A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF DISCIPLINARY ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM “ENFORCERS” ON THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER: ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, COACHES, SUBSTITUTES, AND CAMPUS PATROLS

JAIR MUÑOZ PhD

Doctoral Program in Teaching, Learning, and Culture

APPROVED:

______________________________
Josefina Villamil Tinajero, Ed.D., Chair

______________________________
Johannes Strobel, Ph.D.

______________________________
Erika Mein, Ph.D.

______________________________
Victor Rios, Ph.D.

______________________________
Stephen L. Crites, Jr., Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School
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by

JAIR MUÑOZ PhD

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Abstract

Stemmed from zero-tolerance policies, Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs/Classrooms (DAEPs) in Texas are disciplinary spaces designed to house students deemed at risk, while schools continue to serve students’ educational needs of (Aron 2006, Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Once there, students are stereotyped with analogous carceral-framed personas that taint who they are, how they are perceived, and/or how they are treated in alternative classrooms (Dunning-Lozano, 2015; 2018). As a result, the programs/classrooms are fundamental bastions of the school-to-prison-nexus involving a culmination of practices, and policies, along with institutional enforcements that push youths from school to the legal system (Fernandez, Kirshner & Lewis, 2016; Hartnett, 2011). Situated on the U.S.-Mexico Borderland in a post-COVID era, in this study I explored the experiences of key enforcers in these disciplinary classrooms—teachers, administrators, and campus patrols. Utilizing phenomenology and semi-structured interviews (Harrell & Bradley, 2009), I explored their understanding of the dynamics of disciplining, student infractions, and disciplinary exclusion in DAEP classrooms. Data were analyzed through Foucault’s (1977) disciplinary technologies’ lens and Bourdieu’s (1977) symbolic violence where participants conceptualized how alternative classrooms or spaces are framed as carceral spaces within educational institutions (Dunning-Lozano, 2015). Further, I elaborated on how enforcers view alternative students, their infractions, and themselves. Lastly, I discuss the implications for further research.

Keywords: Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs, disciplinary enforcers, borderland, disciplinary exclusion, reflections, phenomenology, at-risk youth, school-to-prison-nexus
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Al Jazeera’s *Fault Lines*, a current affairs documentary series about the United States and the Americas, featured a segment in 2014 on the school-to-prison-pipeline (Enders, 2014), featuring an Alternative Education Program (AEP) classroom in a middle school in El Paso, Texas. The correspondent walked into a rickety portable classroom, where pressboard cubicles faced the walls, and the windows were covered with blinds. Out-dated, torn textbooks littered the desks. Mug shots of former AEP students who had “graduated” to jail and prison were taped on the chalkboard. “This is a mild form of incarceration,” the officer told the correspondent, “and we let these kids know that” (Enders, 2014). This was the first time a mainstream media outlet, albeit not from the United States, had shot footage inside an AEP in Texas.

At that time, I had been what high school students called “the alternative guy” for two years. I worked in what is called a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) in an El Paso high school. Those first years were consequential for me, as they led to a total of six years of my career being what I termed an “enforcer” in two different borderland high schools. This experience served as my impetus towards pursuing discipline, or disciplinary education, for my dissertation research.

What does it mean to be a DAEP professional/enforcer? My work ranged from classroom management, designing curriculum, delivering instruction, overseeing detention, and engaging in conflict resolution. I also served as a kind of security officer, assisting campus patrol or security guards when there were incidents of violence or drug use on campus. In some instances, I worked as an attendance clerk. I was a long-term substitute in the system for my entire time in the district. Substitutes in the district were hired in long-term positions if they could not hire teachers
to be enforcers in alternative. Unfortunately, without job security, or tenure, we were
dispensable. If a substitute got in trouble, for any reason that did not align with a school
administration, their contract would not be renewed. In the beginning, I was known as a
“straight shooter” – a person who followed district policy to a tee. I soon learned that I was
probably one of the few DAEP teachers who followed any policy. For example, cell phones
were expressly prohibited in DAEP classrooms. One day, when I caught a student texting in
class, I told her that I had to give her a disciplinary referral for insubordination, which meant
days would be added to her DAEP placement. She responded by saying, “Fuck off! You are the
only one that follows the rules in an institution where no one does.” And with that, she walked
out of the classroom. When I turned in the documentation about our interaction, the Assistant
Principal (AP) decided against my recommendation, stating, “She’ll come back to alternative
anyway. Don’t worry about it.” Later, the AP told me that this student was one of the “permanent
residents” in DAEP.

When I saw the *Fault Lines* documentary (Enders, 2014), I knew that the segment was
just a peek into what happens in DAEP classrooms. I wanted to know more about DAEPs,
especially since my experience, though valid, was anecdotal. I made it my task to learn about
these programs that are used ubiquitously throughout the state of Texas and across the nation.
I began reading about the school-to-prison pipeline (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Carver, Dunning-
Lozano, 2015; Lewis & Tice, 2010; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Philips, 2011; Porowski, O’Conner,
& Luo, 2014; Skiba, 2014; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014), which I discuss in depth in
Chapter Two of this dissertation. I was starting to understand that DAEPs, at least in El Paso,
Texas, were actually part of the legal system.
As I will demonstrate in Chapter Two, while there is significant scholarly literature about DAEPs, scholars know little about who the educators in those classrooms are, how they understand disciplining, and how their behavior is informed by their ideologies and beliefs about those “permanent residents.” Please note that throughout this dissertation, I use the term *disciplining*, as opposed to *discipline*, to emphasize the ongoing, processual nature of this practice, and to avoid the notion that discipline refers to a single act.

**Background**

In 1994, the Clinton Administration passed the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA). Programs that grew from this policy, which involved separating so-called at-risk or violent youth from the general school population, quickly gained traction across the country. Like a microcosm of the carceral society, the idea was to separate student offenders from the experiences of general education (Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo, 2014; Skiba and Peterson, 1999, 2000; Stone, 1993; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). GFSA engrained a criminal justice component into educational policy, in that the receipt of federal funding for school districts was tied funding to their compliance. These programs were seen as a logical, normative solution that would bring balance to the schooling environment. That is, students who misbehave would stay a couple of months in DAEP classrooms and return to general instruction when their time is up (Pane, Rocco, Miller, & Salmon, 2014; Vaught, 2017).

Instead, these GFSA-inspired programs led to an increase in the discipline gap (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). The discipline gap refers to the fact that African Americans and Latinxs are disproportionately disciplined in schools, compared to their White and Asian peers (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Aull, 2012; Skiba &
Peterson, 1999). Scholars have also documented the discipline gap produced by these programs (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Edsell, 2011; Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Decades of data have demonstrated that African American and Latinx students across the United States are disproportionately suspended and placed in exclusionary disciplining programs, and that behavioral differences do not account for these disparities (Losen & Martinez, 2020; Pearman, 2023).

Alternative education programs (AEPs), or Type II “last-chance” classrooms, programs, are the norm for so-called at-risk youth (Campbell-Rhone, 2014; Lopez, 2017; Philips, 2011; Skiba, 2000; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). Additionally, in a few states, such is the case in Texas that engrained disciplinary programs in their legislature (Cortez & Cortez, 2009) these are denominated as DAEPs, which are reserved for those who have committed serious offenses or have evinced deeply disruptive behavior. Alternative education spaces are where students labeled as “at-risk” are housed before they are suspended or expelled from school (Skiba, Arredondo & Williams, 2014). It is no surprise that these programs, which are a formal branch of disciplining in schools, would also reproduce the discipline gap (Farelly, 2013; Hanson, 2005; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Lopez, 2017; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). The discipline gap is a term coined by scholars (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008), that speaks to the gap between how White students and students of color are disciplined. That is, Black, Brown, and Native American students are disciplined more severely and more often than their White peers for the same offenses (Brown, 2014; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba et al., 2011). The discipline gap has led directly to the school-to-prison-pipeline (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Carver, Lewis & Tice, 2010; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Grace & Nelson, 2019; Lopez, 2017; Skiba et al., 2011). Further, this term has its limitations,
since it fails to identify the systems in place where incarceration, suspensions, expulsions, and other mechanisms in place (alternative being one) that force youth into the legal system through associations between “institutions, policies, practices, and ideologies (Fernandez, 2016 citing Hartnett, 2011; Hartnett, 2011; Kim, Losen & Hewitt, 2010). The inequity of the discipline gap has led to the school-to-prison pipeline, which means that Black, Brown, and Native American students are being incarcerated in numbers much higher than their White and Asian counterparts, and that this process towards incarceration starts with in-school disciplinary structures. While alternative programs were originally designed to prevent students from failing, that has not been the case (NAACP, 2005; Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). Today, more than 60 percent of school districts have some type of alternative education program (Carver, Lewis & Tice, 2010), with more than 10,000 alternative programs or alternative schools in existence throughout the nation (Aron, 2006). The 2000-2001 academic year showed that between 600,000 and 610,000 students were enrolled in these programs nationwide and by 2010, the last year this growth was documented, approximately 646,000 students were enrolled in some form of alternative program. This is out of 49.9 million students attending U.S. public schools (Carver, Lewis & Tice, 2010; Jones, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

With no federal laws to regulate what happens in DAEP classrooms, school districts have the discretionary power to dictate their own standards, regulations, and codes of conduct (Carver, Lewis & Tice, 2010; Cortez & Cortez, 2009; Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo, 2014). Because of this, it is nearly impossible to measure or understand program effectiveness, as DAEPs are
operated discretionarily, oftentimes even within the same school district (Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo, 2014).

In fact, only twenty-two states have mandated guidelines on eligibility, best practices, funding, accountability, and staffing (Almeida, Le, Steinburg, & Cervantes, 2010). And even in those states – Texas is not one of them – scholarship is scant in regard to the issues I explore in this study (Almeida, Le, Steinburg, & Cervantes, 2010; Dunning-Lozano, 2015), which includes who the educators/enforcers are, and how they understand disciplining, the students, their role, and the function of alternative classrooms/programs. While some superb initial scholarship exists that looks at teacher-student interaction in DAEP programs (Dunning-Lozano, 2015; 2018; Farelly, 2017), scholars know little about the identities and ideologies of those who “teach” in DAEPs.

In this study, I use a phenomenological case study approach to explore how alternative programs, disciplinary students, and discipline itself are understood by DAEP ‘educators’ in Texas schools on the U.S.-Mexico border (Merriam, 1998; 2002). While most of the scholarly literature has identified a discipline gap between Black and White students (Losen & Martinez, 2020; Pearman, 2023), this exploration, which was conducted in El Paso, Texas, a majority-minority community that is 82.9 percent Hispanic, 11.5 percent White, and 2.9 percent African American is pivotal, as Latinx populations currently comprise the largest minoritized group in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2019). This data was collected between December 2021 and September 2022, which was in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic. During this time, students’ educational performance, along with classroom pedagogy and management were profoundly impacted by the move from face-to-face to online instruction.
(Sahu, 2020). During that time, DAEPs paused, no student could be assigned since all instruction was online.

**Significance of the Study**

Some parts of the literature are quite clear. Students who are continually placed in DAEPs are more likely to drop out of school (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Cole & Heilig, 2011; Fowler & Lightsey, 2007; Skiba et al, 2010). And students who drop out of school have a more than 60 percent chance of getting a police record and becoming part of the Criminal Legal System by the age of 18 (Altheide, 2009; Avery, 2016; Hirsfield, 2010; Hetzeig, 2009).

Much of the scholarship in the alternative education literature focuses on best practices in DAEPs (Cobb, 2008; Cobb, 2009; Killian, 2003; Hoffman, 2014; Gullo, 2017; Lopez, 2017; Mattis, 2003; Means, 2015; Philips, 2011; Walker, 2009). These works center around effective teacher-student relationships, parental involvement, positive reinforcement, and the importance of clear school guidelines, to make sure students transition back to the general education classrooms. However, the discretionary nature of how school district’s structure, operate, and serve disciplinary alternative students muddle the water in relation to the best practices literature in alternative education classrooms (Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo, 2014).

Other scholars point out that DAEPs perpetuate the discipline gap, and contribute to low academic performance among DAEP students, compared to those in the general population (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Cortez & Cortez, 2009; Farrelly, 2013; Edsell, 2011; Noltemeyer, & Mcloughlin, 2010; Tajalli & Garba, 2014).
I argue that it is imperative that we understand how discipline is produced in DAEP classrooms. We need to understand the experiences of those who manage, discipline, and educate—i.e., enforcers. This exploration offers a more in-depth view of programs that have dominated school discipline nationally since the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (Almeida & Steinberg, 2010; Campbell-Rhone, 2014; Diaite, 2015; Farely, 2013; Tajalli & Garba, 2014), and in Texas in particular, where alternative programs/classrooms are engrained in the Legislature. One of the few states in the U.S. that took the programs a step further in ensuring there are incremental disciplinary steps (in the form of classrooms/programs/measures) from disciplinary referral/removal from mainstream instruction to in-school-suspension to alternative classroom/programs or DAEPs (in-house) or SAC (in-house) to alternative schools, either standalone DAEPs, to JJAEPs, to in-school-suspension within JJAEPs to Juvenile Detention Centers or Juvie (Johnson, 2014; Pearmen, 2023).

**Purpose of the Study**

There is an urgent need to understand what is happening in DAEP classrooms, along with their structures across communities, and what the perceptions, viewpoints, and ideologies are among DAEP ‘educators’ who work specifically in the U.S.-Mexico border of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, a region I term as the “Borderland”. In this study, I interviewed 15 stakeholders from two borderland school districts, to shed light on how disciplinary enforcers – administrators, educators, Campus Patrol Officers (CPOs), and Security Resource Officers (SROs) – think about their roles and their DAP classrooms, along with the larger question of disciplining. Scholars know little about the experiences of DAEP stakeholders on the ground in
these classrooms’ day-in and day-out, their beliefs, ideologies, and motivations. There are many roads that need paving, and they include understanding:

- How DAEPs operate across communities;
- How teachers are assigned to DAEPs;
- What DAEP ‘educator’ preparation is; and
- What constitutes DAEP curriculum (Dunning-Lozano, 2015).

This study attempts to address these themes. It was conducted in the majority-minority state of Texas, which has a Latinx population of 40.2%, and roughly more than 8 million residents (Aaronson, 2012). In the 1990s, Texas became one of the few states to legally mandate that DAEPs isolate offending students from the general student population (Corte & Cortez, 2009; Dunning-Lozano, 2015). It was not until 2009 that Texas set up any minimal standards for DAEP classrooms, and the Texas Education Agency does not oversee how DAEPs are enacted or implemented, as all of this remains discretionary to the locality (Dunning-Lozano, 2015).

