as compounded and complicated by the white norms of society. Future research is warranted to bring to the forefront more stories of Black girls who have been overdisciplined in other parts of the country, enact policy change in

these areas, and examine how discipline policy may play a role in the development of more Black girls' sense of self and interaction with their world.

Additionally, the treatment of the mesosystem in this study is unusual. The descriptions of the mesosystem in extant literature typically are more open and abstract, such as "classroom relationships" or "interrelationships" between settings in the microsystem (Nadal et al., 2021; Stern et al., 2021) without naming specific interrelationships such as "overdiscipline," as this study does. By placing concrete concepts such as *overdiscipline* and *fighting* within the mesosystem, I assert that these microsystem interrelationships should be recognized for their pressure on the individual. By conceptualizing of the mesosystem abstractly, scholars miss possible connections: rather, future researchers may wish to examine and identify the specific ways in which microsystem interrelationships can be located within the mesosystem.

Conclusion

Audri, Samara, and Indigo have issued a call-to-action for school district administrators to change their code of conduct policy so that girls like them do not suffer harm from ambiguous language and arbitrary rules designed to control and oppress children. I would go a step farther and call all administrators and teachers to meaningfully rethink and redesign their disciplinary policies. Language must be inclusive and clear, and terms must be defined. Most importantly, disciplinary rules based on white norms and systems must be questioned and/or irradicated, as they oppress and punish those whose values do not align. School policies and procedures based on white values signify to Black girls that they do not matter.

When I set out to listen to the stories of Black girls, I was excited to do work which might tackle systems I knew to be unfairly balanced. I had some ideas of what I might find: I

thought the participants might talk about being unjustly disciplined because I know the statistics, have read many articles and books on the subject, and have taught children for many years. I assumed the girls would describe themselves as different from the story that others told because I have heard the words "that's not fair!" spoken in educational settings often. Apart from that, I was unsure what to expect. What I found was that Indigo, Samara, and Audri had a distinct message to convey, which I have curated here:

See us for **more** than the story you've heard:
We are growing and **changing**.

Listen to us:
We are the **experts** in our own narratives.

Seek to **understand**:
Don't punish us based on **rules no one remembers** making.

Change the rules.

REFERENCES

Abraczinskas, M., & Zarrett, N. (2020). Youth participatory action research for health equity: Increasing youth empowerment and decreasing physical activity access inequities in under-resourced programs and schools. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 66*(3/4), 232–243. https://doi-org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/10.1002/ajcp.12433

Adichie, C. N. (2009). "The danger of a single story." TED Talk. https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

Advancement Project. (2013). School-to-prison pipeline infographic and brochure. https://advancementproject.org/resources

Alexander, M. (2010). *The New Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness.* New York Press.

Annamma, S. (2016). Disrupting the carceral state through education journey mapping. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 29*(9), 1210-1230. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2016.1214297

Bae-Dimitriadis, M., & Evans-Winters, V. E. (2017). Flipping the script: The dangerous bodies of girls of color. *Cultural Studies/Critical Methodologies, 17*(5), 415–423. https://doi-org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/10.1177/1532708616684867

Banks-Wallace, J. (2002). Talk that talk: Storytelling and analysis rooted in African American oral tradition. *Qualitative Health Research, 12*(3), 410-426. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973202129119892

Barnes, J. C., & Motz, R. T. (2018). Reducing racial inequalities in adulthood arrest by reducing inequalities in school discipline: Evidence from the school-to-prison pipeline. *Developmental Psychology, 54*(12), 2328-2340. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000613

Basile, V., Black, R., & York, A. (2019). Who is the one being disrespectful? Understanding and deconstructing the criminalization of elementary school boys of color. *Urban Education.* https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085919842627

Baumle, D. (2018). Creating the trauma-to-prison pipeline: How the U.S. justice system criminalizes structural and interpersonal trauma experienced by girls of color. *Family Court Review, 56*(4), 695-708. https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12384

Blake, J., Butler, B., Lewis, C., & Darensbourg, A. (2011). Unmasking the inequitable discipline experiences of urban Black girls: Implications for urban educational stakeholders. *The Urban Review, 43*(1), 90-106. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-009-0148-8

Boals, A., Riggs, S., & Kraha, A. (2013). Coping with stressful or traumatic events: What aspects of trauma reactions are associated with health outcomes? *Stress & Health, 29,* 156-163. https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2443

Bowman, P. J., & Howard, C. (1985). Race-related socialization, motivation, and academic achievement: a study of black youths in three-generation families. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 24*(2), 134-141. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0002-7138(09)60438-6

Breeden, T. J. (2021). *Invited but excluded: Examining the underrepresentation of African American women and girls in STEM-based fields of education, and how historically Black colleges and universities are bridging the equity gap* (Publication No. 110546) [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign]. Illinois Digital Environment for Access to Learning and Scholarship. https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/items/118386

Bright, C., Kohl, P., & Jonson-Reid, M. (2014). Females in the juvenile justice system: Who are they and how do they fare? *Crime & Delinquency*, *60*(1), 106–125. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128711421652

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: experiments by nature and design. Harvard University Press.

Brown, R. N. (2009). *Black girlhood celebration: Toward a hip-hop feminist pedagogy*. Peter Lang.

Brown, R. N. (2013). *Hear our truths: The creative potential of Black girlhood.* University of Illinois Press.

Burton, L. (2007). Childhood adultification in economically disadvantaged families: A conceptual model. *Family Relations*, *56*(4), 329-345. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4541675

Butler, T. T. (2018). Black girl cartography: Black girlhood and place-making in education research. *Review of Research in Education*, *42*(1), 28-45. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44668712

Capehart, J. (2015). The McKinney, Texas pool party: More proof that 'Black children don't get to be children.' *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2015/06/10/the-mckinney-texas-pool-party-more-proof-that-black-children-dont-get-to-be-children/

Calvan, B.C. (2020). Florida lawmakers rally behind 6-year-old arrested at school. News4Jax. 03/04/2020. https://www.news4jax.com/news/florida/2020/03/04/florida-lawmakers-rally-behind-6-year-old-arrested-at-school/

Camangian, P., & Cariaga, S. (2021). Social and emotional learning is hegemonic miseducation: Students deserve humanization instead. *Race Ethnicity and Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1798374

Carlson, E. D., Engerbretson, J., & Chamberlain, R. M. (2006). Photovoice as a social process of critical consciousness. *Qualitative Health Research, 16*(6), 836–852. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732306287525

Chard, C. A., Nelson, D. S., Walters, K. A., Pollard, N., Pollard, N., Pollard, N., Gomez, K., Smith, D., Jenkins, N., Muwwakkil, S., Garland, C., Fard, A., & Fields, M. J. (2020). An inclusive approach to exploring perceptions of body image, self-esteem, and physical activity among Black and African American girls: Smart fit girls melanin magic. *Journal of Park & Recreation Administration, 38*(3), 133–151. https://doi.org/10.18666/JPRA-2019-9710

Chicago Public Schools (2019). CPS stats and facts. https://cps.edu/about_cps/at-a-glance/pages/stats_and_facts.aspx

Chonody, J., Ferman, B., Amitrani-Welsh, J., Martin, T. (2012). Violence through the eyes of youth: A photovoice exploration. *Journal of Community Psychology, 41*(1), 84-101. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.21515

Cook, K., & Buck, G. (2010). Photovoice: A community-based socioscientific pedagogical tool. *Science Scope, 33*(7), 35-39. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43184000

Cook, K., & Quigley, C. (2013). Connecting to our community: Utilizing photovoice as a pedagogical tool to connect college students to science. *International Journal of Environmental & Science Education, 8*(2), 339–357. https://doi.org/10.12973/ijese.2013.205a

Crenshaw, K. W. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, *14*, 139–167. http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8

Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241-1299. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039

Davis, A. Y. (1971). Political prisoners, prisons and Black liberation. *If they come in the morning: Voices of resistance*. Third Press. https://www.proquest.com/books/if-they-come-morning-voices-resistance/docview/2138596197/se-2?accountid=14553

Davis, A. (2007). S.I.P. (School induced psychosis): Poem for my daughter. *Qualitative Inquiry, 13*(7), 919-924. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800407304416

Davis, M. (2008). Indigenous knowledge: Beyond protection, towards dialogue. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, 37S*, 25-33. https://doi.org/10.1375/S132601110000034X

Davis, S. (2016). *An Empowering YPAR Project: Black Girls' Examination Of The Educational Pathway To STEM Fields And School-Based Issues* [Doctoral dissertation, Georgia State University]. ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. https://doi.org/10.57709/14792897

Davis, S. (2020). Socially toxic environments: A YPAR project exposes issues affecting urban Black girls' educational pathway to STEM careers and their racial identity development. Urban Review, 52(2), 215–237. https://doi-org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/10.1007/s11256-019-00525-2

District. (2021). Respect for self, for others, for property: Student code of conduct.

Docket, S., & Perry, B. (2005). "You need to know how to play safe": Children's experiences of starting school. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 6*(1), 4–18. https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2005.6.1.7

Downey, L., & Anyaegbunam, C. (2010). Your lives through your eyes: Rural Appalachian youth identify community needs and assets through the use of photovoice. *Journal of Appalachian Studies, 16*(1–2), 42–60. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41446841

Dumas, M. J. (2014). Losing an arm: Schooling as a site of Black suffering. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *17*, 1-29. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2013.850412

Dumas, M., & ross, k. (2016). "Be real Black for me": Imagining BlackCrit in education. *Urban Education, 51*(4), 415-442. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916628611

Epstein, R., Blake, J., & Gonzalez, T. (2017). Girlhood interrupted: The erasure of Black girls' childhood. https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2017/08/girlhood-interrupted.pdf

Evans-Winters, V. E., & Esposito, J. (2010). Other people's daughters: Critical race feminism and Black girls' education. *The Journal of Educational Foundations*, *24*(1/2), 11.