In this phenomenological case study, I explored how primary stakeholders in DAEPs in the borderland – administrators, educators, Campus Patrol Officers (CPOs), and Security Resource Officers (SROs) – experience and interpret their roles, along with exploring the dynamics of disciplining, determining what student infractions are, and disciplinary exclusion, in general.

Due to the discretionary nature of how DAEPs are organized, managed, and overseen, scholars know little about how disciplining interactions occur (Dunning-Lozano, 2015). In order to understand how DAEP stakeholders understand their experiences, especially during the COVID-19 Pandemic, which I identify as happening between 2019-2022, I conducted a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994; Tewari & Priya, 2017). Through the use of
phenomenological interviews (Moustakas, 1994), I explored topics relating to power, ideologies, and the ways in which people interpreted their experiences. Having conducted this study during the unprecedented COVID-19 years, it was evident that I also needed to understand stakeholders’ beliefs about the impact of COVID-19 on DAEPs. Specifically, it was a conundrum to teach a DAEP classroom online, and to think through how DAEP students could be isolated from the general population, given that all students were isolated from each other during that time.

When considering a topic as complex as discipline in schools, and especially in a majority-minority community such as El Paso, Texas, issues of power are essential. That said, researcher reflexivity and positionality take center stage in this study (Gray, 2016; Weems, 2006), which is something I discuss in-depth in Chapters Three and Five. Next, I offer operational definitions of key terms used in this study.

**Operational Definitions**

**Alternative Education Program (AEP)** – Programs serving the needs of students who are not successful in traditional or mainstream classrooms. The state of Texas gives school districts autonomy as to how they design their AEPs. Usually, they are segregated classrooms within middle or high schools. There are some school districts that have alternative programs in elementary schools.

**At-risk Coordinator** – Typically, this is a counselor who supports school administrators in identifying, monitoring, coaching, and keeping track of at-risk student data.

**At-risk Youth** – These are students or youth in public schools who are deemed to be disruptive, as a result of their behavior, low academic performance, or both.
**Campus Patrol** – These are security guards employed by a school district. They are in charge of enforcing discipline in the school, which entails assisting teachers who have misbehaving students, de-escalating physical altercations between students, and more minor duties, such as escorting students across campus.

**Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP)** – This is an educational program focused on meeting the needs of students removed from traditional mainstream classrooms, due to serious offenses or disruptive behavior.

**Disciplinary Infraction** – This refers to the violation of a school or school district’s code of student conduct, which is documented through disciplinary referrals. Disciplinary referrals can be made by any school official, however, they are usually made by teachers, campus patrols, and school administrators—assistant principals and principals.

**Discipline Gap** – Scholars have extensive documentation about the fact that African American and Latinx students are far more likely to be disciplined than their White peers, even when the discretionary infractions are the same (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010).

**Disciplining** – This refers to the process of training a person or stakeholder to obey certain behavioral standards and/or regulations.

**Discretionary Removal** – This refers to the decision to remove a student from a general education classroom. This is done by administrators, teachers, or other school authorities (i.e., resource officers). These removals are anything that is not a drug, weapons, or fighting-related on campus. Meaning, misbehaviors, truancy, or defiance.

**Expulsion** – This is a disciplinary action taken against a student, leading to their being physically removed from school. When the student cannot be placed in a DAEP, due to their
having a felony or another serious offense, the student is suspended from public school for a period of up to one academic year.

*Guns Free Schools Act of 1994 (GFSA)* – This federal legislation was enacted in 1994 and signed by then-president Clinton. It was used to suspend and criminally charge students who bring weapons to school.

*In-School Suspension* - This is the first step in producing a disciplinary action. When students are removed from the mainstream classroom, due to disruptive behavior or disciplinary offense, they are placed in an isolated classroom, within the school premises, but away from general education students.

*Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs (JJAEP)* – This is the next step after DAEPs. These classrooms are usually housed separately from mainstream public schools. JJAEPs are separate operational middle schools or high schools that exclusively serve at-risk youth. In states like Texas (TEC, chapter 37), populations with more than 125,000 people have to serve the educational needs of at-risk youth who are usually expelled or have committed serious criminal offenses or felonies, due to this these programs, classrooms, or schools (this is left to the school district’s discretion or needs, they have latitude in how they organize JJAEPs) house students that are not successful in alternative programs/classrooms or DAEPs.

*Mandatory Removal* – These refer to a student being removed from mainstream instruction, due to infractions directly linked to the criminal justice code. Serious offenses include felonies having to do with drugs or weapons. These include drug possession, along with selling, or using drugs. They also include the possession of weapons on school grounds, along with assault. Mandatory removals adhere to the state penal code, and in Texas, students may be placed in DAEP, JJAEP, or juvie.
Out-of-School Suspension – This refers to administrative action in which the student is temporarily removed from their home campus for more than three consecutive school days. School administrators have the discretion to determine the severity of the infraction unless it is a mandatory removal, which is determined by the state penal code. Typically, these refer to behaviors related to drugs, weapons, gang activity, and/or physical altercations.

Priority Schools – Priority schools are high schools with Title I funding are those with a graduation rate of less than 60 percent. Another criterion for being a priority school is having the lowest achievement levels in the district in Math and Reading (TEA, 2010a).

Recidivism – This happens when a student who has been in alternative education continues to behave in ways that require their being returned to an AEP, DAEP, or JJAEP.

Referral – This is a disciplinary report usually written by a school official, such as a campus patrol, resource officer, teacher, counselor, and/or administrator. Referrals are initiated because a student has violated the student code of conduct or some other school policy. These reports are the form of documentation for disciplinary infractions, and they are used across the nation.

Special Assignment Class (SAC) – This class serves as a temporary alternative classroom for disruptive youth before they are sent to an alternative school. In the borderland, each district has its iteration of alternative classrooms/programs. For the Borderland district, there are in-house DAEPs. However, in the Valley school district, which is where Coach J works to this day they have SAC classroom, a mini version of alternative where students are housed for up to a week, where they either are sent to an alternative school or juvie. These classrooms also serve as In-School-Suspension classrooms where minor offenses like tardies are handled.
School Resource Officers (SROs) – Usually, school districts will have their own police departments and officers. These officers have the same legal authority as a city police officer, although their enforcement is focused on schools only. However, they still have municipal jurisdiction and cooperate with other local law enforcement agencies. Typically, each school has one SRO.

Suspension – This refers to being removed from the home campus generally for a serious infraction. Suspensions occur for a period not to exceed ten days during an academic year. They also deny students any classroom or school involvement/activities.

Zero Tolerance Policies – Taken from the world of drug enforcement, zero tolerance policies mandate a punitive response for any disciplinary infraction. They serve to deal with discipline and the criminal justice system. Officially, these policies remove students who misbehave, to deter further classroom disruption. Initially, these policies focused on mandatory removals, but later, they were expanded to refer to all removals in school settings.

Summarizing

In this chapter I spoke of the background, significance, and context of the study, from my experience in alternative that the latest version of them date back to the 1990s with GSFA (Skiba and Peterson, 1999, 2000). “Alternative” as is commonly referred to in the context of the study serves as a promulgation of practices materialized into classrooms that serve so-called at-risk youth (Curran, 2016; Lange & Sletten, 2002). I argue that we need to understand how discipline is produced in these classrooms that unfortunately pave the way to what is denominated at the school-to-prison nexus (Hartnett, 2011) especially in Texas, in this case, the U.S-Mexico
border, one of the largest in the country, El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, a majority-minority community. In this study, I employed phenomenology when interviewing fifteen stakeholders that represent enforcement in these classrooms/programs aimed at understanding their experiences. These stakeholders are enforcers on the ground, and their ideologies, motivations, and beliefs to gain a picture of how disciplinary education is empowered through their impetus, operation, assignation, and how they view alternative students, at-risk youth, and disciplinary education at large.

Their understanding of their day-to-day interactions gave a clearer picture as to what happens in these classrooms, and the ideologies behind their role. In the subsequent chapter, I will give an in-depth examination of the historical context of disciplinary education, the literature review, and gaps in the literature.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this literature review, I take a deep dive into the literature on alternative education programs. I begin with the last thirty years, with the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, and zero tolerance policies and their impact on schooling, then move to the history of Type II alternative programs (Raywid, 1994; Tobin & Sprague, 2000), also known as “last chance” programs, which arose in the 1990s, in the age of Zero Tolerance. I include references on how these programs grew with the support of policies, such as zero tolerance, which solidified the structural disappearance through suspensions and expulsions, of students who were deemed as at-risk (Skiba, 2014). In other words, students who were deemed to be disruptive, or violent, or were seen as unlikely to succeed in mainstream instruction (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Rausch, & Skiba, 2004; Skiba, 2014; Tobin & Sprague, 2000 were segregated from the general education population. From there, I discuss the neoliberal policy impact on schooling in the 1980s followed by the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) in the 1990s which popularized zero-tolerance policies, criminalization of youth across the nation and offered new light for disciplinary education, in particular alternative classrooms, or programs (Johnson et al., 2001). From there, I examine scholarly literature on alternative education, students of color, and the work on mainstreaming alternative education. Lastly, I discuss the gaps in the literature along with how my study reveals a profound lack of accountability about these programs nationwide, as there is no federal and, in most states, `no state legislation to effectively monitor them. There is no oversight of their admission policies, pedagogy, or how long students remain in these programs (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010; Campbell-Rhone, 2014). School districts, thanks to Texas law, hold the steer in how discipline is
conceptualized. In it, school administrators hold the gavel on how disciplinary education, and alternative programs/classrooms function depending on the needs of their schools.

While there is some research that praises disciplinary programs, through the perspective of administrators and teachers, that literature is scant, mainly focusing on what best practices should be (Almeida, Le, Steinburg, & Cervantes, 2010; Aron, 2006; Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010; Edsell, 2011; Lopez, 2017; Porowski, & O’Conner, 2014; Skiba, 2014; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). In the next section, I discuss the evolution of discipline in the last thirty years in the United States as one that is interlinked with schooling and guns, materialized by the Gun-Free Schools Act.

**Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994**

The Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994 was federal legislation that mandated how schools across the nation had to deal with supposedly violent students who are considered to be a risk to themselves, their peers, their teachers, and their community (Mayer, & Leone, 1999; McAndrews, 2001; Mongan, & Walker, 2012; Skiba, 2014; Skiba and Peterson, 2000; Tobin & Sprague, 1999). By withholding federal funding for schools that did not comply with the GFSA, the federal government coerced states to adopt the infamous zero-tolerance policies or risk losing funding for schools (Aull, 2012; Baron, 2005; Boroughs, Massey, & Armstrong, 2017; Mitchell, 2014).

Since the 1980s, zero-tolerance policies were arrayed to “dictate that a student caught with a weapon at school be expelled for a year regardless of circumstances or the student’s previous behavioral record” (Curran, 2016 p. 647). By the 1990s, GSFA mainstreamed these policies that criminalized behavior (Brady, 2002). Public education has
been reshaped through the merging of disciplinary action and the criminal justice system (Brady, 2002; Cohen, 2013; Curtis, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2004). Initially, GFSA targeted students who brought a weapon to school or had a physical altercation with another student or a teacher. These measures demanded mandatory action on behalf of school officials, requiring that they suspend or expel the students involved. At the same time, students could also get charged with a felony, or misdemeanor, usually ending up defending themselves in court. The Act expanded to other misbehavior, or discretionary actions, such as absenteeism, truancy, or insulting a teacher, to anything school officials deemed a threat.

As was the case of the seven-year-old student Joshua Welch who was suspended for eating a pop-tart, turning it into the shape of a mountain but was confused as a pop-tart gun, which led to his suspension (Gessler, 2016). He was considered a threat, and his family had to take the case to the state court of appeals where it was resolved years later. The merge between zero tolerance policies along with GSFA sparked an influx of policing in schools—resources officers, campus security, metal detectors, cameras, at-risk coordinators, and closed campuses (students from any grade level are not allowed to leave campus without prior approval from school officials during school hours) (Saltman & Gabbard, 2010). All of this meant that what had previously resulted in a slap on the wrist became a criminal rap sheet (Aull, 2012; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Hetzeig, 2009; Nolan, 2011; Petteruti, 2011).

The 1990s ushered in a new era in U.S. schools; administrators, teachers, and students now faced prison-like environments in schools. States expanded the authority of zero tolerance policies and began punishing students for common misbehaviors (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Hanson, 2005; Hetzeig, 2009;
Disciplinary action was employed for a whole new range of behaviors. Acts like defiance, absenteeism, and truancy were treated more severely than in the past. There were outlandish cases such as a student being given a psychological evaluation for twirling a pencil with his hair, he was accused of behaving violently, a 34-year-old mother serving time for her 2nd grade child due to truancy, and a 5th grader being handcuffed by a resource office due to disruptive behavior (CBS News, 2014; McCormack, 2014; Walsh, & Nehring, 2017). The criminalization of youth (Giroux, 2003; Mallet, 2007; Nolan, 2011; Rios, & Vigil, 2017; Togut, 2011), along with an already hyped up era of mass incarceration (Alexander, 2020; Mallet, 2016; Stone, 1993; Urbina, & Alvarez, 2017) vehemently and disproportionately targeted Black and Latinx students (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Losen, 2014). The consequences of GSFA were further aggravated due to an issue that still resonates today—school shootings.

COLUMBINE AND SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

Tragedies such as the school shooting in Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999 further led to schools becoming battlegrounds in which students were alienated; America’s youth were on one side, and the rest of society was on the opposing side (Altheide, 2009; Covington, 2010; Hetzeig, 2009; Hirschfield, 2010; Muschert, Henry, Bracy, & Peguero, 2014). The media, politicians, and school officials were presenting a discourse where youth were labeled as ticking time bombs waiting to go off, students were being cited for sharing aspirins, nail clippers, or scissors to classmates (Beger, 2002). An
unforgiven predetermined set of enforcing practices via suspensions and expulsions created an intonation of violent acts waiting to happen (Altheide, 2009; Covington, 2010). And even though mass school shooting tragedies continue to stain American culture, and society, zero tolerance policies wrongly criminalized youth, policing it, and created generations of students with a criminal record, pushing them into the legal system through systems of surveillance, monitoring, suspensions, expulsions, a term coined as the school to prison nexus (Goldman & Rodriguez, 2022). America’s youth is constantly policed.