Florida Senate. (2021). The Kaia Rolle Act. https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2021/626/BillText/c2/HTML

Forman, Jr., J. (2012). Racial critiques of mass incarceration: Beyond the new Jim Crow. Prison Legal News, 23(7).

Gee, J. P. (2000). Chapter 3: Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education, 25*(1), 99-125. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1167322

Gines, K. T. (2015) Ruminations on twenty-five years of Patricia Hill Collins's Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 38*(13), 2341-2348. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1058505

Graham, L. F., Matiz, R. A., Lopez, W., Alana, G., Snow, R. C., & Padilla, M. B. (2013). Addressing economic devastation and built environment degradation to prevent

violence: A photovoice project of Detroit youth passages. *Community Literacy Journal, 8*(1), 41–52. https://doi.org/10.1353/clj.2013.0019

Gunderson, E. (2015). Ask Geoffrey: The story behind an iconic 1940s Bronzeville photo. WTTW News, November 25. https://news.wttw.com/2015/11/25/ask-geoffrey-story-behind-iconic-1940s-bronzeville-photo

Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review*, 1707-1791. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1341787

Harris, J. K. & Sanders-Smith, S. C. (2020). "May you be happy, may you live with ease": Blackness and mindfulness in a fifth-grade classroom. Invited to present at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA (April 17-21).

Higgins, M. (2014). Rebraiding photovoice: Methodological metissage at the cultural interface. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, 43*(2), 208-217. DOI: 10.1017/jie.2014.18

Hinds, O., Kang-Brown, J., & Lu, O. (2017). "People in prison in 2017." For the record. Vera Institute of Justice. https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/people-in-prison-2017.pdf

hooks, b. (1989). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking Black*. South End Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1395217

hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. South End Press. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uiuc/detail.action?docID=1813137

Hope, E. C., Skoog, A. B., & Jagers, R. J. (2015). "It'll never be the white kids, it'll always be us": Black high school students' evolving critical analysis of racial discrimination and inequity in schools. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 30*(1), 83–112. https://doi-org/10.1177/0743558414550688

Illinois State Board of Education. (2020). Regional safe schools program (RSSP). https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Regional-Safe-Schools-Program.aspx

Jarvie, J. (2015). Girl thrown from desk didn't obey because the punishment was unfair, attorney says. *Los Angeles Times*, October 29. https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-girl-thrown-punishment-unfair-20151029-story.html

Jennings, D., & Lowe, J. (2013). Photovoice: Giving voice to Indigenous youth. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health, 11*(3), 521-537. http://www.pimatisiwin.com/online/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/15Jennings.pdf

Jordan, S. (2003). Who stole my methodology? Co-opting PAR. *Globalism, Societies and Education, 1*(2), 185-200. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767720303913

Joseph, A., Hnilica, R., and Hansen, M. (2021). Using restorative practices to reduce racially disproportionate school suspensions: The barriers school leaders should consider during the first year of implementation. *Taboo, 20*(2), 95-119. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/using-restorative-practices-reduce-racially/docview/2545665694/se-2?accountid=14553

Kyodo williams, a., Owens, R., & Syedullah, J., (2016). *Radical dharma: Talking race, love, and liberation.* North Atlantic Books.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice, 34*(3), 159-165. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1476635

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher, 35*(7), 3-12. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3876731

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). 'Who you callin' nappy headed?' A critical race theory look at the construction of Black women. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 12*(1), 87-99. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320802651012

Ladson-Billings, G. (2021). I'm here for the hard re-set: Post pandemic pedagogy to preserve our culture. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 54*(1), 68-78. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2020.1863883

Lattimore, K. (2017). When Black hair violates the dress code. *NPREd*. Jul 17. https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/07/17/534448313/when-black-hair-violates-the-dress-code

Leafgren, Sheri. (2012). The magnificence of getting in trouble: Finding hope in classroom disobedience and resistance. *International Journal of Social Education, 24*, 61-90. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263198669_The_Magnificence_of_Getting_in_Trouble_Finding_Hope_in_Classroom_Disobedience_and_Resistance

Liboiron, M. (2020). Land relationships in science: insights from an anti-colonial laboratory. Invited talk. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Champaign, IL. March 4.

Lindsey, T. B. (2013). "One time for my girls": African-American girlhood, empowerment, and popular visual culture. *Journal of African American Studies*, *17*(1), 22-34. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-012-9217-2

Lindsey, T. B. (2015). Let me blow your mind: Hip Hop feminist futures in theory and praxis. *Urban Education*, *50*(1), 52-77. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914563184

Lipsitz, G. (1995). The possessive investment in Whiteness: Racialized social democracy and the "white" problem in American studies. *American Quarterly*, *47*(3), 369-387. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2713291

Love, B. (2013). "I see Trayvon Martin": What teachers can learn from the tragic death of a young Black male. *Urban Review*, *46*(2), 292-306. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-013-0260-7

Love, B. (2016). Complex personhood of hip hop & the sensibilities of the culture that fosters knowledge of self & self-determination. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *49*(4), 414-427. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2016.1227223

Love, B. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom.* Beacon Press.

Lutrell, W. (2010). 'A camera is a big responsibility': A lens for analyzing children's visual voices. *Visual Studies*, *25*(3), 224-237. https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2010.523274

Lynch, S., DeHart, D., Belknap, J., Green, B. (2012). Women's pathways to jail: The roles & intersections of serious mental illness & trauma. The Bureau of Justice Assistance. https://doi.org/10.1037/e528222013-001

Marston, E., Russell, M., Obsuth, I., & Watson, G. (2012). Dealing with double jeopardy: Mental health disorders among girls in the juvenile justice system. In *Delinquent girls: Contexts, relationships, and adaptation* (S. Miller et al. eds., 2012). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-0415-6_7

Meiners, E. R. (2007). *Right to be hostile: Schools, prisons and the making of public enemies.* Routledge.

Meiners, E. R. (2011). Ending the school-to-prison pipeline/building abolition futures. *Urban Review, 43,* 547-565. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-011-0187-9

Meiners, E. R. (2015). Offending children, registering sex. *Women's Studies Quarterly, 43*(1 & 2), 246-263. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43958491

Meiners, E. R. (2016). *For the children?: Protecting innocence in a carceral state.* University of Minnesota Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt1g69zkd.3

Menendian, S., Gambhir, S., & Gailes, A. (2020). The most segregated (and integrated) cities in the SF Bay Area. Othering and Belonging Institute. https://belonging.berkeley.edu/most-segregated-and-integrated-cities-sf-bay-area

Miller, Leve, L. D., & Kerig, P. K. (2012). *Delinquent girls contexts, relationships, and adaptation* (Miller, L. D. Leve, & P. K. Kerig, Eds.; 1st ed. 2012). Springer New York. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-0415-6

Morris, E. W. (2007). "Ladies" or "loudies"? Perceptions and experiences of Black girls in classrooms. *Youth and Society, 38*(4), 490-515. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X06296778

Morris, M. W. (2012). Race, gender and the school-to-prison pipeline. *African American Forum, 1*, 2-12.

Morris, M. W. (2016). *Pushout: The criminalization of Black girls in schools*. The New Press.

Morton, T. R., & Parsons, E. C. (2018). #BlackGirlMagic: The identity conceptualization of Black women in undergraduate STEM education. *Science Education, 102*(6), 1363-1393. DOI: 10.1002/sce.21477

NAACP (2019). Criminal justice fact sheet. https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/.

Nadal, K., King, R., Sissoko, D. R., Floyd, N., & Hines, D. (2021). The legacies of systemic and internalized oppression: Experiences of microaggressions, imposter phenomenon, and stereotype threat on historically marginalized groups. *New Ideas in Psychology, 63*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2021.100895

NCES (2019). Teacher trends. https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=28

Neal-Barnett, A., Stadulis, R., Murray, M., Payne, M. R., Thomas, A., & Salley, B. B. (2011). Sister circles as a culturally relevant intervention for anxious Black women. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 18*(3), 266-273. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2850.2011.01258.x

Newman, B., & Newman, P. (2020). *Theories of adolescent development.* Chapter 11 - Ecological theories, p. 313-335. Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-815450-2.00011-5

NPR (2018). Suspensions are down in the U.S. but large racial gaps remain. December 17. https://www.npr.org/2018/12/17/677508707/suspensions-are-down-in-u-s-schools-but-large-racial-gaps-remain

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2015). Status offenders. *Model Programs Guide Literature Review.* https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/Status_Offenders.pdf

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2019). Juvenile reentry. *Model Programs Guide Literature Review.* https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/model-programs-guide/literature-reviews/juvenile_reentry.pdf

Omi, M., & Winant, H. (1996). "Racial formation." From *Racial formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s.* 2nd edition. Routledge. 53-76

Ornelas, I. J., Amell, J., Tran, A. N., Royster, M., Armstrong-Brown, J., & Eng, E. (2009). Understanding African American men's perceptions of racism, male gender,

socialization, and social capital through photovoice. *Qualitative Health Research, 19*(4), 552–565. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732309332104

Peabody, C. G. (2013). Using photovoice as a tool to engage social work students in social justice. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 33*, 251–265. https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2013.795922

Reynolds, A. (2019). *"Ain't nobody checkin' for us": Race, fugitivity and the urban geographies of Black girlhood* (Publication No. 23670) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois Chicago]. University of Illinois Chicago Library. https://hdl.handle.net/10027/23670

Reynolds, A., & Hicks, S. D. (2016). Can we live? Working toward a praxis of support for carefree Black girls. *Black History Bulletin, 79*(2), 12-17. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5323/blachistbull.79.2.0012

Ritchie, A. (2017). Invisible no more: Police violence against black women and women of color. Chapter 3, "Policing girls." Beacon Press.

Simkin, S., & Katz, S. (2002). Criminalizing abused girls. *Violence Against Women, 8*(12), 1474-1499. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780102237966

Smith, L., Bratini, L., & Appio, L. M. (2012). "Everybody's teaching and everybody's learning": Photovoice and youth counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 90*, 3–12. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1556-6676.2012.00001.x

Solorzano, D. G., & Bernal, D. D. (2001). Examining transformational resistance through a critical race and LatCrit theory framework: Chicana and Chicano students in an urban context. *Urban Education, 36*(3), 308–342. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085901363002

Spencer, M., Dupree, D., & Hartmann, T. (1997). A phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST): A self-organization perspective in context. *Development and Psychopathology, 9*(4), 817-833. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579497001454

Steinhart, D. (1996). Status offenses. *The Juvenile Court, 6*(3), 86-99. https://doi.org/10.2307/1602596

Stern, J., Barbarin, O., & Cassidy, J. (2021). Working toward anti-racist perspectives in attachment theory, research, and practice. *Attachment & Human Development, 24*(3). https://doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2021.1976933

Stovall, D. (2016a). Out of adolescence and into adulthood: critical race theory, retrenchment, and the imperative of praxis. *Urban Education, 51*(3), 274–286. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915618718

Stovall, D. (2016b). *Born out of struggle: critical race theory, school creation, and the politics of interruption.* SUNY Press.

Stovall, D. (2017). Freedom as aspirational and fugitive: a humble response. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 50*(3), 331-332. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2017.1341822

Strack, R., Magill, C., & McDonagh, K. (2004). Engaging youth through photovoice. *Health Promotion Practice, 5*(1), 49-58. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839903258015

Sutherland, C., & Cheng, Y. (2009). Participatory-action research with (im)migrant women in two small Canadian cities: Using photovoice in Kingston and Peterborough, Ontario. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, 7*, 290–307. https://doi.org/10.1080/15562940903150089

Taaffe, C. (2016). *Black girl gaze: A visual (re)membering of Black girlhood as an act of resistance* (Publication No. 90942) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign]. Urbana, IL. Graduate Dissertations and Theses at Illinois. https://hdl.handle.net/2142/90942

Tesfagiorgis, F. H. W. (1993). In search of a discourse and critique/s that center the art of Black women artists. In S. M. James & P. A. Busia (Eds.), *Theorizing Black feminisms: The visionary pragmatism of Black women*, 228–266. Routledge.

Theriot, M. (2009). School resource officers and the criminalization of student behavior. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 37*(3), 280-287. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2009.04.008

Townsend, T., Neilands, T., Jones Thomas, A., & Jackson, T. (2010) I'm no jezebel; I am young, gifted, and black: Identity, sexuality, and Black girls. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 34*, 273-285. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2010.01574.x

Tyson, K. (2003). Notes from the back of the room: Problems and paradoxes in the schooling of young Black students. *Sociology of Education, 76*, 326–43. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1519869

U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014). Civil Rights Data Collection. Data snapshot: Early childhood education. Issue Brief No. 2, 03/2014. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED615856.pdf

van Ausdale, D., & Feagin, J. R. (2001). *The first R: how children learn race and racism.* Rowman & Littlefield.

van Laar, C., Derks, B., Ellemers, N., Bleeker, D. (2010). Valuing social identity: Consequences for motivation and performance in low-status groups. *Journal of Social Issues, 66*(3), 602-617. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2010.01665.x

Velez, G., & Spencer, M. B. (2018). Phenomenology and intersectionality: Using PVEST as a frame for adolescent identity formation amid intersecting ecological systems of inequality. In C. E. Santos & R. B. Toomey (Eds.), Envisioning the Integration of an Intersectional Lens in Developmental Science. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 161*, 75–90. https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20247

Wang, C., (2006). Youth participation in photovoice as a strategy for community change. *Journal of Community Practice, 14*(1), 147-161. https://doi.org/10.1300/J125v14n01_09

Wang, C., & Burris, M. (1994). Empowerment through photo novella: Portraits of participation. *Health Education Quarterly, 21*, 171-186. https://www.jstor.org/stable/45049549

Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior, 24*(3), 369-387. https://www.jstor.org/stable/45056507

Williams, N. (2020). "I say (s)he's just a friend. A narrative analysis on the process and privileges of voluntary kin relationships between black men and women." 11th Annual Graduate Student Conference. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Urbana, IL, March 6.

Wilson, N., Dasho, S., Martin, A., Wallerstein, N., Wang, C., & Minkler, M. (2007). Engaging young adolescents in social action through photovoice: the youth empowerment strategies (YES!) project. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 27*(2), 241-261. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431606294834

Winn, M. (2011). *Girl time: literacy, justice, and the school-to-prison pipeline*. Teachers College Press.

Wun, C. (2016a). Unaccounted foundations: Black girls, anti-black racism, and punishment in schools. *Critical Sociology*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514560444

Wun, C. (2016b). Against captivity: Black girls and school discipline policies in the afterlife of slavery. *Educational Policy*, *1*(26). https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904815615439

Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 69-91. https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006

Zembylas, M. (2002). "Structures of feeling" in curriculum and teaching: Theorizing the emotional rules. *Educational Theory, 52*(2), 187-208. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2002.00187.x

APPENDIX A

Critical Dialogue Questions

Participants will engage in dialogue about their photos (both childhood and self-portraits) through a series of questions that will allow them to reflect. Grieb et al. (2013) developed critical dialogue questions drawing from Freire's SHOWeD critical dialogue technique. The SHOWeD technique is based on the following: What do you **S**ee here? What is really **H**appening? How does this relate to **O**ur lives? **W**hy does this problem/strength exist? I have adapted the questions above into more appropriate dialogic questions for this study:

1) What do you see in this photograph?
2) What is happening in this photograph?
3) How does this relate to your/others' lives?
4) Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist?
5) How can we become empowered by our new understanding?
6) What can we do about it?

APPENDIX B

Teaching Identity as a Lens

As participants share their childhood photos with me during Phase I and begin to share their stories, I will help them to examine how identity can be framed in multiple ways. We will begin by asking what questions we can ask about identity. This may be as simple as, "What is identity?" I will populate the bullets which read, "Question 1, Question 2, Question 3" with actual questions the participants have about identity. We will then explore four lenses of identity according to Gee (2000) and how they intertwine. As participants move through to Phase II and begin working with photography, we will continue to revisit this Smore to ensure the girls feel their self-portraits are capturing what they are attempting to convey.

Figure B1

"Using Identity as a Lens" Smore (https://www.smore.com/943x8-using-identity-as-a-lens)

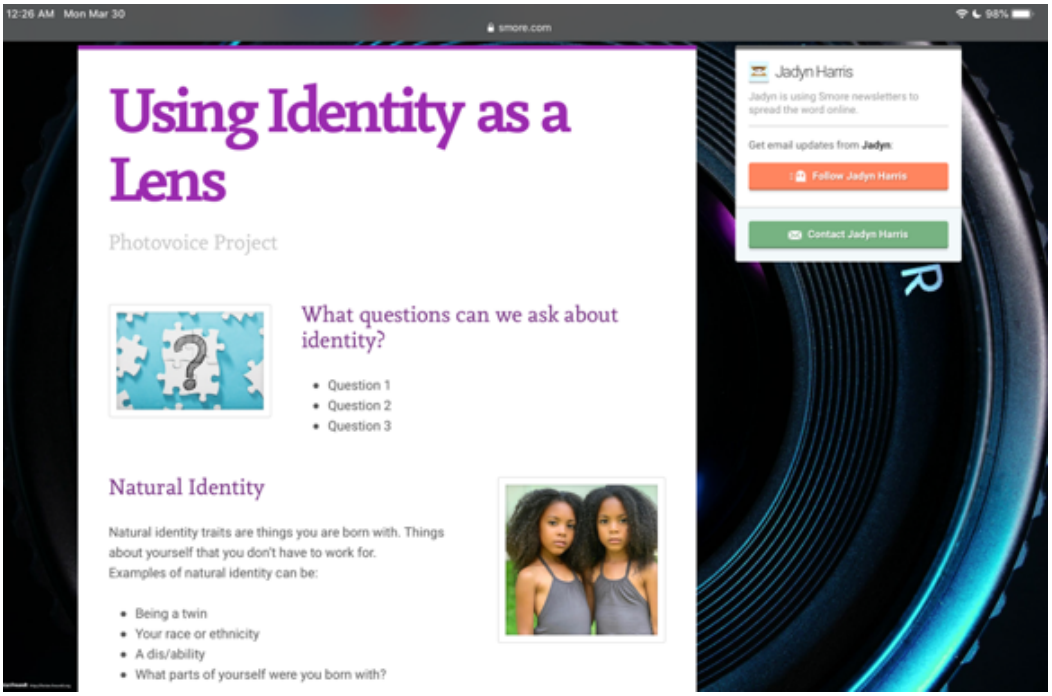
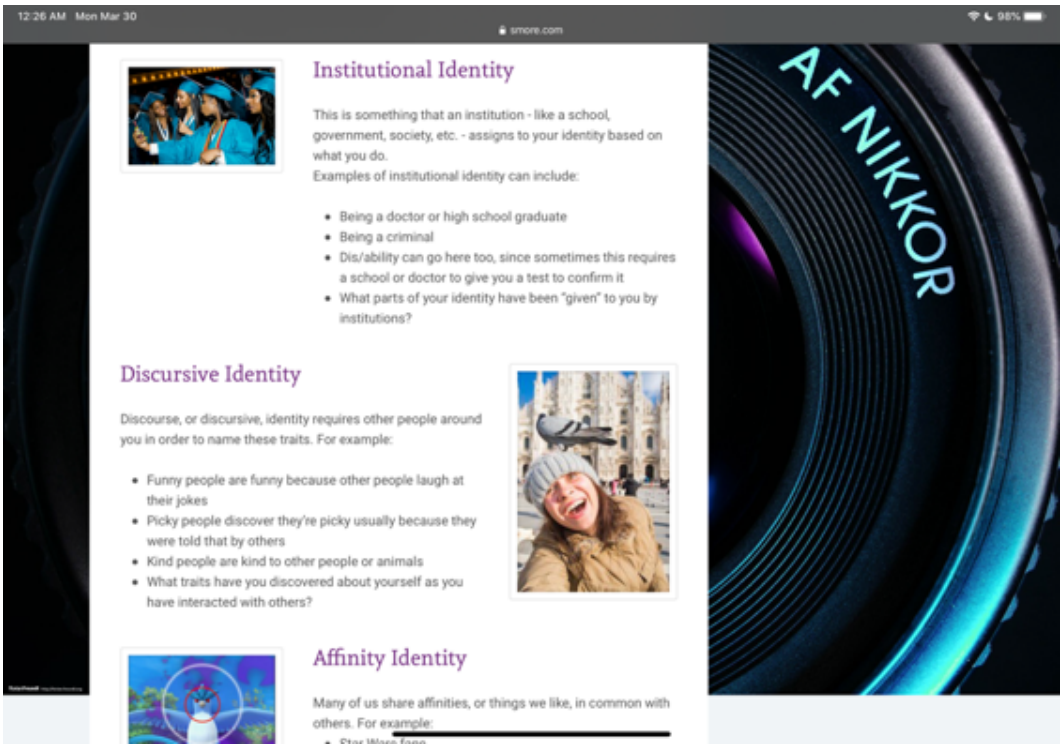