This horrendous act unintentionally solidified Zero-Tolerance policies (Altheide, 2009; Hetzeg, 2009; Simmons, 2005). Due to the Columbine shooting, schools have become spaces of mass surveillance, campus security, resource officers, K-9 units, and metal detectors (Devine, 1996). We have now institutionalized active shooter trainings for faculty and students, along with training teachers to deal with students who are disruptive or violent. Essentially, there is a carceral system within education (Brady, 2002; Nunn, 2002; Simmons, 2005). Millions of students have suffered through harassment, violence, suspensions, expulsions, and vilification, all justified by these neoliberal policies (Nunn, 2002; Reyes, 2006; Rios, & Vigil, 2017; Vaught, 2017).

**Zero-Tolerance Policies**

Zero-tolerance policies as mentioned are a set of policies that aim to punish student behavior mandatorily. Meaning, punitive sentencing, suspensions, and expulsions, or even citations with the legal system (Beger, 2002; Giroux, 2009). The policies have weaponized suspensions and expulsions to *weed out* so-called undesirables from classrooms across the country (Hanson, 2005; Mitchell, 2014; Skiba et al., 2011). This is where alternative
education programs take center stage. States, in response to the growing numbers of students being punished and penalized, realized that at-risk youth were still in need of education. Instead of just expelling them from school, states designed programs to house and supposedly “rehabilitate” at-risk youth (Foley & Pang, 2006; Insley, 2001; Mallet, 2016; Mitchell, 2014). While alternative education programs existed before the 1990s (Raywid, 1994; 1999; Tobin & Sprague, 2000), thanks to the GFSA, and zero tolerance policies, these last-chance programs were seen as an opportunity to help a student “succeed” before dropping out of school and ending up in the legal system (Insley, 2001; Petteruti, 2011).

An Historical Overview of Alternative Education Programs in the United States:

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

Alternative schooling has existed virtually since the inception of this country; variably providing education to certain populations based primarily on race and gender (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Watson, 2014; Young, 1990). Those populations who could afford to go to an alternative and/or private school were largely students whose families came from privilege, were affluent, male, and overwhelmingly, White (Farelly, 2013; Lange & Sletten, 2002). However due to changing demographics, segregation, and as a result, the civil rights movement of the 1960s, alternative schools were popularized by critics of public education (Aron, 2006; Ryan, 2009; Young, 1990). They pointed out that public schools were
“irrelevant” institutions, detached from the needs of students who were not in the majoritarian communities. Critics also argued that public schools undermined the education of students of color by encapsulating their experience through top-down educational experience meant to assimilate, whitewash their identities via standardization focalized on the performance of a euro-centric, hegemonic viewpoint, educational institutions had (Eckford, 2017; Young, 1990). Johnson’s War on Poverty and the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 both led to schools being racially integrated, putting them on the frontlines of social change, with the hope of educational equity (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Foley & Pang, 2006; Jensen et al., 2004; Vandehaar, Muñoz & Petrosko, 2014). The 1960s saw the spawning of alternative schools that competed to provide quality education for minoritized communities (Aaron, 2006; Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Diaite, 2015; Farelly, 2013; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Young, 1990). This led to the development of alternative schools outside the public school system, which later led to alternative schools inside public schools.

*Alternative Education outside the Public School System.* Civil Rights activists knew that public education was still steeped in the racism and classism of the Jim Crow system, especially in the South. They created Freedom Schools or Free Schools, which were schools that were informal, temporary, and intended to promote political, social, and economic equality (Diaite, 2015; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Raywid, 1994, 1999). In this model, students were not formally tested, nor did they have disciplinary measures in place that would impede them from self-determination (Aaron, 2006; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Raywid, 1983; 1994; 1999). This gave free rein to students to explore without any limits—in other words, there was no formalized teaching (Edsell, 2011; Ellerbe, 2017; Raywid, 1994; 1999; Young,
Alternative Education within the Public School System. A group of educators along with Civil Rights activists, inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and alternative schools outside of public education, aimed at innovative approaches to public education. Interestingly, they did this within public schools (Edsell, 2011; Raywid, 1994; Young, 1990). This is when the idea of “school choice” first appeared in U.S. education (Lopez, 2017; Raywid, 1981; 1983; 1994). Initially, these choices were called Open Schools – where parents, teachers, and students chose to synchronize learning and employ evaluations that were situational and individualized to the child’s needs (Carver, Lewis & Tice, 2010; Young, 1990).

The Open School Movement sent shockwaves through public education, which was organized as teacher-centered, a kind of “teachers teach, students learn” model. Called Schools without Walls, they incorporated community-based learning and students’ lived experiences into the classroom, recruiting teachers who grew up in the community. The School within a School model – early college programs emanated from this approach – focused on secondary education and catered to students with specific needs and interests (Camarrotta, 2007).

Multicultural Schools are another incarnation of the School within a School approach. They focused on serving students from a particular ethnic group, teaching topics like Black History, focusing on a certain race, culture, or ethnicity, in order to diversify the curriculum (Camarrotta, 2007; George & Dei, 1994). This approach also bred Continuation Schools, which used individualized instruction for students who were at risk of failing, due to discipline problems or academic failure. Amazingly, pregnancy was considered a sort of
barrier, as well for academic success. There were also Learning Centers, which centered on vocational education and were for students with special needs or who needed special resources.

Another kind of alternative education that came from the Schools without Walls approach was Fundamental Schools. Fundamental schools offered a stricter environment, a response as well as a rejection of the Freedom Schools. The final kind of alternative education is Magnet Schools— which are still thriving today. They focus on bringing together a diverse student population to study a specialized curriculum, such as the performing arts, or STEM (Barr, Colston, & Parrett, 1977; Diaite, 2015; Lange, 1998; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Lopez, 2017; Raywid, 1981; 1994; 1999; Young, 1990).

Raywid (1981) suggests that during the 1970s, these alternative schools multiplied substantially, ranging from approximately 100 schools to more than 10,000 by the end of the decade. The idea of “choice” and “options” within public education ignited a sense of democratization in schooling (Raywid, 1981; 1994). Raywid (1994) points out that these movements were short-lived, mostly fading away after the 1970s, except for schools of “choice”, magnet schools, and of course, continuation schools, which later became Type II schools.

The U.S. Department of Education defined the term Type II Alternative Programs as, “…schools and programs designed to address the needs of students that typically cannot be met in regular schools. The students who attend alternative schools and programs are typically at risk of educational failure” (Carver, Lewis & Tice, 2010 p.1). All states have some form of alternative education program. However, the effectiveness of these programs
is up for debate, since scholars argue that these exclusionary classrooms have re-segregated learners of color under the excuse that disruptive students need some form of rehabilitation (Aron, 2006; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014; Tajalli & Garba, 2014; Van Acker, 2007). Students of color are disproportionately placed in AEPs in classrooms in majority-White communities.

Since the enactment of the GFSA, the number of students in alternative programs has grown exponentially. In 1998, there were approximately 4,000 alternative schools in the United States, and from 2002-2008, those numbers skyrocketed to 20,000, conservatively (Carver & Tice, 2010; Porowski, & O’Conner, 2014). Since 2008, just shy of one million students are in some form of alternative program, either administered by the school district or housed in-school (Carver & Tice, 2010; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Vandehaar, Muñoz & Petrosko, 2014).

There is also no formalized conceptualization of alternative programs at the federal level, nor is there a governmental body that oversees them. Rather, each state and school district adopts its own rules, making the implementation and accountability of alternative programs discretionary in nature, and hard to research (Aron, 2006; Farrelly, 2013; McAndrews, 2001; Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo, 2014; Watson, 2014). The only thing all states have in common is that they must adhere to Zero-Tolerance policies regarding mandatory violations, such as fighting, drugs, or weapons violations. Even so, alternative schools set up a pattern— which is that not all students learn in the same way (Carver, Lewis & Tice, 2010; Vinovskis, 2003; 2015).
Alternative Education Categorized

Today, alternative programs and schools are markedly different from the protest schools of the 1970s. Raywid (1994) describes them as:

- Type I alternatives are schools of choice, such as magnet schools, early college programs, and other innovative programs that aim to serve high-achieving students.
- Type II alternatives are last-chance schools, where students are a step away from suspension and/or expulsion. They became famous because of zero tolerance policies, and they focus on behavior modification or remediation.
- Type III alternatives are remedial and mainly deal with student’s social and emotional issues. Type III includes adult education (GED and ESL) and education for pregnant students (Diaite, 2015; Ellerbe, 2017; Langue & Sletten, 2002; Raywid, 1994; 1999; Vinovskis, 2015).

While Raywid (1994) groups each type depending on whatever the state program or policy was accomplishing, Langue and Slatten (2002) recognize that there are crossovers and hybrid programs, as well. If one thing is clear, it is that alternative schools and programs are characterized as: 1) maintaining small class sizes and prioritizing one-on-one interactions between teachers and students; and 2) fostering a supportive and constructive environment that maximizes student success and allows for flexibility in structure (Eckford, 2017; Tobin & Sprague, 1999; Raywid, 1994).

Type II is the most known alternative school or program,
mainly due to zero-tolerance policies and the GFSA (Hetzeig, 2009; Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo, 2014). Next, I go into how zero-tolerance policies stemmed from criminalizing youth. I also discuss neoliberal policies, which are rooted in the War on Drugs, and the ways in which they weaken public education.

**The Cold Warrior, Neoliberalism, and Education**

In the 1980s, with the last decade of the Cold War signaling the end of an era, *A Nation At-Risk* (Gardner, 1983) was published. With the Department of Education having been recently created during the Carter Administration, President Reagan, without the support of Congress, threatened to abolish it. However, instead of destroying it, his administration produced the crucial report, *A Nation at Risk*, in an attempt to undermine public education. A precursor to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Vinovskis, 2009; 2015), *A Nation at Risk* portrayed schools as bleak places with dilapidated classrooms, low standards, a lack of teacher preparation, and low student achievement (Gardner, 1983; Verdugo & Glenn, 2006; Vinovskis, 2015). *A Nation at Risk* became a way to create curriculum standards, define student expectations, increase classroom time, and focus on whether teachers were competent. It led to high-stakes testing and the tying together of whole-school achievement and finances (Au, 2010; Borek, 2008; Guthrie & Springer, 2004; Vinovskis, 2015). This expansion of the federal government into local education contradicts the small government brand that conservative ideologues continue to embrace in the United States. Reagan, a neoliberal champion, advocated for the deregulation of markets, the privatization of public services such as healthcare and education, and he destroyed several unions,
significantly weakening the right to organize (Corva, 2008; Guthrie & Springer, 2004; Harvey, 2007; Hewitt, 2008; Jacobs, & Myers, 2014).

Some hail Reagan as the president who tumbled communism in Eastern Europe ("Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall"), a true Cold Warrior credited with ending the Cold War (Dumbrell, 1996; Kuznick & Gilbert, 2013; Mann, 2009). This achievement was widely praised by politicians on both sides of the political aisle. With a focus on law and order, and a deep embrace of the free market (Dumbrell, 1996; Kuznick & Gilber, 2013), Reagan touted limited government only in regards to tax cuts, gun control, and healthcare. His tone changed when he dealt with education, policing, the prison-industrial complex, the military-industrial complex, immigration, abortion, civil rights, women’s rights, LGBTQ rights, and the war on drugs (Alexander, 2016; Chomsky, 2015; Corva, 2008; Gabbard, 2003; Grewal, 2006; Harvey, 2007; Navarro, 2007; Symcox, 2009). Further, he revitalized inflammatory Cold War discourse once more in conservative factions nationwide. This made him the poster child of neoliberalism, which on the one hand, meant praising limited government, and, on the other, meant justifying economic interventions that bankrupted entire nations and supported fascist dictators across the globe (Apple, 2013; Chomsky, 2015; Gabbard, 2003; Klein, 2007; Kuznick & Gilbert, 2013).

_A Nation at Risk_ was Reagan’s touchstone in education. He used it as leverage to begin an era of standardization that continues to haunt and marginalize entire communities (Apple, 2006; Au, 2010; Gabbard, 2003; Hursch, 2001 and 2008; Lipman, 2004). Scholars have long criticized the report by pointing out how it was used as propaganda to further corporatize and privatize education, while ignoring or trivializing educational disparities based on race, gender, language, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation (Apple, 2013;
Borek, 2008; Gabbard, 2003; Grewal, 2006; Guthrie & Springer, 2004; Hewitt, 2008; Lipman, 2004; Symcox, 2009; Verdugo, 2006). The justification for the report (i.e., higher standards) is still debated today. The report is rife with mixed signals – while painting a fatalistic view of schooling – it recognized new generations as more educated and more knowledgeable than previous ones, while still claiming that schools lacked quality. This message of high standards paved the way for other presidents to follow, regardless of party, putting education in the face of competitive globalized markets (Au, 2010; Johanningmeier, 2010; Lipman, 2004; Vinovskis, 2009). Americans needed to compete globally. This was Reagan’s rhetoric, and he took education into neoliberalism through high-stakes testing, tax cuts for the rich, school vouchers, and lastly, school “choice”—another alternative program (Gabbard, 2003; Symcox, 2009). This, in turn, continues to undermine public education today. The proliferation of standardized testing, the public investment in charter schools, and private schools, is a direct result of the report (Au, 2010; Borek, 2008; Johanningmeier, 2010; Lipman, 2004; Vinovskis, 2009). This has resulted in increased tracking and a racialized achievement gap, both of which are tied to the rhetoric of criminalization of youth. That is, the school-to-prison pipeline, along with DAEPs, are presented as solutions to the problem of school violence (Addington, 2014; McAndrews, 2001; Daresbourg, Perez & Blake, 2010).