Figure B2

"Using Identity as a Lens" Smore, continued (https://www.smore.com/943x8-using-identity-as-a-lens)



APPENDIX C

Recruitment Flyer

I developed the following online flyer via the Smore.com website. It was distributed to potential participants at Okunye by the social workers.

Figure C1

"Photography Project" Smore (https://www.smore.com/e76nv-photography-project)

Figure C2

"Photography Project" Smore, continued (https://www.smore.com/e76nv-photography-project)

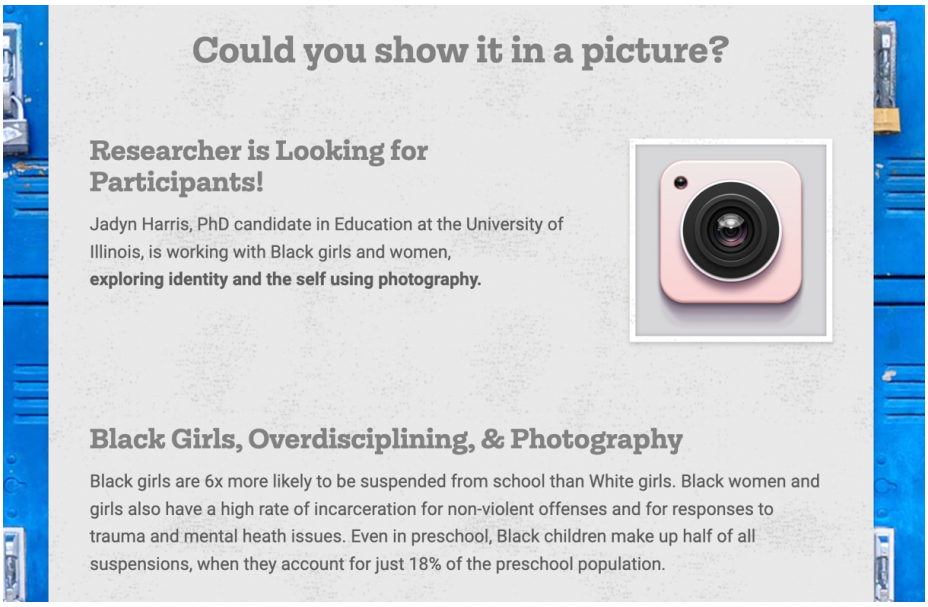


Figure C3

"Photography Project" Smore, continued (https://www.smore.com/e76nv-photography-project)

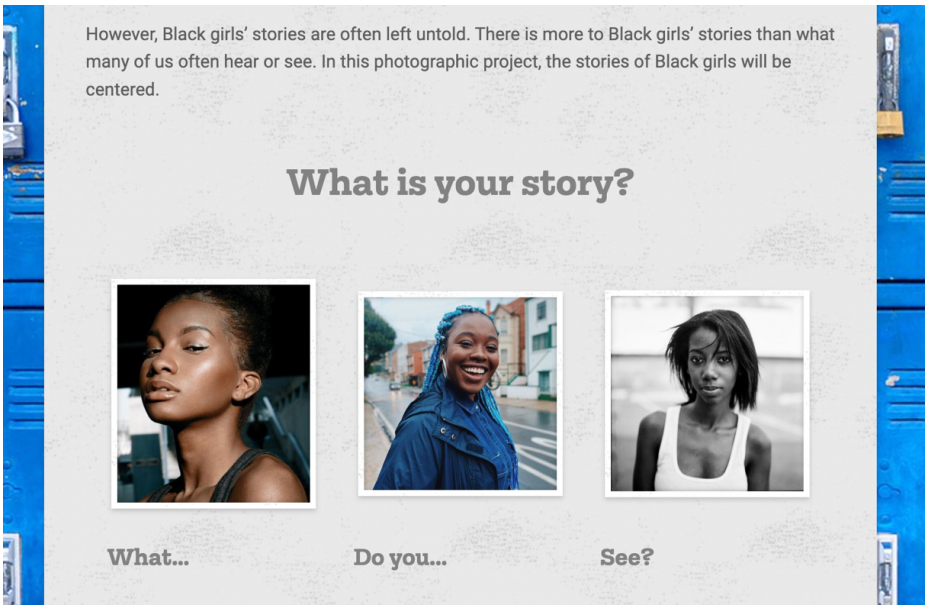


Figure C4

"Photography Project" Smore, continued (https://www.smore.com/e76nv-photography-project)

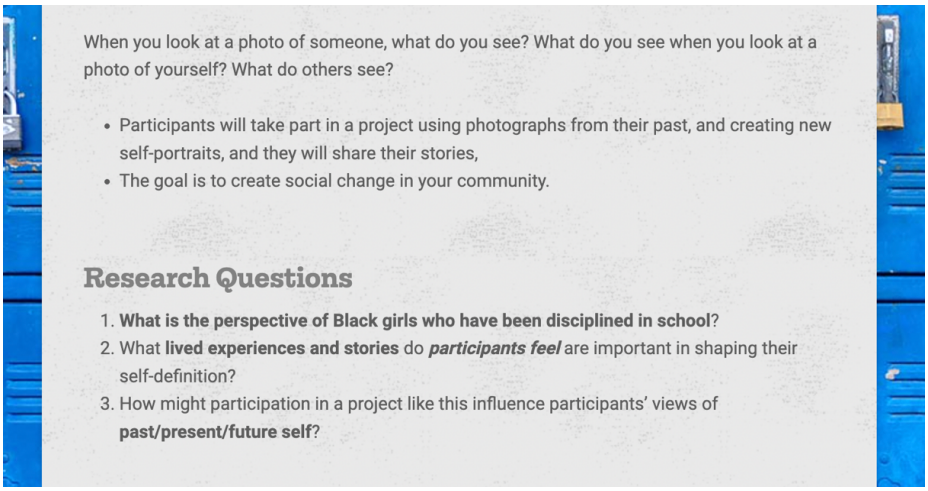


Figure C5

"Photography Project" Smore, continued (https://www.smore.com/e76nv-photography-project)

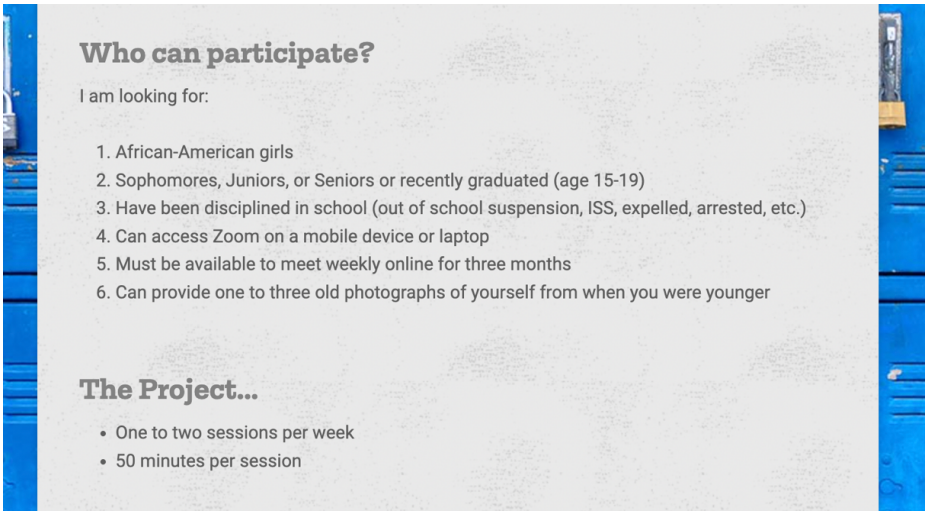


Figure C6

"Photography Project" Smore, continued (https://www.smore.com/e76nv-photography-project)