As the 1990s began, Presidents Bush Sr. and Clinton capitalized on this same political bandwagon, focusing on the criminalization of youth (Hawdon, 2001). This was a punitive model of no mercy to anyone, meaning the confiscation of property and detention of anyone possessing an illegal substance through zero tolerance policies (Blumenson, & Nilsen, 2002; Curtis, 2013; Hoffman, 2014; Martinez, 2009).
When President Clinton signed the GFSA in 1994, the criminalization of minorities had already extended to youth in schools (Covington, 2010; Hetzeig, 2009; Hirchsfield, 2010). Even though violence was steadily decreasing during the 1990s, two-thirds of the evening news featured violent crime coverage, largely attributed to men of color under 25 (Covington, 2010; Gorman-Smith, & Tolan, 1998; Hancock, 2001). Terms like “super-predators”, “crack”, “mass shootings”, “gangs” and “young Black or Latino men” were linked constantly and were pervasive in political and media platforms. Clinton created a legacy that he unapologetically stands behind, even today. When Black Lives Matter activists confronted him, he used the same punitive discourse that criminalized Black and Brown men. (Altheide, 2009; Reyes, 2006; Rickford, 2016). GFSA is Clinton’s legacy in education. He turned the narrative against public education by eliding the criminal justice system and school discipline (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Aull, 2011; Au, 2010; Curtis, 2013; Reyes, 2006). Schools were now the new grounds for the criminalization of youth.

With the full force of zero tolerance policies in effect across school districts in the country, by 2001, with the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), education was once again restructured in a major way. NCLB sold the idea of quality education by telling students they were equal, regardless of SES, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and ability (Leonardo, 2007; Rocque, 2010). The Act steered education into a colorblind society or post-racial world ideology (Au, 2010; Freeman, 2005; Insley, 2001; Nunn, 2002). It was conceptualized as eliminating underperforming schools. It was yet another get-tough crusade that supposedly aimed to provide all students with equal instruction. In reality, it was a ruse that disguised structural Whiteness, disproportionately ravishing communities of
color (Leonardo, 2007; Reyes, 2006; Vaught, 2011). This led to the discipline gap and racialized achievement gap, I now examine empirical literature on the two central issues that revolve around alternative education.

**Two Branches, One Tree: The Discipline and Racialized Achievement Gap**

Zero tolerance policies and NCLB ushered in an era of polarity that permeates schooling today. This polarity has two branches—the first, a carceral one, that replicates the criminal justice system in schools, and the second, which is achievement (Au, 2010; Aull, 2011; Brady, 2001; Giroux, 2003; Nolan, 2011; Rios, 2011; Rios, & Vigil, 2017; Vaught, 2017). This first carceral polarity is manifested in Type II Alternative Programs, as places to dump at-risk youth (Raywid, 1994; 1999; Foley & Pang, 2006; Langue & Sletten, 2002; Schlessman & Hurtado, 2012). The second polarity is achievement. Underperforming students, largely students of color, were also placed in Type II Alternative Programs, so alternative programs were seen as the solution for the increasing suspensions, expulsions, low achievement, as well as the dropout problem (Aron, 2006; Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Farrelly, 2013; Foley & Pang, 2006; Lange & Sletten, 2002). In the next section, I discuss important scholarship that has grown from both branches – the discipline gap and the achievement gap.

**The Discipline Gap and the Discretionary Nature of Disciplining**

Zero tolerance policies act in classrooms through these media—disciplinary referrals, absences, and truancy numbers. The main weapon is suspensions and expulsions, which is accomplished through referrals (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Reyes, 2006; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; 2000; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba, 2014; Symcox, 2009). These are the sources
of disciplinary documentation that school officials rely on and that determine millions of students’ fates in education.

According to the Department of Education’s latest estimates, there are over three million students who receive out-of-school suspensions, along with more than 110,000 expelled students, all on a yearly basis (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Male and minoritized students are disproportionately suspended, compared to their White and Asian counterparts. African Americans (19.6 percent), Native American (10.5 percent), and Hispanic (8.2 percent), compared to Asian American students (1.1 percent, and White students (3.7 percent) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). In addition to this, more than 70 percent of all disciplinary infractions that end in suspensions or expulsions are discretionary (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Mallet, 2013; 2016) while the rest are mandatory infractions relating to weapons, physical confrontations, and drugs.

It is a fact that disciplinary action contributes to negative school outcomes and declining academic performance (Curtis, 2013; Mallet, 2007; 2016; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014; Skiba et al, 2010). That is, students who are isolated from general education fall behind in their coursework, and those students are disproportionately African American and Latinx. They are disciplined more often and more harshly than their White peers, which results in their being suspended and expelled more frequently (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Gopalan, & Nelson, 2019; Wald, & Losen, 2003). In fact, students of color are at least 60 percent more likely to drop out of school and enter the legal justice system than their White and Asian peers (Barton, 2005; Bridgeland, DiTulio, & Morison, 2006; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Scholars have pointed out two pivotal
aspects of the discipline gap—its discretionary nature and the role of teachers in it.

McElderry and Chenng (2014) draw from national data of more than 4,800 student placements by looking at student demographics, race, socioeconomic status (SES), single-parent family status, and whether the discipline gap is discretionary in that locale. Drawing from the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey (PFIES), they found that even though African American students nationally comprise seventeen percent of the school population, utilizing multivariate regression analysis the scholars found minoritized students were at least twenty-three percent excluded from mainstream instruction. They confirmed their proposed null hypothesis adding to the literature how minoritized students are disciplined more than their White counterparts.

Kinsler (2011) looks at North Carolina state data and finds a discipline gap regarding disciplinary referrals and suspensions. Analyzing state data, Kinsley aimed to study racial bias within referrals in schools and across schools in a state with more than 1,000 schools and 500,000 plus students. Utilizing multivariate analysis, the scholar noted that within schools he found racial gaps in referrals across schools. Yet, within schools, the data did not show school administrators behaved differently with students, a clear limitation Kinsler noted. In fact, the scholar points out that more research is needed to describe how disciplining works within schooling.

Rocque and Paternoster (2011) complement these findings by collecting data in a Mid-Atlantic state, compiling data of more than 22,000 elementary student referrals in 45 schools during the 2005-2006 academic year. Using multi-level regression analysis, Rocque and Paternoster elaborated on how since their elementary years, African American students experience discipline more than White students. However, they do not misbehave
significantly more than White students, therefore confirming a racial gap that is complemented by achievement. In this Mid-Atlantic state where they conducted their study, minoritized students underperformed, along with students whose primary language is not English, or are deemed as special needs. They identified how students since their early academic years were deemed as more unruly or perceived as hostile to school officials.

Bottiani, Bradshaw, and Mendelson (2017) in another multi-level analysis gathered from both the Office of Civil Rights and the state of Maryland’s student-report Maryland Safe and Supportive Schools (MDS3) School Climate Survey found that there was a discipline gap in over 58 high schools, with over 15,000 students. The scholars show significance in how the discipline gap was accentuated in schools where Black student perception was lower in terms of equity, sense of belonging, and adjusting to school campuses.

In this section, these studies pinpoint how the discipline gap materializes through either state or federal data. In it, the scholarship notes the discretionary aspect where the authors pinpoint what causes it, whether it be racial bias, lack of sense of belonging, adjusting, or equity. In the next section, the discipline gap is further elaborated by suspensions and expulsions.

**Suspensions and Expulsions**

Skiba (2000) analyzed the disparities in disciplinary action throughout the 1990s and problematized the many inconsistencies of zero-tolerance policies in his review of policy scholarship (Skiba, 2000; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014; Skiba & Sprague, 2008). His work
revolves around identifying or affirming whether there is a discipline gap across schools and
districts. For instance, Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997) conducted two simultaneous
studies, one across different schools, and the other in one research site, quantifying
disciplinary referrals, to determine who the “disruptive student” is demographically and
why.

It turns out the disruptive student is noncompliant, defiant, or insubordinate.
Although these are all discretionary infractions, Black, Brown, and low SES students were
punished for them with suspensions or expulsions. While analyzing suspensions and
expulsions across school districts, Skiba (2000) found that over 40% of suspensions came
from repeat offenders, meaning the rate of recidivism is close to 50%, which is outrageously
high.
In another study that analyzed school district disciplinary records, Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May & Tobin (2010) noted that Black students were punished for more subjective or discretionary reasons than their White peers. Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson (2002) gathered data in a midwestern school district and found that teacher discretion in terms of enforcement is a major factor in how students are disciplined. Disciplinary referrals from teachers in this study, most of whom were White, displayed racial bias/disparities against Black students. This meant that how teachers enacted discipline was likely to be based on their racial beliefs.

Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson, and Wu (2006) conducted a study of more than 60 teachers in fourteen schools, looking at their views on minoritized special education students. A discipline gap was present in all the research sites, and concordantly, students of color were more likely to be put into special education than were White students. Teachers recognized that a lack of resources and a lack of teacher training led to their placing students into special education. This is something that has been researched extensively (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; 2007; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Losen, 2014). Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May and Tobin (2011) examined referrals from more than 300 middle schools and high schools and looked at the impact of disciplining. Without surprise, Black and Latinx students were more severely disciplined for similar infractions than their White peers due to misbehavior and non-threatening behavior, such as disrespect towards White teachers. Skiba, Chung, Trachok, Baker, Sheya, and Hughes (2014) found in their quantitative study that the discipline gap is intensified by the student’s SES, gender, achievement, and the school environment, all while not accounting for race. All these aspects of identity contribute to
whether a student will be expelled or suspended, but being Black or Brown is primary.

Mendez (2003) analyzed suspensions and expulsions in a Florida school district and found a link between out-of-school suspensions and low academic performance. Most students who were suspended once were likely to be suspended again, and there was a decrease in the student cohort because so many of them dropped out. She identified a direct link between discipline, achievement, and dropping out. White (2019) identified this trend as well, by asking whether minoritized students were suspended or assigned to In-School-Suspension more frequently than their White counterparts. By employing a casual-comparative research design, White looked at Texas Education Agency (TEA) archival data on disciplinary referrals state-wide for middle school students for a period of four academic school years from 2012-2016. Again, it was no surprise that Black and Hispanic students were suspended and/or placed in In-School-Suspension two to three times more than White students.

Gregory and Weinstein (2008) identified the discretionary nature of the discipline gap, focusing on defiant behavior and what causes it. The first part of the study identified a high school’s discipline referrals. Tracking more than 400 referrals, again, Black students were number one. In the second study, they asked why Black students were written up for defiance, uncovering that Black students misbehaved and were defiant with White teachers they did not trust. This illustrates how valuable teacher-student relationships are, and how discipline is tied to trust or the lack thereof.

Similarly, Abdou (2013) looked at data from 168 teacher and staff surveys along with student archival/referral data from four junior high schools in California analyzing the discipline gap affectation on Latinx students. Implementing regression analyses to document
how disciplining is affected by social structures. Abdou identified a discipline gap through suspensions, expulsions, and referrals. Latinx students were suspended at least twice more often than White students. However White students were represented in mandatory infractions, not misbehavior. Of the 168 interviewed, 119 participants spoke of the discretionary nature of disciplining, from talking too much, to dress code. Abdou recognized the vitality of racial climate in disciplining students since stereotypes feed and aggravate how students are punitively disciplined.

**The Role of the Teacher**

Most of the literature regarding school discipline acknowledges that there is in fact a discipline gap, and that most of it is discretionary. That means that there is a common misconception that teachers are to blame for misbehavior or scapegoated (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; 2007; Skiba, Chung, Trachok, Baker, Sheya and Hughes 2014; Skiba, Michael, Nardo and Peterson, 2002; Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson and Wu, 2006)--meaning that disciplining falls almost on teacher-student interactions, relationships, or training (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; 2007). However, disciplining encompasses more than just the interactions in the classroom setting. While some scholars point to the lack of teacher support/training, (Gregory and Ripski, 2008), the fact that most teachers are White (Monroe, 2009), that there is a lack of resources, and that the role is implicitly biased (Gray, 2016; Gregory and Mosely, 2004; Grewal, 2016) take part in how disciplining or the discipline gap is conceptualized (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; 2007; Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson and Wu, 2006).

The role of teachers is paramount when considering the discipline gap (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Gregory & Mosely, 2004) because most discretionary infractions
occur in the classroom, in the context of day-to-day interactions. Gregory and Ripski’s (2008) work highlights the role of teachers in the discipline gap. In their survey of more than 60 disruptive students and their teachers, Gregory and Ripski identify the importance of enabling culturally relevant or culturally responsive teaching to not alienate minoritized students. Teachers must understand the communities where they teach, and many do not. On the other hand, Gregory and Mosely (2004) looked at teachers’ theories as to why disciplinary infractions occur. Interestingly, teachers in this study could not account for the discipline gap. Most of their reasoning involved a student’s parent’s responsibilities or lack of discipline.

Gregory, Hafen, Ruzek, & Mikami (2016) analyzed a coaching program that trained in-service teachers to become culturally responsive. They provided a coaching model called the Classroom Assessment Scoring System-Secondary, which aims at instructional, organizational, and emotional support for students of color. This intervention significantly reduced teachers’ disproportionately referring students of color to disciplinary education.

Monroe (2009) observed and interviewed four teachers to understand teacher ideologies in relation to the discipline gap. Recognizing the fundamental role that teachers have in discipline, the teachers in the study acknowledged the profoundly racially charged ideologies in most school environments. Nevertheless, teachers prioritized student needs and wanted to establish communication with both students and parents, regardless of race.

I argue that race must not be ignored. The ideology of colorblindness affects minoritized populations gravely. Colorblindness is the belief that structural racism is a product of a socio-historical past that continues to endemically impact minoritized communities, and is no longer relevant (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). This is an underlying problem.
in mass incarceration as well as in education (Bonilla-Silva, & Embrick, 2006; Hetzeig, 2009; Rosenberg, 2004). The belief that racism was resolved by the Civil Rights Movement is a talking point for conservatives (Rosenberg, 2004; Ulluci & Battey, 2011). The denial of current structural forms of oppression that continue to impact communities of color needs to be discussed and foregrounded in educational research.

As the works reviewed above indicate, many scholars have demonstrated that the discipline gap is still very much alive in this country, and that teachers play a central role in how discretionary infractions are enacted. It is apparent that teacher perception of students defines how they interpret misbehavior (Gregory, Hafen, Ruzek, & Mikami, 2016; Gregory and Ripski 2008; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Monroe, 2009). However, teachers are not the sole culprits in the discipline gap. Structural racism as it is enacted through policy is pivotal, as well (Gray, 2016; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010).

**Summary**

In this section, I examined the integral role teachers play in discipline. In an effort to minimize the discipline gap, culturally responsive approaches to students or meaningful connections (Monroe, 2009) between teachers and students were pivotal in reducing disciplinary and racial bias in classrooms. In other work, teachers did not account for the discipline gap as a structural condition in schools, as more as reductionist responsibility where parents are exclusively central to student misbehavior (Gregory & Mosely, 2004). In the next section, I discuss the opportunity gap and its impact on minoritized students.