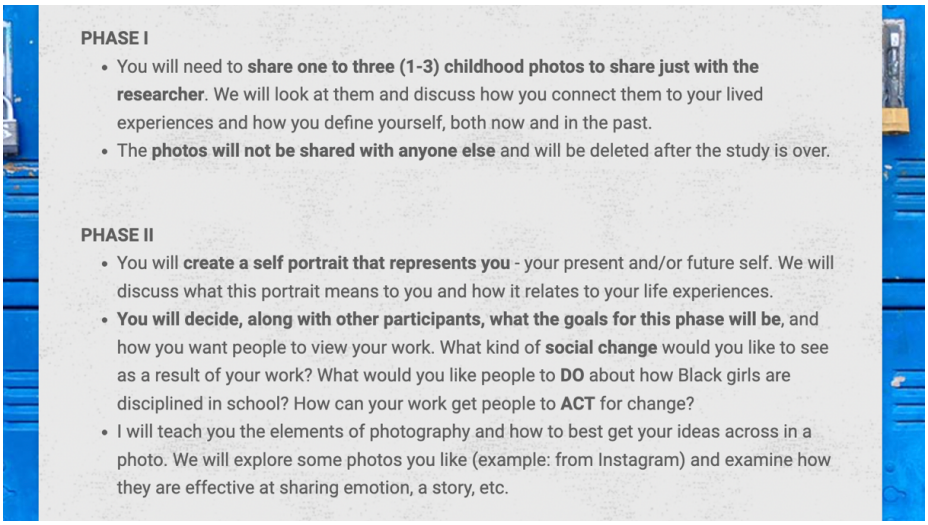


Figure C7

"Photography Project" Smore, continued (https://www.smore.com/e76nv-photography-project)

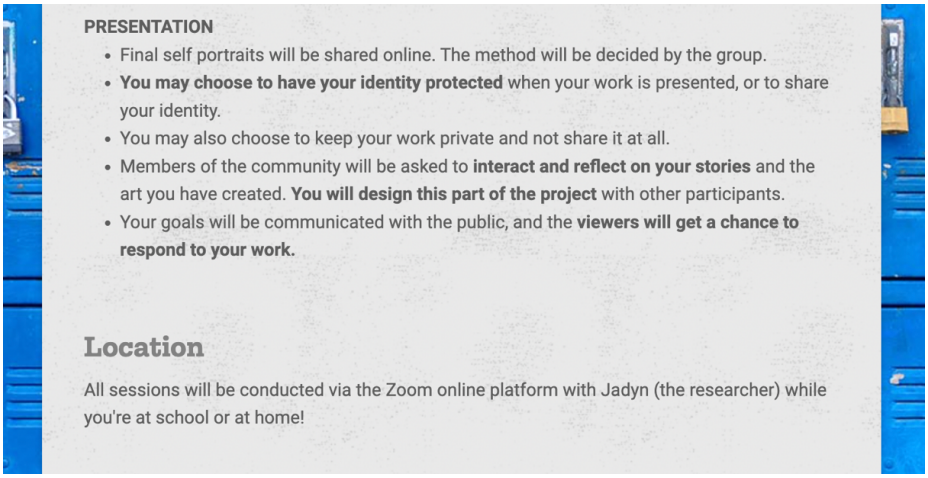
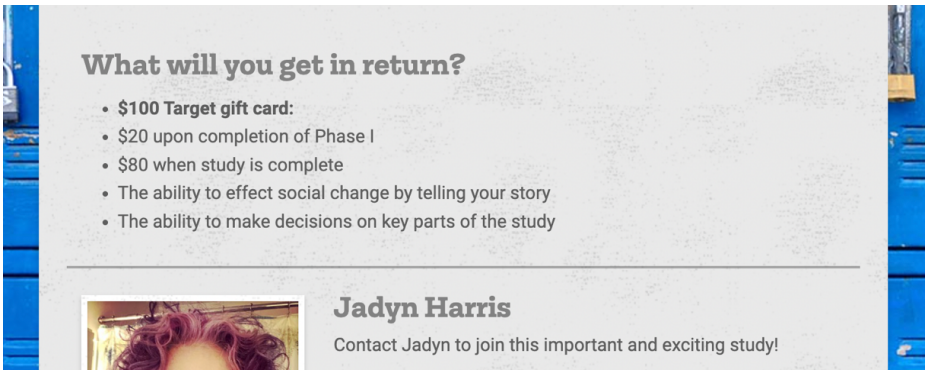


Figure C8

"Photography Project" Smore, continued (https://www.smore.com/e76nv-photography-project)



APPENDIX D

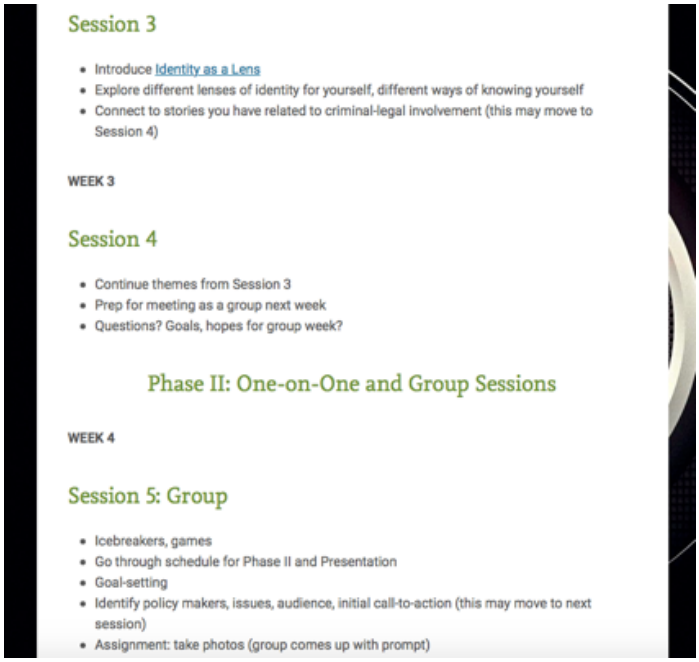
Schedule of Sessions, Planned

Figure D1

"Schedule of Sessions" Smore (https://www.smore.com/ceju9-schedule-of-sessions)

Figure D2

"Schedule of Sessions" Smore, continued (https://www.smore.com/ceju9-schedule-of-sessions)



Session 3

- Introduce Identity as a Lens
- Explore different lenses of identity for yourself, different ways of knowing yourself
- Connect to stories you have related to criminal-legal involvement (this may move to Session 4)

WEEK 3

Session 4

- Continue themes from Session 3
- Prep for meeting as a group next week
- Questions? Goals, hopes for group week?

Phase II: One-on-One and Group Sessions

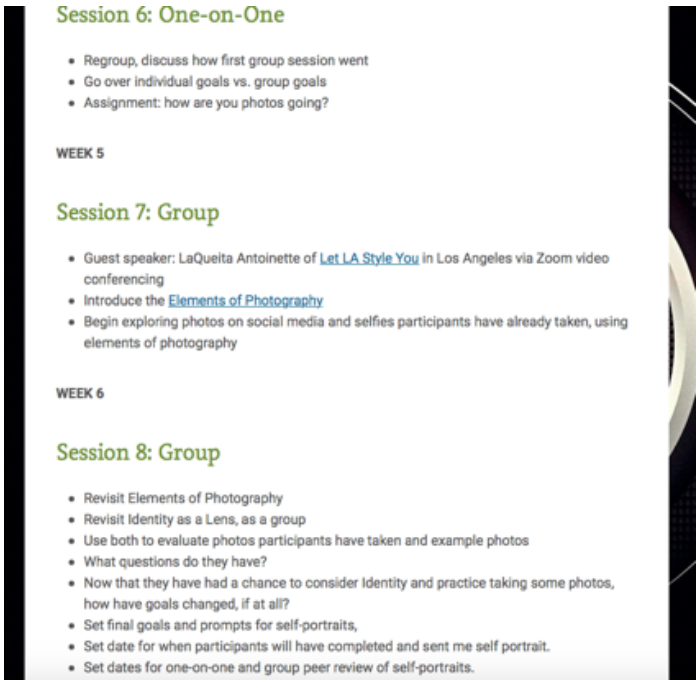
WEEK 4

Session 5: Group

- Icebreakers, games
- Go through schedule for Phase II and Presentation
- Goal-setting
- Identify policy makers, issues, audience, initial call-to-action (this may move to next session)
- Assignment: take photos (group comes up with prompt)

Figure D3

"Schedule of Sessions" Smore, continued (https://www.smore.com/ceju9-schedule-of-sessions)



Session 6: One-on-One

- Regroup, discuss how first group session went
- Go over individual goals vs. group goals
- Assignment: how are you photos going?