**The Opportunity Gap**

The term achievement gap is one of the most researched, criticized, analyzed (policy-wise) topics in education (Burris & Welner, 2005; Becker & Luthar, 2002; Ferguson, Stellar,
By contrast, the opportunity gap relates to the combination of structural conditions that serve as barriers for minoritized students in terms of achievement, school resources, and future academic future (Carter & Welner, 2013; Rubin et al., 2016; Verstegen, 2015). The overlap between the achievement gap and the discipline gap are clear; students of color who come from working-class backgrounds fare worse academically than White, more affluent students (Ladson-Billings, 2006; McKown & Weinstein, 2008). This is another result of NCLB and zero tolerance policies, which is a result of segregation, and A Nation at Risk (Borek, 2008; Hewitt, 2008; Johanningmeier, 2010; Saltman, 2000; Symcox, 2009).

Ladson-Billings (2006) brilliantly tracks the causation of this endemic dilemma in education. She argues that students of color and other minorities are owed an educational debt. She pinpoints this debt in terms of four characteristics:

1) The historical debt—the inequities and the exclusion of students of color’s identity, history, and legacy from the American psyche and educational platforms.

2) The economic debt—the economic disparities schools have today. Instead of serving students across schools with equity, education is economically stratified, giving value to some students, while casting others away.
3) The sociopolitical debt—how minorities have been stripped of their civil rights and civic duties throughout history—this happens through Jim Crow and continued voter suppression.

4) Lastly, the moral debt—the fact that minorities have been othered for hundreds of years and continue to be. For example, African American slavery and Native American genocide, along with the ethnic cleansing of Mexican and Chinese immigrants.

Ladson-Billings elaborates on the ways in which this amalgamation of debt hinders real progress. The literature on the achievement gap is comprised of critiques and reviews of policy, looking primarily at NCLB and how it punishes schools that do not reduce the achievement gap (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee, 2002; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Noguera & Wing, 2006). Adding to what Ladson-Billings states, both the discipline gap and achievement gap are converged echoes of A Nation at Risk. They are also a result of the catastrophic zero-tolerance policies and a product of a failed war on drugs (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Corva, 2008; Gabbard, 2003; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Giroux, 2003; Harvey, 2007; Howard, 2010; Noguera & Wing, 2006). This merger has laid the groundwork for the school-to-prison pipeline.

The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy, At-Risk Youth, and the School-To-Prison-Pipeline

Thus far, I have delved into how detrimental educational policies impact students of color throughout the nation, and I’ve traced their origins to structural racism (Au, 2010;
Aull, 2011; Covington, 2010; Hetzeig, 2009; Hancock, 2001; McCorkle & Miethe, 2000; Mendez, 2003; Newburn, & Jones, 2007). In the following sections, I confer on the school-to-prison pipeline and its impact on marginalized youth, along with examining hallmark studies relating to discipline, at-risk youth, and disciplinary education.

As I’ve mentioned previously, Type II alternative programs and schools gained momentum once again in the 1990s thanks to GFSA and zero tolerance policies, as well as NCLB (Drumbell, 1996; Lipman 2004; Hursh, 2001; 2008; Mann, 2009). Regrettably, the GFSA and NCLB were the precursors to a new era of alternative schools, mainly in secondary education (Aron, 2006; Diaite, 2015; Raywid, 1981; 1994; 1999; Young, 1990). These alternative schools of “choice” are magnet and early college programs which are usually a combination of Type I and III Alternative Schools (Raywid, 1994). My interest is in Type II programs which are where at-risk students are sent (Aron, 2006; Lange & Slatten, 2002; Raywid, 1994). In the next sections, I discuss the school-to-prison pipeline, or the now term coined as the school-to-prison-nexus.

The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the reality that Zero Tolerance policies and the GFSA have worked together to disproportionately punish students of color and those from low SES backgrounds more severely for the same infractions that White students “get away with”. These policies have led Black, Brown, and Native American youth into disciplinary education, and at least 60 percent of so-called at-risk youth end up in the legal system (Heitzeg, 2009; Wald & Losen, 2003). It all begins with disciplining (Gonzalez, 2012). While I have already discussed the criminalization of misbehavior because of the GFSA, there is also notable research exploring the school-to-prison pipeline. This research has focused on the impact that policing, profiling, and labeling has on minority youth
I first discuss the work of scholars who study endemic structural racism in education, focusing on at-risk Black and Brown youth. Specifically, I look at how schools are institutions of social control that interact with the judicial system in a cyclical self-prophetic manner (Kupchick, 2010; Nolan, 2011; Rios & Vigil, 2017; Vaught, 2011).

Recidivism for students of color in DAEPs is estimated at around 40% and 60% or even 70% (Booker & Mitchell, 2011) and this is something that has drawn some scholarly attention. Kupchick (2010), Nolan (2011), Rios, & Vigil (2017), Shedd (2015), Sojoyner (2016), and Vaught (2011; 2017) are all highly influential scholars whose work explores the implications of being at risk from a structural viewpoint. Their important work frames my discussion as to what is lacking in the alternative education literature—a structural, critical inquiry into alternative programs and schools. I am situating my study in relation to the following works.

Rios’ (2011) work on “delinquent “Latino youth in Oakland is a landmark study that explores punitive social control—that is, the criminalization and stigmatization of young men in schools, starting at an early age. Schools produce this stamp of criminality on young men. In his trailblazing ethnography, Rios follows 40 young “delinquent” Latinx males, as they journey through high school. The view society has about young people, schools, institutions, and law enforcement, creates the “criminal”, so young men once faced with great disparities in society, mainly racism and classism, end up embodying this stereotype. Since they can’t get the resources or support, they need to overcome systemic barriers imposed by society, these young men appropriate a criminal identity, after they are first
given that label in school. Thus, creating a self-fulfilling prophetic structural barrier for students. They are trapped in an endless cycle between the criminal justice system and schooling.

In Rios and Galicia’s (2014) later ethnography, they study the consequences of hypercriminalization, and overpolicing in schools that push Latino youth into the school-to-prison-pipeline. Rios (2017) also builds on the labeling of students as “at-risk” as a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that he sees many youths of color – specifically young Latino/x – become more and more marginalized in school, and ultimately, in the criminal legal system. In his most recent ethnographic work, Rios (2017) follows a group of delinquent Latino youth in San Francisco. He describes how these young men were alienated at school, by law enforcement, and their families. Because they are outcasts looking for a sense of belonging, they are vulnerable to capitalism at its worst—street gangs. To understand criminalized Latino youth, Rios contends, we must listen to them.

We must reflect on how institutions play a major role in shaping their identities and sense of agency, a topic that is largely ignored by law enforcement and schools. In her influential work, Vaught (2011) deconstructs race and inequity in an underperforming high school, conducting a critical race ethnography. Interviewing students, staff, teachers, and administration, Vaught examined the colorblind hate speech in Martin Luther King High School, along with the deeply entrenched White supremacist discourse that is normative and perpetuated through the school policies and practices. Vaught documents everyday interactions, conducts interviews, and engages in policy analysis, critiquing the achievement gap, and unmasking it as a tool of White supremacy, through its main iteration—schools of choice. Black students are indoctrinated into buying into colorblind hate speech.
structuralized by policy and practice that undermines their identity and experience, producing their invisibility. Her work is a slipknot between students of color and this stigma of being at risk, since she underlines how students’ identities are branded as ignominious and dehumanized. She further expands on this concept in her much grimmer work in a high-security juvenile center.

In her later work, Vaught (2017) conducted another revolutionary ethnography on Black youth who are arrested, imprisoned, and labeled as delinquents, the last step of the school-to-prison pipeline. Frustrated by what her research reveals, she asks us to question and reflect on concepts like “perpetrator,” “victimhood” and “incarceration” (p. 31-38). She argues that schools are an oppressive system that sets students up to fail, and where people are monetized into property. She eloquently documents how young Black men are stripped of their identities and dehumanized into docile, obedient beings (Foucault, 1975). And once they are released from detention centers, they enter a cycle of recidivism that creates a toxic and unending relationship. She argues that generations of youth have been failed by the tying together of schools, law enforcement, and the judicial system. Like the war on drugs, she contends that the school-to-prison pipeline has destroyed the lives of millions and has led to the death of many (Dagen, 2017; Elwood, 1994).

Nolan (2011) takes on policing in schools. In her work in an urban high school in New York City, he ethnographically explores the impact of police presence in schools, looking at daily police-student interactions and putting them in contrast with the ways students interact with resource officers, teachers, the principal, and the dean, all of whom express that they want students to succeed. Still, their good intentions were meaningless in relation to the powerful Zero Tolerance policies.
Nolan documents students’ daily encounters with racial bias and calls for a new approach to Zero Tolerance policies. She embraces positive environmental support, school-based support for students, a culturally driven curriculum, and the restoration of moral authority on behalf of school authorities. The latter point is one of Nolan’s shortcomings; she does not question the structural conditions that produce teachers’ and administrators’ agency or ideologies. When Nolan claims that teachers and administrators need to have their moral authority restored, I find her conclusion too lukewarm in that it does not address other structural biases that Vaught (2011; 2017) and Rios (2011) point out.

Kupchick (2010) complements Nolan’s work on restoring autonomy to teachers and introducing the concept of homeroom security, a derivative of homeland security that is iterated in schools through metal-detectors, security guards, closed campuses, cameras, and resource officers. In this mixed-methods study, Kupchick gathers data from four high schools; two in the Mid-Atlantic region and two in the Southwest, where the scholar talks about the overreaction of disciplining—how criminalizing youth has been detrimental for thousands of students, due in part to the media sensationalism of mass school shootings. Schools have created a world of mass surveillance, constantly looking for threats, and aiming to weed out potential perpetrators. This is a haunting paradox in that it asks us to be cautious and protective, while at the same time criminalizing all students of color, without cause. Given that most school shootings have been perpetrated by white males as well (Duxbury et al., 2018).

Administrators and teachers end up creating circumstances that criminalize students of color, and this profiling of youth molds them from a very young age. It conditions them into believing that they are the problem while ignoring their educational needs and
voices. Kupchick (2010) arrives at a similar conclusion to that of Nolan (2011) in that they both note that while teachers can be well-intentioned, their power is taken away from them, and instead, that power is put in the hands of law enforcement.

Similarly, Shedd’s (2015) mixed-methods study of four high schools in Chicago focuses on the context of racial hierarchy in the city. Students learn to navigate racially unjust institutions daily, mainly in schools and with law enforcement. This vital work shows how schools shape student identities, robbing them of their agency and criminalizing them. Shedd warns us that the more schools resemble prisons, the more and more students will resemble prisoners. Sadly, that ship has already sailed.

Sojoyner’s (2016) ethnography of Black youth at a high school in Los Angeles looks at students’ forms of resistance, which include cultural expressions through arts and literature. He discusses the concept of enclosure, which refers to law enforcement materializing in schools as a carceral reality of schools. He noted “enclosure embodies the removal/withdrawal/denial of services and programs that are key to the stability and long-term well-being of communities” (p. XIII). Sojoyner shows the ways in which enclosure prevents Black youth from developing a sense of belonging. It alienates them culturally, socially, and economically. He posits that arts can destroy cultural hegemonic norms that define the school-to-prison pipeline. Adding to this, he recognizes how school policies have historically oppressed Black youth. He critiques the ways in which policies and institutions blame students for the barriers that are historically imposed on their lives. However, he forgets to reflect on the Black youth’s intersectionality, and fails to consider the role gender takes in schools that are overwhelmingly hypermasculine and heteronormative.

It is important to note that none of this literature has considered the disparities in
suspensions, expulsions, and dropouts in an intersectional way, especially in relation to
gender and the LGBTQ community. While gender has been considered a variable in work
on the discipline gap and the school-to-prison-pipeline (Rios, 2011; Sojoyner, 2016; Vaught,
2011; 2017), there is almost no literature that highlights the impact of how school is an
institution of racial social control that impacts the lives of young women and LGBTQ
students of color. Also, none of this scholarship looks at DAEPs.

All the literature I have reviewed here relied heavily on the experiences of Black
Youth, except for Rios’ work, which focused on Latinx youth in California (Rios, 2011;
Rios, Carney, & Kelekay, 2017; Rios, & Vigil, 2017). However, we do not know the extent
to which schooling impacts other minoritized students disciplinarily, and in different
communities.

However, there is an important body of research that has dealt with resistance and
issues of identity among Black women and Chicana prisoners (Diaz-Cotto, 2006; 2007;
Greer, 2000; Haney, 2010; McCorkerl, 2013; Zaitzow & Thomas, 2003). In that literature,
resistance, agency, and sexual abuse are key themes. But when it comes down to DAEPs,
that research has not yet been done.

Alternative Education, Stakeholders, and the Shadows of Zero Tolerance

The alternative education literature on separate schools and in-school programs is
also limited (Carver, Lewis & Tice, 2010). Many scholars point out that is difficult to gain
access to these research sites (Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo, 2014; Rios, Carney, & Kelekay,
2017). Something I personally experienced as well and will detail in Chapter 3.

Because there is no federal policy that oversees alternative education, when a K-12
student is placed in an alternative classroom, due process is supposed to be applied, just as it is in the judicial system (Curtis, 2013; Hetzeig, 2009; Mitchell, 2014; Petteruti, 2011). That student has the right to a hearing, the right to remain silent, to have their caregivers present, and to face their accuser/s. They also have the right to a lawyer and the right to tell their side of the story (Mitchell, 2014). Due to a lack of state supervision of DAEPs, and the discretion that is involved in placing students there, scholars have relied heavily on quantitative state data (Means, 2015). Importantly, we do not know how many schools give students due process.

Even so, alternative education has been credited with reducing high school dropouts in the past two decades since NCLB (Diaite, 2013; Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010; Schlessman & Hurtado, 2012). The number of dropouts has gone from 3.8 million in 2001 to 1.2 million in 2017 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). However, we still do not know if alternative education deserves all the credit for this, nationally. The reasons students drop out are complex, and as with any social phenomenon, it is difficult to prove there is a single cause. Indeed, there are conflicting accounts in the literature in terms of the effects of exclusionary education (Carver, Lewis & Tice, 2010; Ellerbe, 2017; Kozol, 2005). On one hand, exclusionary disciplinary education appears to have impacted a reduction in dropout rates, yet on the other hand, there is no real correlation between these programs and student success (Almerida, & Steinberg, 2010; Campbell-Rhone, 2014; Cortez & Cortez, 2009; Farrelly, 2013).

**What do States Oversee?**

Taking into consideration that every state in the nation has some form of alternative
program or school when it comes to structure, these programs vary widely (Almeida, Le, & Steinberg, 2010). There are only twenty-two states that have alternative education operation and management guidelines. They deal with eligibility, effective practices, funding mechanisms, governance, accountability, and staffing (Almeida, Le, & Steinberg, 2010; Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo, 2014). Four of these—Minnesota, North Carolina, Oregon and Tennessee—have extensive manuals that specify the requirements for alternative education and make recommendations for pedagogical practices (Almeida, Le, & Steinberg, 2010).

The rest of the 28 states have their own policies and great autonomy. In other words, we do not know how they operate. The federal government requires no guidelines for DAEPs. Scholars do not know what happens in these classrooms, what the rules and regulations are, whether they follow due process, and ultimately, what constitutes disciplining (Carver, & Tice, 2010; Lopez, 2017). Each state designs its’ own alternative programs, with no guidance from the federal level, beyond Zero Tolerance policies and the GFSA, both of which are limited to gun and drug-related infractions. Everything else is left to the states, and often, it is left to the school district (Almeida, Le, Steinburg, & Cervantes, 2010; Carver & Tice, 2010; Edsell, 2015; Gut & McLaughlin, 2012; Lopez, 2017; Skiba, 2014; Tobin & Sprague, 2000).

Given this reality, the scholarship on DAEPs focuses on descriptions of best practices for administrators, teachers, and students. I understand there to be overlap among all of the DAEP stakeholders’ roles. (Carver, Lewis & Tice, 2010; Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo, 2014). Interestingly, either AEP or DAEP is the term used, depending on the state or the school district. In the next section, I discuss the role of school administrators in alternative settings and teacher-student interaction.
Administrative Disciplining and Teacher Inconsistencies

This literature revolves around best practices for stakeholders in disciplinary education—administrators, teachers, and students (Freeman, 2005; Killian, 2003; Hoffman, 2014; Gullo, 2017; Walker, 2009). It describes best practices and looks at many of the basic questions regarding efficacy in education—small class size, caring teacher-student relationships, individualized instruction, and parental participation (Edsell, 2011; Foley & Pang, 2006; Walker, 2009). Scholars do, however point to the lack of consistency regarding how students are disciplined, which again, is no surprise in that it results in the racialized discipline and achievement gaps (Campbell-Rhone, 2014; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Philips, 2011; Skiba, 2014; Tajalli & Garba, 2014).

Looking at the research on administrators, most of it relies on descriptive statistics, surveys, and, in some cases, mixed-methods or interview-based studies. Killian (2003) in surveying administrators from at least 40 school districts in Texas, argued that administrators and directors of DAEPs prioritize structured programs. Clear guidelines with curriculum, expectations, the site, having a clear mission of the program and school, and positive attitudes towards innovation for students. These things, along with classroom size, are what should constitute an effective alternative program.

In contrast, Hoffman (2015) recognizes the discretionary nature of disciplining and criticizes the disconnect between referrals and placements in the program. Through district data, Hoffman documented how students were being held in AEPs, largely because of common misbehaviors. Both Killian (2003) and Hoffman (2015) contend that administrators and counselors need consistency when it comes to disciplining. That means there need to be
clear guidelines and professional development regarding disciplining for teacher and administrator enforcers at the school level where they enforce discipline.

The best practices Hoffman (2015) describes focus on consistency in placements. As I have mentioned before, there is a lot of variation, depending on the state, the districts, and many scholars, to anonymize their research, they do not mention where it was conducted. Among those who do mention where the research was conducted is Nelson (2019), who delves into best practices in an alternative program in Missouri. Nelson conducted a mixed methods study on three alternative programs, and surveyed schoolteachers identifying six domains for a successful program—assessment, curriculum and instruction, leadership, and structure. None of the three programs had professional development or consistency in curriculum/pedagogy. Nelson also noted that there is a need for student engagement in order for these students to be successful.

Concordantly, Gullo (2017) in surveying administrators in Pennsylvania, identifies implicit bias among program administrators using a cross-section design. This type of bias, Gullo defined it as “attitudes or stereotypes held subconsciously and unintentionally acted upon” (p. 1). Using descriptive statistics, the scholar identified and sent surveys from 41 administrators in twenty-seven schools. Gullo argues that the lack of clarity and guidelines in AEPs has increased the discipline gap in alternative education. While also recognizing the low rate of responses in the study, bias and subjective disciplining accumulated at least thirty percent of all responses, meaning one-third of all administrative action from different stakeholders changed over disciplinary decisions, resulting in biases in their actions. Gullo also states that administrators need clear guidelines for disciplining, including regulations, curriculum, and classroom management.
On the other hand, not much attention has been given to explicit bias, and how it ties into disciplining in alternative education programs. Unfortunately, this is obscured by the difficulty of gathering statewide data through each school district. Freeman (2002) describes the difficulty of obtaining information regarding alternative programs at the elementary level. To classify DAEPs in Texas at the elementary level, Freeman explored the main goals of the programs through administrators’ perspectives. The scholar found this troublesome, since there was a lack of participation on behalf of many alternative programs in Texas. The study consisted of seven administrator interviews of alternative elementary schools. The scholar repeatedly met dead ends when asking for disciplinary referrals from different school districts across the state. Additionally, Freeman states that most of the responses he received revolved around improving individual student behavior, rather than student success, interventions, or even due process.

Walker (2009) surveyed administrators on classifying alternative programs in Texas, where there was little consistency in how students transitioned from DAEPs, in this case, alternative schools, to their home campuses. Walker understandably frustrated, warns of the dangers of inconsistency in how administrators manage alternative programs. He suggests that the discipline gap and implicit bias are everywhere, and because there are no guidelines or regulations, and there are no assurances of due process, especially for students of color.

Edsell (2011), in a study on best practices in 40 alternative programs across Indiana, found that there was consensus between administrators and teachers on best practices, but they disagreed sharply on standards. Utilizing MANOVA and ANCOVA tests, where more than 140 surveys were emailed and 40% of administrators responded, while only twenty percent of teachers responded. Teachers disagreed with administrators, noting that there was
inconsistency in discipline, once more the discretionary element of how someone disciplines in these classrooms, and that classroom sizes were too big. However, both stakeholder enforcers agreed to the necessity of these programs and the integral role they play in schooling.

Foley and Pang (2006) surveyed administrators, noting the lack of resources many alternative programs have in terms of academics, along with the paucity of services for at-risk youth with disabilities. Both Edsell (2011) and Foley and Pang’s (2006) work speak to the ways in which the ideologies of administrators and teachers impact what happens in alternative classrooms. Some administrators hold at-risk youth to a higher standard than the general student population, and some teachers stereotype students of color by recommending them more frequently for disciplinary education.

The literature on disciplinary education administrators is mostly technical and non-empirical, dealing with best practices and issues of classifying students (Freeman, 2003; Killian, 2003; Hoffman, 2015; Gullo, 2017; Walker, 2009). The issue of inconsistency in practice is brought up throughout this literature, as well (Edsell, 2011; Foley & Pang, 2006).

More research is needed since these scholars did not consider the day-to-day interactions of administrators in alternative settings. Importantly, there is no research that involves in-depth, semi-structured interviewing or participant observation, in different communities, enforcer experiences, which would allow us to understand how disciplining occurs. In the next section, I examine the literature on alternative education and minoritized students, in particular students of color.
Alternative Education and Students of Color

The following section delves into the literature that analyses the discipline gap, reactions, ideologies, or experiences of minoritized students in alternative settings/classrooms. In the previous section, I examined how most of the literature regarding alternatives revolves around classifying students, solidifying whether there is a discipline gap in different states, or what are best practices (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Cobb, 2008; Lopez, 2017; Means, 2015; Tajalli & Garba, 2014; Tsang, 2004). Scholarship on students in alternative education looks at issues such as the importance of caring teacher-student relationships, some notable examples on the experiences of former alternative students where they either had negative attitudes towards the programs/classrooms or emphasized the vitality of one-on-one interactions, individualized curriculum instruction and fostered relationships between teachers and students in order to be successful in the programs/classrooms (Cobb, 2008; Lopez, 2017; Mattis, 2003; Means, 2015; Tsang, 2004). Most of the research is statistical analysis (Abdou, 2013; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Brown, 2007; Cobb, 2008; Henkel, 2015; Jones, 2011; Kravelich, 2007; Lopez, 2017; Means, 2015; Tajalli & Garba, 2014; Tsang, 2004) vital first steps towards understanding the role alternative programs/settings/classrooms play in disciplinary education in the U.S. Further, it provides insight to how the literature is directed—bettering teacher-student relationships, classifying and identifying the discipline gap, and the discretionary nature of enforcement stems in biases (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Gullo, 2017; Tsang, 2004).

Tsang (2004) shows that student-teacher relationships are fundamental for students in a Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP) in Texas. Being in a JJAEP is the step just before incarceration. Tsang conducted surveys on students and obtained
archival data on their performance to understand what constitutes success for a student in these programs. Overwhelmingly it was trust, and students feeling supported by teachers, that contributed to student success. Tsang reminds us that Black students are usually punished due to defiance in the classroom, more than mandatory infractions. Cobb (2008) like, Tsang (2004), ranked the effectiveness of several DAEPs in a Dallas, Texas school district, noting the overrepresentation of minoritized students and their low academic performance. Cobb indicates that the student’s experience was negative, due to the lack of consistency in instruction, teacher bias, and lack of resources.

Means (2015) pointed out in an interview-based study, that students talked about how they responded favorably to meaningful relationships with teachers, something that in this case, they did not have. The students acknowledged that disciplining was a one-on-one daily interaction and was completely discretionary. They noted that trust, was a constant and daily interaction, too.

Lopez (2017) used causal-comparative research to analyze student demographics in Texas alternative schools, looking at grades six through eight. He found that Black boys and girls were disciplined more than Hispanic boys and girls, and he found that low socioeconomic status was the most common characteristic among DAEP referrals. That is, students living in who extreme poverty were most likely to end up in these programs.

Booker & Mitchell (2011), conducted research at the high-school level, measuring whether or not there is a discipline gap in Texas DAEPs. They concluded, as all of these studies have, that Black students had more disciplinary referrals than White students, at a rate of four to one, with Latinx students at a rate of two to one. Tajalli & Garba’s (2011) found the same thing in their study based on state data on DAEPs in Texas, noting that 70
percent of all disciplinary referrals were discretionary, and disproportionately affected Black students.

Campbell-Rhone (2014) explored how Texas DAEPs impact Black and Brown students, while also surveying teachers about their qualifications, and their support resources for students. This mixed methods study used surveys of 103 DAEP teachers across the state, along with interviews with ten students. The students reported negative experiences in DAEP, noting their struggles to transfer back to mainstream instruction. The teacher surveys found a lack of training in classroom management and the need for a smaller teacher-student ratio. The study revealed that teachers who had gone through alternative programs had more classroom management skills and that positive reinforcement led to better outcomes than negative reinforcement. Campbell-Rhone (2014) also found that many DAEP students lacked basic literacy and needed access to counseling. While this study is important, as it clearly demonstrates the lack of professional development among teachers, it does not dive into how these students without basic literacy learn to navigate a DAEP. Questions remain about how DAEP students resist schooling, and react to teachers – in some instances violently – in an effort to channel their frustrations. Again, we do not know how discipline is produced in DAEPs.

Phillips (2011) surveyed parents of students in a Texas DAEP at the elementary level, analyzing how parents interpret disciplinary policy. Phillips interviewed parents of children who had been in DAEPs for at least six months, and they expressed frustration with and alienation from school officials. Parents said they felt disconnected when it came to teachers providing insight as to how to help their children. Phillips documented that most children were Black or Hispanic, and needed special education services, but did not receive
them. Noting that there is a need for policymakers to establish federal law on alternative education programs, Phillips found that faculty development, parental involvement, and transitioning to their home campus were key areas that needed to be addressed.

Eckford (2017) examined data on race, ethnicity, and SES among students in a Texas middle school, by looking at disciplinary referrals obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. The scholar found that the majority of the students came from a working-class background, were Black, and underperformed in Reading and Mathematics, compared to general education students.

Avery (2016) interviewed teachers to understand why there is so much recidivism in DAEPs in Texas. The findings offered a critique of the discretionary nature of disciplining and a need to do away with labels such as “at-risk”. She also noted the importance of more empathetic teaching approaches, and the need for defined guidelines and structures for teachers, including effective classroom management.

Similarly, Ellerbe (2017), using a narrative inquiry approach—interviews and observations of alternative teachers in Ohio. The scholar points out how the social stigma of students in alternative settings along with lack of resources unfortunately contribute to students of color failing academically. In a similar vein, Johnson (2013) conducted a survey (n = 65) in a Texas school district, with general education teachers, administrators, and DAEP teachers, and found that there is coercive power—meaning a combination of fear and control when dealing with students in a DAEP. This concept is one that is recognizing that the impact of this coercive power dynamic in the disciplinary classroom needs further research, especially in how teachers see themselves in terms of disciplining, why they see themselves that way, and how enforcing needs adjustments to student needs.
Williams (2009) conducted one of the few studies that explores race in an in-depth way, looking specifically at aspirational, linguistic, and oppositional capital among Hispanic students. Williams found that students and parents felt like educational castaways, and that there was a linguistic divide between alternative students and general education students. The DAEP teachers were all monolingual English speakers, and many of the students and their caregivers were monolingual Spanish speakers. Williams also found that students were resilient but had a set of defense mechanisms to save face with teachers, peers, and administrators. When parents met with school officials, Williams noted that fathers were often the only ones to speak, and the mothers remained silent. Regarding resistant capital, students expressed frustration with alternative programs, and with teachers. Sometimes this resulted in their acting out, which led to more time in DAEP, and even judicial action against them.

Like Rios’ works (2011; 2014), Williams (2009) displays that students are labeled and stigmatized, because they resist, and develop oppositional identities. Lastly, Ball (2008) conducted one of the few studies that focused on Hispanic and Black female students. Ball concluded, as have many others (Cobb, 2008; Lopez, 2017; Mattis, 2003; Means, 2015; Tsang, 2004), that teacher-student relationships were crucial. Ball highlighted the ways that empowering students and teaching them responsibility can make them successful in an alternative program.