WEEK 5

Session 7: Group

- Guest speaker: LaQueita Antoinette of Let LA Style You in Los Angeles via Zoom video conferencing
- Introduce the Elements of Photography
- Begin exploring photos on social media and selfies participants have already taken, using elements of photography

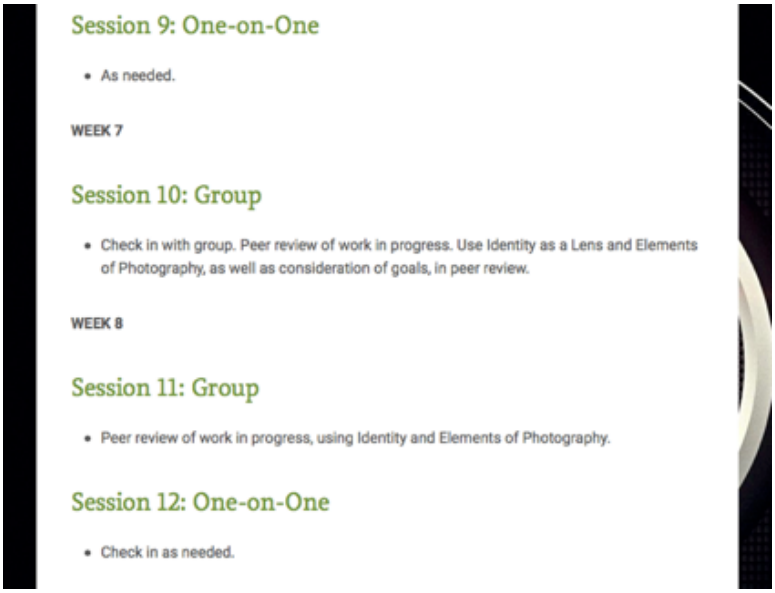
WEEK 6

Session 8: Group

- Revisit Elements of Photography
- Revisit Identity as a Lens, as a group
- Use both to evaluate photos participants have taken and example photos
- What questions do they have?
- Now that they have had a chance to consider Identity and practice taking some photos, how have goals changed, if at all?
- Set final goals and prompts for self-portraits,
- Set date for when participants will have completed and sent me self portrait.
- Set dates for one-on-one and group peer review of self-portraits.

Figure D4

"Schedule of Sessions" Smore, continued (https://www.smore.com/ceju9-schedule-of-sessions)



Session 9: One-on-One

- As needed.

WEEK 7

Session 10: Group

- Check in with group. Peer review of work in progress. Use Identity as a Lens and Elements of Photography, as well as consideration of goals, in peer review.

WEEK 8

Session 11: Group

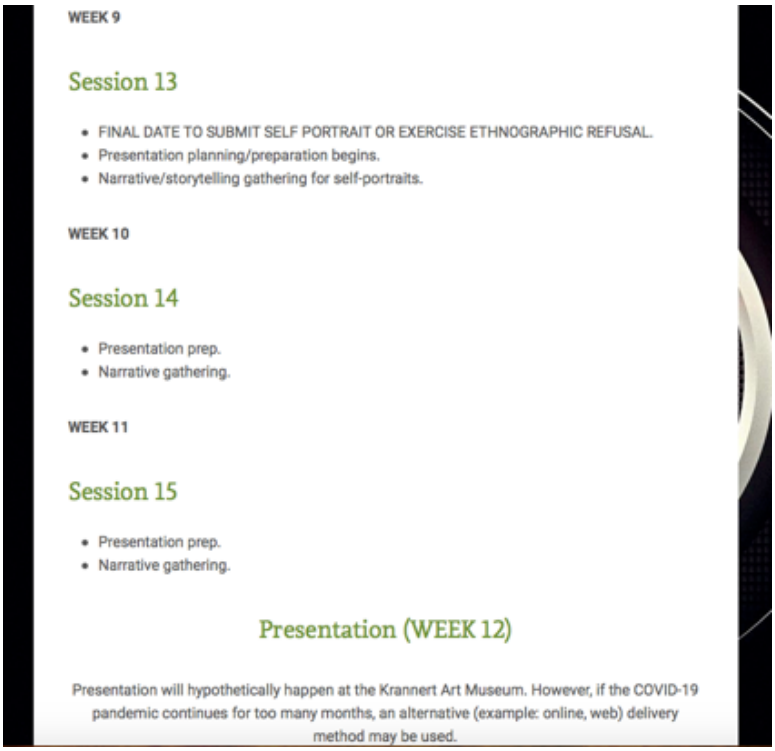
- Peer review of work in progress, using Identity and Elements of Photography.

Session 12: One-on-One

- Check in as needed.

Figure D5

"Schedule of Sessions" Smore, continued (https://www.smore.com/ceju9-schedule-of-sessions)



WEEK 9

Session 13

- FINAL DATE TO SUBMIT SELF PORTRAIT OR EXERCISE ETHNOGRAPHIC REFUSAL.
- Presentation planning/preparation begins.
- Narrative/storytelling gathering for self-portraits.

WEEK 10

Session 14

- Presentation prep.
- Narrative gathering.

WEEK 11

Session 15

- Presentation prep.
- Narrative gathering.

Presentation (WEEK 12)

Presentation will hypothetically happen at the Krannert Art Museum. However, if the COVID-19 pandemic continues for too many months, an alternative (example: online, web) delivery method may be used.

APPENDIX E

Schedule of Sessions, Actual

Table E1

Table of sessions

Date	Participant(s)/Session	Notes	Time (min)
6/1/20	Cherri 1	*Only session with Cherri.*	60
11/19/20	Audri 1		64
11/27/20	Audri 2		64
12/1/20	Audri 3		74
12/5/20	Audri 4		74
12/9/20	Samara 1		75
12/11/20	Samara 2		81
12/16/20	Samara 3		53
12/18/20	Indigo 1		67
12/19/20	Samara 4		80
12/19/20	Audri 5		85
12/20/20	Indigo 2a	No show. Researcher reflection	8
12/20/20	Indigo 2b	Success	60
1/4/21	Indigo 3		84
1/6/21	Group 1a	Failed. Audri only	32
1/16/21	Group 1b	Failed. Indigo only	17
1/22/21	Group 1c	SUCCESS! All three girls attended. *Final session with Samara.*	84
1/22/21	Social Workers 1		57
1/27/21	Indigo 4		52
1/28/21	Group 2a	Semi-failed. Indigo only, became Indigo session	41
1/29/21	Social Workers 2		56
1/29/21	Group 2b	Failed. Audri & Indigo	14
1/30/21	Audri 6	Failed. Researcher reflection	17
2/3/21	Audri 7	*Final session with Audri.*	56
2/9/21	Group 3	Partial group. Audri & Indigo, attempted reset of goals by researcher	53
2/20/21	Group 4a	Failed. No reflection	3
2/21/21	Group 4b	Failed. Researcher reflection	3
2/25/21	Social Worker 3	Discussed work demands on girls	17
2/25/21	Researcher Reflection 1	Thoughts on ending data collection early	7
3/3/21	Indigo 5	Set new goal: Code of Conduct analysis	16
3/9/21	Indigo IIb 1	Extremely productive session. *Final session with Indigo.*	98
3/11/21	Indigo IIb 2a	Failed. Researcher reflection	22

3/25/21	Indigo IIb 2b	Failed. Researcher reflection	8
4/30/21	Social Worker 4		51
5/4/21	Researcher Reflection 2	Researcher final thoughts	19

APPENDIX F

District Code of Conduct (District, 2021)

Figure F1

Secondary grades acts of "gross disobedience or misconduct"

Secondary Grades (6–12)

So that all students and parents may know what might be considered "gross disobedience or misconduct," the Board of Education stipulates that any or all of the following acts may be considered as evidence of "gross disobedience or misconduct," and may be cause for suspension or reassignment to AIE and/or expulsion (see Glossary—Secondary, pp. 38-41:

★ 01. Alarms, False/Bomb Threats
★ 02. Alcohol-Related Offenses
★ 03. Arson/Attempted Arson
★ 04. Computers, Misuse of
05. Detention, Refusal to Serve
06. Disobedience
07. Disruptive Behavior
★ 08. Drug-Related Offenses
09. Misuse of Electronic Devices (Cell Phones, Laser Pointers, iPods, MP3 players, PSPs, etc.)
★ 10. Extortion/Shakedown/Strong-Arm
11. Refusal to Serve Saturday/Evening School
★ 12. False Reports/Forgery
★ 13. Gambling
★ 14. Gang-Related Activities
★ 15. Harassment/Hazing/Sexual Harassment/Bullying/Cyberbullying
16. Horseplay/Scuffling
★ 17. Participation in Acts Designed to Disrupt School (Strikes, Walkouts, Mass Defiance, etc.)
★ 18. Physical Confrontation with Staff
★ 19. Physical Confrontation with Students or Others
★ 20. Property Damage/Vandalism/Littering
★ 21. Sexual Conduct
22. Tardiness
★ 23. Theft
★ 24. Threats to/Intimidation of Staff
★ 25. Threats to/Intimidation of Students
★ 26. Tobacco Products, Use or Possession of
★ 27. Trespassing/Loitering
28. Obscenity/Verbal Abuse/Profanity to Staff
29. Obscenity/Verbal Abuse/Profanity to Students
★ 30. Harmful Objects
★ 31. Any Other Acts that Endanger the Well-Being of Students, Teachers, or Any School/District-Authorized Personnel
★ 32. Truancy
★ 34. Weapon-Related Activities
★ 36. Mob Action
★ 37. Possession of Fireworks

★ **Acts which may also result in criminal prosecution and penalties as well as school disciplinary actions. Violation of federal, state, or local law shall be promptly reported to the appropriate law enforcement authorities.**