In this section, the literature surrounding students of color in alternative settings/classrooms are one of classification—scholars identify a discipline gap in alternative classrooms in different states. Next, students of color are negatively impacted by placements due to social stigma or power dynamics that influence how teachers and students
interact. The literature is overwhelmingly quantitative analysis or records from districts. What is needed is in-depth research that explores the extent to which students of color are impacted by disciplinary exclusion.

**Placements in Alternative Education**

Two studies focalize on placements, the first remarks key components to being successful in alternative classrooms (Mattis, 2003) and the second examines first grader placements and potential characteristics of elementary students that set them up in an at-risk track.

Mattis (2003) categorized the effectiveness of AEPs in terms of positive reinforcement, parental support, and meaningful teacher-student relationships. The predictors of bad behavior were parents, teachers, and peer relationships. In other words, a combination of having a negative experience at home, with peers, and with teachers seemed to lead to misbehavior at school. However, Mattis did not look at the conditions of the school, or psychological variables, such as self-esteem. These factors, Mattis argued, are not significant when it comes to disruptive behavior. However, this study is limited, since it does not reflect how students interpret behavior at the psychological level.

Another study regarding placement in DAEPs is by Teague (2014) who suggested that there may be behavioral predictors among first-grade students that can indicate whether or not children will end up in an alternative program. Using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) database, a student information system that documents referrals, the scholar looked at more than 700 first grade student records, with an eye toward behavior that would lead to alternative placements in later academic years. Teague’s (2014)
study points out that misbehavior, especially among students from low SES backgrounds, begins early, but there is a broad range of misbehavior, and it can include talking to a classmate or not sitting down quickly enough when the bell rings. Equally, Teague identifies a discipline gap, and low SES including identifying trends in first graders, mainly misbehaviors that in turn a student carries these referrals throughout their later years. Unfortunately, it creates a precursor to label and identify potential alternative students since the age of six.

The implications of these two studies are substantial. It sets a normalized precursor to how we identify discipline or disciplining in younger students or children. They identify potential disciplinary students. While valid, what is not questioned, is the structural mechanisms in place, whether policy, practice, or both along with ideologies and/or biases of disciplinary enforcers in place that polish how students become disciplinary students. In the next section, I dive into the impact alternative has on student testing performance.

**Alternative Impact on Student Testing Performance**

Many scholars have documented that being placed in DAEP results in lower standardized test scores. In this section, I briefly discuss literature that accentuates the negative correlation between alternative placements and testing performance.

Henkel (2015) examined in-school, out-of-school, and in DAEP programs and considered whether they positively or negatively impacted standardized test scores among Black, White, and Hispanic sixth through eighth graders in Texas. Gathering raw reading and math scores from these students over an academic year, the scholar analyzed how students placed in exclusionary education perform negatively regarding state exams. Jones
(2013), focusing on the academic performance of DAEP middle school students in Texas, like Henkel (2015), found a correlation between low academic performance and being placed in a DAEP. Kralevich (2007) confirmed that students in DAEPs performed lower on standardized measures than their general education peers, by looking at scores from close to a million sixth through eighth-grade students in Texas, as well. Boughton (2004), confirmed this, yet again, looking at Texas data on more than 31,000 referrals over a two-year period, and found that AEP students tend to perform lower than general education students. Brown (2007) found that close to 40 percent of students in alternative schools said that the more time they spent in suspension or expulsion, the less connection they felt to school or teachers, and that the impermanent nature of DAEPs, along with being labeled “at-risk worsened these feelings.

In sum, alternative education has a profound impact on students, and disproportionately so for students of color, who are more likely to be placed there. Feelings of alienation and apathy are common (Booker & Mitchell 2011; Cortez & Cortez, 2009; Langue & Sletten, 2002), and being excluded from general instruction leads to lower academic performance. It is essential to point out that racism and classism are at the foundation of alternative education. While we know that DAEP students underperform academically, we do not know the scope of this underperformance (Carver, Lewis & Tice, 2010; Edsell, 2011; Khalilah, 2014; Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo, 2014).

**Mainstreaming Alternative Education**

In this section, I explore the work of scholars who support mainstreaming alternative programs. Scholars recognize how each program can be unique, and dependent on school
officials and policies, one cannot generalize based on them. This complicates research on alternative education because there is no standardized program or school that is employed across the nation. Take Wolfe’s 2008 study in which student performance declined once learners left the alternative program, a program in which there was one-on-one instruction, as well as parental and instructor support. Wolfe’s conclusion centers on the effectiveness of this particular alternative program and the fact that students should receive this kind of instruction if it serves them better than mainstream classes do. Armstrong (2017), on the other hand, takes into consideration a self-affirmation program within a DAEP in Texas. With a sample size of 23 middle school students, the scholar used a non-probabilistic sampling method where they found statistical significance in how it improved the student's performance under this program. Armstrong notes how this top-down program-within-a-program helps students meditate on their past errors and how they can improve them. Armstrong considers this to be a best practice, and a possible solution to misbehavior in DAEPs. Likewise, McGee & Lin (2017) surveyed and interviewed students in an alternative school, to examine students’ experiences. Students described positive, supportive environments that positively impacted their experience. Without caring relationships and spaces of support, they attest that their experience would have been detrimental.

Watson (2014) rails against alternative programs that are exclusively designated for at-risk youth, calling for its expansion. Instead, the scholar advocated for the expansion of alternative programs or at least make them available for all student populations. Using narrative inquiry, Watson looks at the perceptions of two students who have not been labeled at-risk, yet wanted to be in an alternative program, due to the individualized instruction. To be assigned to the program, they had to commit minor school infractions.
Watson champions alternative programs as a second option for those students who do not feel comfortable in mainstream classes, since they are more structured, one-on-one, and skills are taught to students such as time management and focused learning. Comparatively, Thomsen (2007) prefers alternative programs that foster small class sizes, caring and supportive teachers, individualized instruction, as well as a democratic environment. Through this interview-based study, Thomsen ascertains that the effectiveness of all alternative programs falls on teacher-student relationships.

Eschen (2013) comes to a similar conclusion in terms of curriculum. In Eschen’s study, students stressed the vitality of trusting relationships between teachers and students, but also a self-paced curriculum where students advance at their own pace. This case study focused on two students who went through a mentoring program emphasizing on smaller classes and the mindset for teachers can benefit students tremendously. Eschen cheers this notion that teachers must adapt with the at-risk student. Adapt in the sense traditional teaching will not work in alternative settings. Instead, self-paced curriculum will empower students to their own rhythm, which in turn coupled with mentoring, in this case, called peers, will support students effectively to help them make positive choices in education and their lives. Lindell (2011) remarks on the notion that rapport is the main contributor to an effective alternative program, even if a student comes from an adverse social environment. In the final analysis, success for a student will depend on the teacher’s rapport with the student, and how they are approached in an alternative environment.

Washington-Cobb (2012) delves into a similar theme when interviewing former alternative education students. Issues of anger, distrust, neglect, abandonment, and violence were trumped by caring-meaningful relationships in the program. Even though the students
expressed many adversities in their own social environments, their experiences were perceived as positive due to the presence of positive rapport. Donlon (2008) builds on a different framework, noting that if an alternative program has small class sizes, individualized instruction, and life-skills education, then students will perform better on standardized tests. Donlon situates the study in a program that does that, ergo, according to the scholar, students fared better as a result of these frameworks adopted in the alternative classroom. Donlon talks about how using this model in mainstream classrooms can have a positive impact on students. Coleman (2002) interviewed students, observed classrooms, and performed artifact analysis in an alternative school, taking into consideration referrals, and whether the program helped students succeed academically and disciplinary-wise. Coleman concludes that the program was successful with the following traits—small classroom size, small teacher-student ratio, and rapport. Lastly, set in Mississippi and Louisiana, Duggan (2007) through descriptive statistics—regression analysis compares two alternative schools in both states suggesting the positive impact school culture has on students if it is student-centered. The student’s perspective of their school changed dramatically too if the culture revolves around them. Duggan classified this positive reinforcement as academic innovation and hopes to replicate this hypothesis in other school districts.

In this previous section, I have looked at alternative programs that take into consideration the vitality of fostering teacher-student rapport based on trust and authenticity. Most of the programs in this section had clear guidelines and interventions to follow, which is something that is lacking, for the most part, throughout the nation. It is no wonder many of these scholars praised them in the hopes of mainstreaming. However, these approaches
are not possible in states such as Texas, where there are no accountability guidelines, and where teachers' and administrators’ biases are allowed to shape alternative education.

**Zero Tolerance Policies in Texas**

Texas is one of the few states that incorporated Zero-Tolerance policies into state law. Also, it is where most of the DAEP literature originates (Cortez & Cortez, 2009; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). DAEPs were created under the Texas 68th Legislature in 1984. The first iteration of DAEPs was in accordance with the so-called crime wave of at-risk youth in the 1980s, which highlighted criminalizing youth (Dorfman, & Schirald, 2001). The goal was to separate high school students awaiting trial from the general education population. By the 1990s, its second iteration, the Texas legislature enacted the Texas Safe Schools Act (Chapter 37, Section 37.001-37.002 of the Texas Education Code), which expanded DAEPs into elementary and middle schools.

As part of the Bible Belt, Texas has a history of slavery and continued systemic racism against the African American, Mexican American, and Native American people. Regarding schooling, it is one of the few states left in the nation where corporal punishment is still legal and discretionary (Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Since the 1960s, Texas has refused to make corporal punishment illegal, standing firm against organizations like the American Academy of Pediatrics, which makes clear the adverse effects of violence on children, both emotionally and cognitively (Paolucci & Violato, 2004; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Even though this is left to the caregiver’s discretion and has to be done with their permission. Further, there are questions as to what the criterion for selecting teachers is, including whether they are certified by the state. Lastly, predictably there is a discipline gap (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Cortez & Cortez, 2009; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Texas is special, to say
the least, and not in a positive way.

Texas has been an influential model in terms of how alternative programs have been developed in the United States after the GFSA (Acker, 2010; Vandehaar, Muñoz & Petroski, 2014). Yet, between AEPs and DAEPs, the commonality is just how each district decides what to name their alternative education program. Both serve at-risk youth in an individualized, exclusionary environment, through one-on-one instruction, and provide emotional support, supervision, and counseling (Acker, 2010; Reyes, 2006; Lopez, 2017). However, these programs are not monitored by anyone in Texas at the state level, meaning oversight ends at school official’s hands.

The First Alternative Ethnography in Texas

Dunning-Lozano (2015) conducted the first emblematic ethnography of a DAEP, and she did so in central Texas. Gaining access to a high school, she drew from a total of 90 interviews with students, parents, teachers, and staff, along with student surveys, and school disciplinary documents, she explored the effects, variation, form, and spread of discipline, both within DAEPs and beyond them. Looking at the micro-effects of disciplinary policies on teachers, students, families, and administrators, Dunning-Lozano zeros in on the wildly different experiences of those involved with DAEPs, based on race, class, gender, and legal status. In a span of 27 months, 12 of which she was a substitute teacher, she eloquently documented her experiences, through participant observation where she took from Foucault’s (1977) deconstruction of power, in which participants identified students as “deficient.” Taking this concept, Dunning-Lozano embarked on an ethnographic journey where she documented first-hand accounts of a deep inculturation of students. One that began from seeing students as deficient, to becoming “docile” bodies. In addition to this, she
discursively identifies how students are labeled as “culturally deficient” (Dunning-Lozano, 2015 citing Ferguson, 2001). My study builds on Dunning-Lozano’s, by focusing specifically on administrators, DAEP teachers/coaches, substitutes, and campus patrol guards, and using a phenomenological approach to understand how they understand their experiences and ideologies. Next, I will explain the gaps in the literature and how this study adds to the literature.

**Gaps in the Literature**

Throughout this literature review, I have discussed scholarship on how policies, such as GFSA, NCLB, and Zero Tolerance have led to the creation of DAEPs and the school-to-prison pipeline (Cohen, 2013; Curtis, 2013; Christie, Jolivette, Nelson, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Giroux, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Wald, 2001). These policies have disproportionately impacted students of color for more than 20 years, and they have helped to produce both discipline and achievement gaps (Apple, 2013; Au, 2010; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Students of color have been unnecessarily damaged by these policies, as well as by the practices within DAEPs. As I have discussed in this chapter, alternative education programs were seen politically as a solution to the dropout problem (Almeida & Steinberg, 2010; Diaite, 2015; Farely, 2013), but they are part of the problem. Indeed, most alternative education programs are a disguise for what Simmons (2005) calls, “prison schools”, where schools and prisons merge, leading ultimately, to incarceration. Though Simmons does not call alternative education a precursor to incarceration, it is paramount that we consider if and how alternative education comes to produce incarceration. These programs function as gateways to the School to Prison Pipeline, especially in secondary education (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).
Most of the scholarship on DAEPs has focused on quantifying referrals or finding patterns in very general surveys. What scholars need to do now, is to explore what happens in DAEPs, how students and teachers experience them, and how they impact minoritized students (Booker and Mitchell, 2011; Correa, 2011; Darensbourg, Perez & Blake, 2010; Skiba, 2014; Skiba and Peterson, 1999). While there is substantial scholarship on best practices in DAEPs, which focuses on the importance of strong teacher-student relationships, parental involvement, and clear administrative guidelines, this work is limited (Cobb, 2008; Freeman, 2003; Killian, 2003; Hoffman, 2015; Gullo, 2017; Lopez, 2017; Mattis, 2003; Means, 2015; Philips, 2011; Tsang, 2004; Walker, 2009). We do not know what the prolonged effects of these programs are on at-risk youth, looking more specifically at issues of identity.

While there is some phenomenal ethnographic work regarding the school-to-prison-pipeline and the negative impact of DAEPs on students of color (Kupchick, 2010; Rios, 2011; 2014; 2017; Shedd, 2015; Vaught, 2011; 2017), more needs to be done. In Vaught’s (2017) influential and unnerving work, she asks us to reevaluate who the real perpetrators and victims are. To this, I am reminded once more of Teague’s (2014) study, in which behavioral “predictors” among first graders can be used to shape them into future criminals.