Figure F2

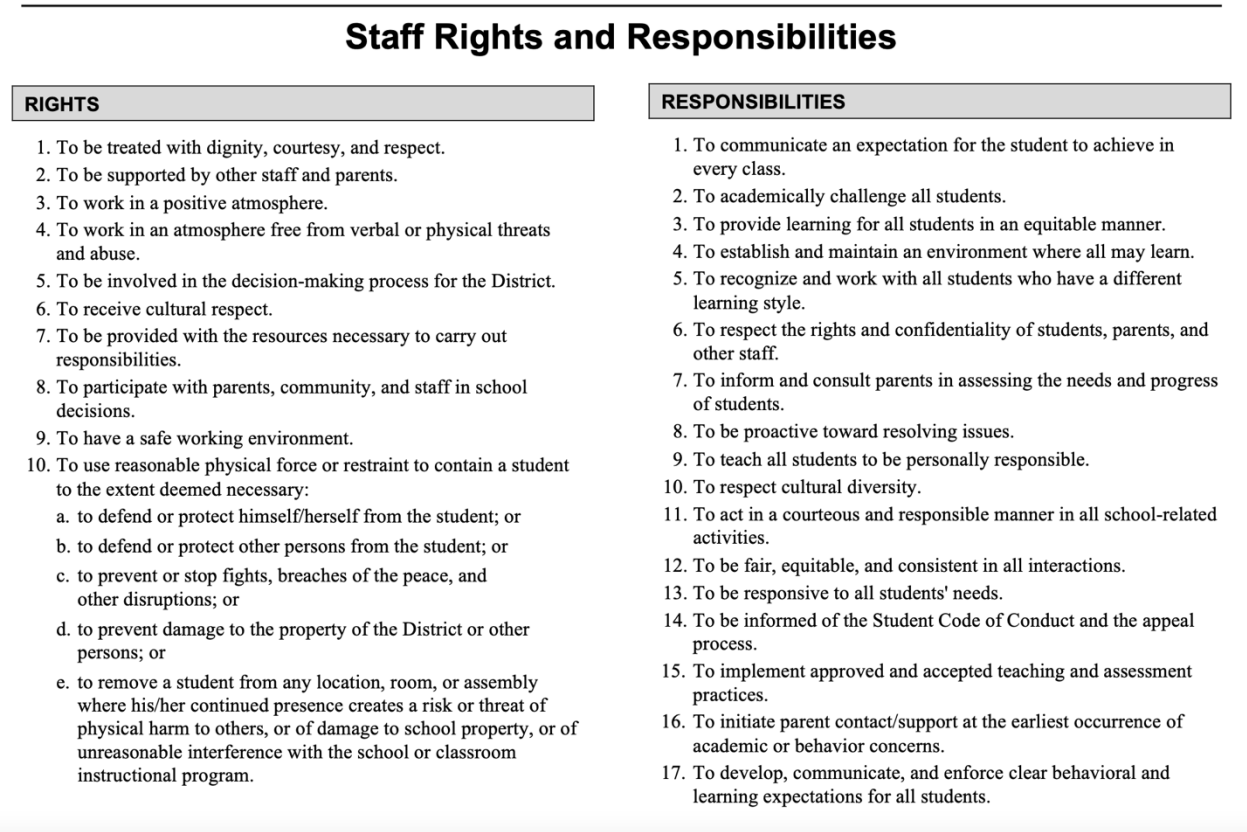
Students' rights and responsibilities

Students' Rights and Responsibilities

RIGHTS	RESPONSIBILITIES
1. To be treated with dignity, courtesy, and respect.	1. To resolve problems and issues while treating everyone with dignity, courtesy, and respect.
2. To be treated as an individual.	2. To become productive citizens.
3. To be academically challenged.	3. To recognize when personal actions are interfering with the rights, personal space, feelings, and property of others.
4. To be given the opportunity to be heard as well as have witnesses and/or an advocate speak on one's behalf.	4. To attend school regularly, arrive on time, bring supplies, and be prepared for the day's lessons.
5. To pursue a successful education without disruption.	5. To be sensitive to individuals from diverse cultures.
6. To discuss educational concerns with teachers and other school staff.	6. To develop a sense of responsibility for personal choices.
7. To be informed of student responsibilities, rights, and discipline policies.	7. To succeed in school by working to the best of one's ability.
8. To receive fair and equitable treatment without discrimination in every aspect of the educational system.	8. To follow discipline guidelines adopted by the District, school, and class.
9. To expect cultural respect.	9. To ask for help when in need of assistance.
10. To expect learning to be relevant to life situations.	10. To act in a courteous and responsible manner in all school-related activities.
11. To participate in courses and extracurricular activities that promote individual skills, academic achievements, and talents.	11. To be a participating learner.
12. To be transported in a safe and timely manner.	12. To behave in a safe and responsible manner on District and/or public transportation.
13. To access facilities that correspond to their gender identity. Any student who is uncomfortable using a shared facility will be provided with an alternative. Students or parents should contact the building principal to request an alternative to a shared facility.	

Figure F3

Staff rights and responsibilities



Staff Rights and Responsibilities

RIGHTS

1. To be treated with dignity, courtesy, and respect.
2. To be supported by other staff and parents.
3. To work in a positive atmosphere.
4. To work in an atmosphere free from verbal or physical threats and abuse.
5. To be involved in the decision-making process for the District.
6. To receive cultural respect.
7. To be provided with the resources necessary to carry out responsibilities.
8. To participate with parents, community, and staff in school decisions.
9. To have a safe working environment.
10. To use reasonable physical force or restraint to contain a student to the extent deemed necessary:
    a. to defend or protect himself/herself from the student; or
    b. to defend or protect other persons from the student; or
    c. to prevent or stop fights, breaches of the peace, and other disruptions; or
    d. to prevent damage to the property of the District or other persons; or
    e. to remove a student from any location, room, or assembly where his/her continued presence creates a risk or threat of physical harm to others, or of damage to school property, or of unreasonable interference with the school or classroom instructional program.

RESPONSIBILITIES

1. To communicate an expectation for the student to achieve in every class.
2. To academically challenge all students.
3. To provide learning for all students in an equitable manner.
4. To establish and maintain an environment where all may learn.
5. To recognize and work with all students who have a different learning style.
6. To respect the rights and confidentiality of students, parents, and other staff.
7. To inform and consult parents in assessing the needs and progress of students.
8. To be proactive toward resolving issues.
9. To teach all students to be personally responsible.
10. To respect cultural diversity.
11. To act in a courteous and responsible manner in all school-related activities.
12. To be fair, equitable, and consistent in all interactions.
13. To be responsive to all students' needs.
14. To be informed of the Student Code of Conduct and the appeal process.
15. To implement approved and accepted teaching and assessment practices.
16. To initiate parent contact/support at the earliest occurrence of academic or behavior concerns.
17. To develop, communicate, and enforce clear behavioral and learning expectations for all students.

APPENDIX G

Indigo's Revised List of Discipline Infractions

Table G1

Revised list of discipline infractions as categorized by Indigo, May 2021

Serious	Mild	Question	Remove From List
01.	04.	02.	17.
03.	06.	05.	22.
15.	07.	08.	27b. Loitering
18.	09.	13.	32.
19.	10.	14.	
20a. Property Damage/Vandalism	11.	16.	
	12.	21. what is this?	
23.	20b. Littering	26.	
24.	27a. Trespassing	30.	
25.	28.	37.	
31. (endanger emphasized)	29.		
34.			
36.			

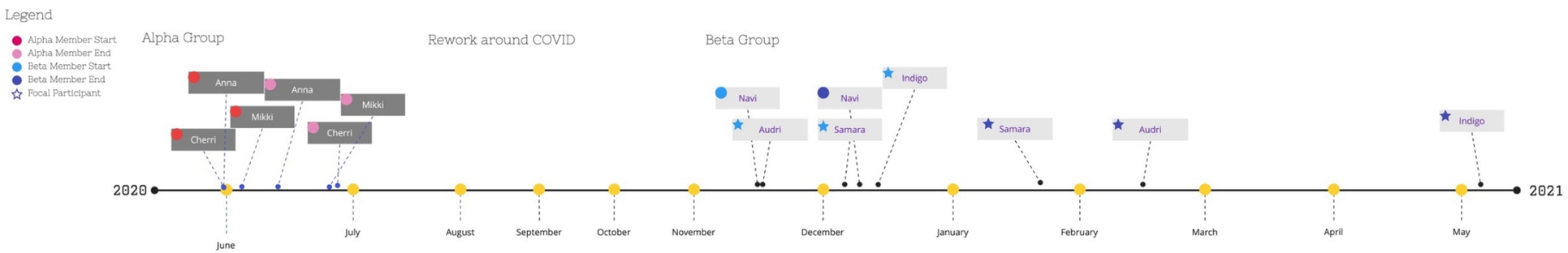
Numbers correspond to original list of "Gross Disobedience and Misconduct" infractions from District Student Code of Conduct 2020-21 (see Appendix F).

APPENDIX H

Recruitment Timeline: Alpha Group and Beta Group

Figure H1

Recruitment timeline



APPENDIX I

IRB Approval Letter and Amendments

Figure I1

New submission approval

ILLINOIS

OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR
FOR RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

Notice of Approval: New Submission

March 23, 2020

Principal Investigator	Smith Stephanie
CC	WORDS
Protocol Title	*Self (In)Justice: A Photovoice Study with Justice-Involved Black Youth*
Protocol Number	20688
Funding Source	Unfunded
Review Type	Expedited 7
Approved Subparts	D
Status	Active
Risk Determination	No more than minimal risk
Approval Date	March 23, 2020
Closure Date	March 22, 2020

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved the research study as described.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Using the approved consent documents, with the footer, from this approved package.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
IORG0000014 • FWA #00008584
217.333.2670 • irb@illinois.edu • oprs.research.illinois.edu

Figure I2

Amendment 1

ILLINOIS

OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

Notice of Approval: Amendment #01

June 19, 2020

Principal Investigator	Smith Stephanie
CC	Jadyn Harris
Protocol Title	*Self (In)Justice: A Photovoice Study with Justice-Involved Black Youth*
Protocol Number	20688
Funding Source	Unfunded
Review Type	Expedited 7
Approved Subparts	D
Amendment Requested	• Allow for data to be collected through Zoom
Status	Active
Risk Determination	No more than minimal risk
Amendment Approval Date	June 19, 2020
Closure Date	March 22, 2025

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved the research study as described.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Using the approved consent documents, with the footer, from this approved package.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
IORG0000014 • FWA #00008584
217.333.2670 • irb@illinois.edu • oprs.research.illinois.edu

Figure I3

Amendment 2

ILLINOIS

OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

Notice of Approval: Amendment #02

October 26, 2020

Principal Investigator	Smith Stephanie
CC	Jadyn Harris
Protocol Title	*Overdisciplined: A Photovoice Study with Black High School Girls*
Protocol Number	20688
Funding Source	Unfunded
Review Type	Expedited 7
Approved Subparts	D
Amendment Requested	• Change in Title • Surname Change for Research Team Member • Update anticipated start date • Modification to consent to inform that zoom meetings will be recorded
Status	Active
Risk Determination	No more than minimal risk
Approval Date	October 26, 2020 (Amendment Approval Date)
Closure Date	March 22, 2025

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved the research study as described.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Using the approved consent documents, with the footer, from this approved package.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
IORG0000014 • FWA #00008584
217.333.2670 • irb@illinois.edu • oprs.research.illinois.edu

Figure I4

Amendment 3

ILLINOIS

OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

Notice of Approval: Amendment #03

December 17, 2020

Principal Investigator	Smith Stephanie
CC	Jadyn Laixely
Protocol Title	*Overdisciplined: A Photovoice Study with Black High School Girls*
Protocol Number	20688
Funding Source	Unfunded
Review Type	Expedited 7
Approved Subparts	D
Amendment Requested	• Adding new target population (Social Workers) • Adding Social Worker interview procedure
Status	Active
Risk Determination	No more than minimal risk
Approval Date	December 17, 2020 (Amendment Approval Date)
Closure Date	March 22, 2025

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved the research study as described.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Using the approved consent documents, with the footer, from this approved package.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
IORG0000014 • FWA #00008584
217.333.2670 • irb@illinois.edu • oprs.research.illinois.edu

Figure I5

Amendment 4

ILLINOIS

OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

Notice of Approval: Amendment #04

February 23, 2022

Principal Investigator	Smith Stephanie
CC	Jadyn Harris
Protocol Title	*Overdisciplined: A Photovoice Study with Black High School Girls*
Protocol Number	20688
Funding Source	Unfunded
Review Type	Expedited 7
Approved Subparts	D
Amendment Requested	Updating research team
Status	Active
Risk Determination	No more than minimal risk
Amendment Approval Date	February 23, 2022
Closure Date	March 22, 2025

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved the research study as described.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Using the approved consent documents, with the footer, from this approved package.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
IORG0000014 • FWA #00008584
217.333.2670 • irb@illinois.edu • oprs.research.illinois.edu

APPENDIX J

Consent Forms

Figure J1

Minor Consent Form

MINOR WRITTEN PERMISSION FORM
Permission to Participate in Research

Title of Research Study: Overdisciplined: A Photovoice Study with Black High School Girls

Investigator: Jadyn Laixely
Sponsor: Stephanie Smith

You are being asked to participate in a voluntary research study. **The purpose of this study is to explore identity with Black girls who have been disciplined in school.** Participating in this study will involve making photographic self-portraits and examining childhood photographs, and your participation will last for about **three months**. Risks related to this research include dealing with emotions related to what could be considered traumatic lived experiences; benefits related to this research include the opportunity to explore self identity, help direct this project, and effect policy and social change in schools and the community.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

Research studies are usually done to find new knowledge, understanding, or to solve problems. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a Black high school girl at the READY program, which means you may have experience being disciplined in school before. This could include being sent out of the classroom, being suspended or expelled from school, or other forms of discipline. I'm interested in how your experiences being disciplined in school or at home have (or have not) played a part in how you define yourself. In providing a creative space in which to tell your stories, it is my intent that school staff and community members can reflect upon your experiences, and together we can affect social change.

What should I know about a research study?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. It is up to you if you want to participate. You can choose to take part now and change your mind later if you want. Your decision will not be held against you. You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

How long will the research last?

Your participation in this research will last three months. You will be given a Zoom link and meet with Jadyn and/or other participants once or twice a week starting in November of 2020 and ending around the end of January or early February. Sessions will last about 50 minutes each.

What happens if I say "Yes, I want to participate"?

If you agree to be in this study:

- All sessions will be conducted over Zoom.
- During Phase I, you share some photos from your childhood and tell me about them.
- During Phase II, you will create a self-portrait and share why it represents you. During this portion, you will sometimes work with other participants!
- During the study, you will work with other participants to decide on a way to share your work online so that school staff and members of the community can listen to your experiences and your stories and be called to act.
- You will receive a $20 Target gift card at the end of Phase I and an $80 Target gift card at the end of Phase II, to thank you for your time.

What are the possible risks?

These activities will help you reflect; while this is usually a really good thing, sometimes it can also help memories to surface that may be unpleasant. We can stop any session if you are uncomfortable.

Figure J2

Adult/Emancipated Minor Consent Form

ADULT/EMANCIPATED MINOR WRITTEN PERMISSION FORM

Permission to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a voluntary research study. **The purpose of this study is to explore identity with Black girls who have been disciplined in school.** Participating in this study will involve making photographic self portraits and examining childhood photographs, and your participation will last for about **three months**. Risks related to this research include dealing with emotions related to what could be considered traumatic lived experiences; benefits related to this research include the opportunity to explore self identity, help direct this project, and effect policy and social change in schools and the community.

PROTOCOL TITLE: Overdisciplined: A Photovoice Study with Black High School Girls
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Stephanie Smith, PhD
DEPARTMENT & INSTITUTION: Curriculum & Instruction, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
CONTACT INFORMATION: ssmith37@illinois.edu
CO-INVESTIGATOR/STUDENT INVESTIGATOR: Jadyn Laixely
CONTACT INFORMATION: jharri10@illinois.edu

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

Research studies are usually done to find new knowledge, understanding, or to solve problems. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a Black high school girl at the READY program, which means you may have experience being disciplined in school before. This could include being sent out of the classroom, being suspended or expelled from school, or other forms of discipline. I'm interested in how your experiences being disciplined in school or at home have (or have not) played a part in how you define yourself. In providing a creative space in which to tell your stories, it is my intent that school staff and community members can reflect upon your experiences, and together we can affect policy and social change.

What should I know about a research study?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. It is up to you if you want to participate. You can choose to take part now and change your mind later if you want. Your decision will not be held against you. You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

How long will the research last?

Your participation in this research will last three months. You will be given a Zoom link and meet with Jadyn and/or other participants once or twice a week starting in November of 2020 and ending around the end of January or early February. Sessions will last about 50 minutes each.

What happens if I say "Yes, I want to participate"?

If you agree to be in this study:

- All sessions will be conducted over Zoom.
- During Phase I, you share some photos from your childhood and tell me about them.
- During Phase II, you will create a self-portrait and share why it represents you.

Figure J3

Parent Consent Form

PARENT WRITTEN PERMISSION FORM

Permission for Child to Participate in Research

Your child is being asked to participate in a voluntary research study. **The purpose of this study is to explore identity with Black girls who have been disciplined in school.** Participating in this study will involve making photographic self-portraits and examining childhood photographs, and participation will last for about **three months**. Risks related to this research include dealing with emotions related to what could be considered traumatic lived experiences; benefits related to this research include the opportunity to explore self identity, help direct this project, and effect policy and social change in schools and the community.

PROTOCOL TITLE: Overdisciplined: A Photovoice Study with Black High School Girls
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Stephanie Smith, PhD
DEPARTMENT & INSTITUTION: Curriculum & Instruction, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
CONTACT INFORMATION: ssmith37@illinois.edu
CO-INVESTIGATOR/STUDENT INVESTIGATOR: Jadyn Laixely
CONTACT INFORMATION: jharri10@illinois.edu

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Jadyn Laixely. I am a doctoral student in Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and I will be conducting a research study this fall and winter (2020-2021). I'm interested in how Black girls' experiences of being disciplined in school or at home have (or have not) played a part in how they define themselves. In providing a creative space in which to tell their stories, it is my intent that school staff and community members can reflect upon the girls' experiences and stories, and together we can affect social change. **This is not an evaluation of your child's teachers or of your child's academic progress.** Your child is being asked to participate in this study because she is a Black high school girl at the READY program, which means she may have experience being disciplined in school before. This could include being sent out of the classroom, being suspended or expelled from school, or other forms of discipline.

The purpose of this study is to boost the stories of Black girls who have had adverse experiences at school, and to examine how these girls view themselves. Using childhood photographs and making self-portraits, participants will explore their self-definition and share stories that are meaningful to their sense of self. **All parts of the study will be conducted online on the Zoom video conferencing platform.**

- During Phase I of the study, your child will need to bring one to three (1-3) childhood photos to share just with the researcher. Photos will be shared on screen so that we can look at them and discuss how your child connects them to their lived experiences and sense of past and present self. The photos will not be shared with anyone else.
- During Phase II, your child will create a self portrait that represents their present and/or future self. They will discuss what this portrait means to them and how it relates to their life experiences.
- At the end of the study, there will be an online presentation of your child's work. The participants will determine how this will take place. Your child will have the choice to reveal her identity or not during this exhibit. Members of the community and school staff will be asked to interact and reflect on your child's stories and the art they have created. During the course of the study, your child and two other