Significantly, the literature does not mention Priority I schools at all. And there is minimal work on DAEP teachers in relation to the discipline gap (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Kinsler, 2011; Losen, 2014). Although teachers initiate disciplinary referrals, there is more research needed to understand how they can effectively engage “at-risk” youth in a system that has unfortunately produced unfair policies and punishments for students and teachers alike. The effects of alternative education programs on at-risk youth
are still virtually unknown.

There are many dynamics that still need exploration. Who are the teachers in alternative programs? What are their day-to-day interactions with students and other stakeholders? What are the experiences of teachers, students, and parents in different educational contexts, such as Title I schools vs. Priority I schools? What are the ideologies and practices of campus security guards, many of whom are police officers? And how do DAEPs work in minority-majority schools? Clearly, research on alternative education needs to be done with a critical lens to better understand how and what forms of power produce discipline. Additionally, the disturbing idea of having six and seven-year-old children secluded and segregated in a program as punishment for misbehavior is obscene. We are producing students who will become used to prison-like conditions at the very beginning of their lives (Rios, 2011; Rios, & Vigil 2017; Vaught, 2011; 2014). If we are conditioning children to adapt to a carceral system at such a young age, then there is definitely something systemically wrong with public education in the United States (Dunning-Lozano, 2015; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Simmons, 2005; Skiba, 2014; Vaught, 2011; 2014).

My study will shed light on how alternative disciplinary enforcers understand alternative spaces, their roles, the students they work with, and how they conceptualize disciplining. Through their experiences, opens a pathway toward understanding how enforcers understand the discipline gap in the context of a majority-minority community. Moreover, the study examines what is normative for disciplinary enforcers, why, and how it impacts their understanding of alternative enforcement.

In the next Chapter, I break down the theoretical framework of the study, the context, participants, and the analysis I employed.
Chapter 3: Methodologies

Theoretical Framework

Discipline is the underbelly of education. It should not be minimized or left to fall through the cracks of an already politicized, gargantuan educational system. Here on the borderland, there is an unspoken consensus that school districts do not welcome researchers interested in conducting research on any topic that might make the district look bad, and the experiences of at-risk youth are one of those topics. Disciplinary education deals with students who are not understood to be exemplars or are deemed to be incorrigible. This is not unfamiliar territory, as I have made clear in Chapter 2.

This study explores how administrators, teachers, campus patrols, and resource officers interpret their experiences and their ideologies, in relation to their work in DAEPs. I employed a Critical Phenomenological approach (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009; Giorgi, 1985a; Moustakas, 1994; to this exploration, and I used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Theoretically, I frame this study with the work of Foucault and Bourdieu. Perhaps unsurprisingly, their theoretical work speaks to disciplinary education in both straightforward and more nuanced ways.

Foucault’s (1977) work, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, offers a historical analysis of the penal system in France, describing a history of cultural recalibrations that are popularly understood to be examples of human progress and humanitarian reform. Instead, he argues that these transformations are new technologies of power used to control the body, and that they exist not only in prisons, but also in places like schools.

Foucault (1977) discusses three key types of disciplinary technologies, and I have offered examples of each in the context of schooling. The first is hierarchical observation. This refers to
state control of students’ bodies, including restrictions on their mobility and things like the use of security cameras posted throughout schools. The second is normalizing judgments. This speaks to behavioral norms that are enforced throughout the institution of the school, including labels such as “at-risk” and the behaviors that lead students to be referred to disciplinary education programs. The “necessity” of excluding DAEP students from the general student population, similar to isolating criminals from the public through imprisonment, is also a normalizing judgment (Foucault, 1977; Kozol, 2005). The third is examination, which combines hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment, and allows administrators to classify them (i.e., at-risk students), qualify them (i.e., place students in DAEPs, based on their behavior), and punish them (i.e., isolate and suspend students). This punishment through isolation is the first step toward the criminal legal system, and ultimately, jail or prison, as I have discussed previously. This is the school-to-prison pipeline.

Foucault identified disciplinary power as technologies used by institutions to reproduce relationships of oppression and inequity, through psychological means. That is, disciplinary power involves installing the jailor, psychologically, inside the heads of those who are being disciplined (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). The goal is to produce docile, obedient bodies.

Foucault also argued that over time, abnormal behaviors became highly scrutinized, in order to define normality, and in turn, to identify groups of people classified as abnormal, into homogenous bodies. Individuals and groups come to be seen, and to see themselves, as detached from the structures of power that produce these norms. The more the norm is accepted, the more individuals and groups are isolated, and come to self-regulate themselves. Marshall (1990) stated, “examination plays a critical role, for it determines not only whether a person is governable that is, likely to lead a docile, useful, and practical life” (p. 15). Foucault spoke
against this individualization, especially since it makes people into docile bodies who monitor themselves within an institution.

I intertwine Foucault’s theories on disciplinary power with the work of Bourdieu (1977), particularly his notion of symbolic violence. Bourdieu developed this concept to describe types of non-physical violence that are produced through relations of power. As a result of imposed behavioral norms, symbolic violence is a technique used to control minoritized groups. Symbolic violence involves dominations that happen through discourse and the everyday practices that reproduce it. This, in turn, spawns subordination among minoritized people. That dominance becomes normalized and is mainly unquestioned (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

The structural functions that create subordination are applied nearly invisible to the point that subaltern groups accept their social location in the hierarchy (Apple, 2006). That acceptance is symbolic violence. Further, the social actors reproducing this violence often do not recognize its existence. That is, oppressive social hierarchies seem natural and unchanging, which legitimizes them, even though they are socially produced. “The process whereby power relations are perceived,” Bourdieu explicated, are “not for what they objectively are, but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder” (1977, p. xxii).

Bourdieu (2001) explains that in order for social hierarchies to appear legitimate, minoritized groups must be compliant, and accepting, and in turn constantly reproduce the symbolic violence of their positions. This process is called misrecognition (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Burawoy (2012) interprets misrecognition as universal, essentially, “the result of the incorporated and embodied habitus, a process of internalization that was unconscious” (p. 189). This explains how minoritized groups, through the interactive process of symbolic violence, perceive their subaltern status as self-evident. Their positions in the hierarchy get
reproduced through their own cognitive structures and habitus (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016). Toshalis (2009) takes into consideration the fact that, “symbolic violence is still violent because it produces inequities in terms of access to resources or the acquisition of social and cultural capital” (p. 188). In educational settings, Bourdieu (1991) spoke of the established order in which teachers and students work together to ensure behaviors and identities are preserved within a sphere of normalized expectations. This happens through practices such as examinations and disciplining. Symbolic violence is embedded in our physical bodies, our social interactions, and our life chances, and we misrecognize it as something that is naturally occurring.

Regarding this study, there is misrecognition on at least two avenues. That is, the very existence of alternative programs themselves seems natural, but of course, it is not. And disciplinary referrals are also a misrecognition, in that these slips of paper, which seem minor, are a tool of maintaining social hierarchies in schools (Coles & Powell, 2020). The participants in this study, the “enforcers”, are social agents determined to misrecognize their role in disciplinary education. They also fail to pinpoint the structural inequities that produce their roles in these programs, and the programs themselves also produce the school-to-prison-pipeline (Skiba et al., 2014), or the now adopted, school-to-prison nexus. This nexus, which is described by Fernandez, Kirschner & Lewis (2016) as the “interlocking system of power over youth, allows us to understand how the criminalization of youth is a systemic problem that demands structural change (p. 93). This criminalization of youth has been years in the making. Both Foucault (1977) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) explore the role of power and its impact on minoritized, and/or subaltern classes. In the next section, I reflect on my own positionality in this research, which is extensive and complex.
Researcher Positionality

My first experience with DAEPs was in 2011, when I was hired as a substitute teacher in a Borderlands high school. I was asked by a colleague to take over for him, as he left for a position at an alternative school. The students at the school, which I identify as Rovers High School (pseudonym), were considered a disciplinary problem in the city. Based in a lower socioeconomic community with mostly Latinx students, the Rover alternative education program hired me as a long-term substitute, the main teacher’s backup. The main teacher was a football coach, who was only present in the DAEP classroom in the morning, as he had football responsibilities throughout the afternoon.

As I went in, I noticed worn-out, browned tile floors, tarnished, and rusted. The classroom was filled with rows of gray pressed-wood cubicles. Most of them were broken or uneven, with drawings of poorly erased marijuana paraphernalia and cartoon characters on them. The windows overlooked a parking lot, and the metal blinds were bent and crooked from students constantly trying to look out the window. No other student space in the school had the windows covered. These ersatz blinds were there to prevent students from looking outside.

The coach, a self-identified white male with Latinx heritage in his 40s with a crew cut, wearing jeans and the football team T-shirt, liked to keep the air conditioner at an uncomfortable 60-something degrees, to keep students awake, even though the ten students there slept most of the day. On my first day at Rovers, a Latinx student raised his hand and asked to use the restroom. His eyes were bloodshot, and he looked dazed and confused. The coach allowed it, and said to me, “they are just here to do their time, baby. Let them sleep.” The coach laughed and said that the students who put their heads down and slept all day, just waking up once or twice for restroom breaks and lunch were the “perfect” AEP students.
This was my baptism into disciplinary education. It set the tone for what would later become four years of being a permanent substitute for alternative and in-school suspension, detention, and security.

The coach’s description of the “perfect” alternative student was analogous to Foucault’s notion of docile bodies being produced in the carceral system (Foucault, 1977). To me, these students seemed like prisoners who were constantly surveilled, and the coach was the authority, sitting in the panopticon (Foucault, 1975; Simmons, 2005). The coach’s behaviors were militaristic, in that he cared about students being quiet and sitting up straight. When he wasn’t policing their posture, swearing at them if they resisted, or yelling at them, he permitted them to sleep, giving them a choice about their schoolwork. That is, if the student chose to do the work, the coach would email their teachers and ask them to send work. Otherwise, he would not bother them either.

When a student stole clothes from a nearby store, School Resource Officers (SROs) and Campus Patrol Officers (CPOs) were stand-ins for the police, a designation made by the city police. As a permanent substitute, my control officially extended only to the DAEP classroom. While that was my official role, I also served as an unofficial campus patrol for the school, overseeing detention, along with working with SROs to organize fire drills and lockdown drills.

Another time, a student with a history of assaulting teachers, staff, and other students stole a hammer from the school’s janitor. Three SROs, a CPO, and I trapped him in a hallway, where he was screaming, spitting, and threatening us. The SROs were about to tackle him when the student’s Behavioral Intervention Classroom (BIC) coach intervened and took him outside. I saw that one of the SROs was holding up his middle at the student, something I had not seen before. I asked the SRO what he was doing, and he said, “if he is going to do it, let’s do it”,

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(meaning, if the student was going to fight him, then he wanted it done sooner rather than later) with a cackle. The SRO was a Latinx man in his 40s, who continued to taunt the student, saying, “Come on fucker, let’s do it.” Fortunately, the coach calmed the student down and convinced him to give up the hammer. Later the SRO told me that this student had stabbed a librarian’s hand with a pencil. My experiences with administrators, SROs, and CPOs were extensive. Over time, I grew into an enforcer, myself.

It was not long before I embodied these punitive practices, sending dozens of students to court and juvenile detention, thinking that I was doing my job well. I walked the hallways wearing reflective sunglasses, playing “cat and mouse” with students, and calling for backup with my walkie-talkie. I had daily brushes with violence, drugs, gangs, and corruption, and after four years in this role, I grew frustrated. Having rejected several offers to take over as the DAEP teacher, one day, my contract was not renewed.

Officially I was not told why, but unofficially, I was told that I was criticizing DAEP practices too much. Studying for my doctorate in education, and being trained in educational anthropology at the time, with the courses I was taking, being an emerging scholar during this time had led me to think about issues of power and social control. I reflected more and more about racism and heteronormativity in the program, and my own role as an enforcer (Chavez, 2008; Gray, 2019; Simmons, 2005; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Today, I see myself as both an insider and an outsider, since I have a rapport with some DAEP staff at different campuses, although I no longer work there.

The prison-like conditions in the alternative education programs where I worked, combined with the symbolic violence practiced there, changed me into someone who reproduced school practices that unsparingly subjugated students (Foucault, 1975). Both my anecdotal experience
and the ambiguity of how these programs operate at the local level, specifically how stakeholders understand, interpret, and reproduce disciplinary practices, built an amalgamation that I argue, at the very least, needs documentation and clarity (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Farrelly, 2013; Lange & Sletten, 2002). This is especially the case since these programs are the overarching solution to quell misbehavior, disruptions, violent behavior, and often forms of retaliation (Rausch, & Skiba, 2004; Lopez, 2017).

My time as a disciplinarian lasted for about six years at two different high schools, and it led to my interest in researching this topic. A CPO and an administrator I worked with during that time have since praised me for my work as a model DAEP enforcer. The CPO told me that students knew I did not kid around and that I understood that DAEP was about punishment for misbehavior. With those students at Rover High School, in a middle-to-working class part of town, I rarely taught anything. Students there refused to do assignments, and when they did, I merely explained the directions for a worksheet from another class. The administrator who commended my work was from a more affluent school, Ranger High School (pseudonym), and he noted that I had “mentored” students and helped them complete their coursework. These two DAEPs were significantly different.

I compared these two experiences and saw the power of class differences. At Rovers High School, the more working-class school, things were rigid. Students sat in cubicles and teaching rarely happened. At Rangers High School, the more affluent school, things were more relaxed. There were no cubicles, as it was just another classroom. There, I participated with students in a program called Project Youth (pseudonym), which was designed to support Latino students who were struggling in school. Often, lunch was bought in for them in order to build trust and rapport. I was encouraged to build relationships with these students and to help them return to
mainstream instruction. I talked with these students about their lives, and followed up with them when they left the DAEP.

Chavez (2008) wrote about the fact that scholars need to critically reflect on their own positionality. This to understand how they are approaching the people they do research with constant critical reflection is vital to qualitative research, and I had to think carefully about how my positionality facilitated rapport and/or complicated it (Carlson, 2010; Lather, 1986). I know I have some insight into DAEPs, but my knowledge is limited. I wish I had taken notes on my experiences during those six years, but I did not. I was struggling financially then, had recently become a father, both my mother and mother-in-law were undergoing chemotherapy for their cancer and was enrolled in the doctoral program.

My positionality is intersectional. It includes my work experience in DAEPs, having been an enforcer, along with my identity as a Chicanx educator. At least once while conducting interviews for an early pilot study on DAEPs, I spoke with an alternative teacher, a White man, who told me he was born and bred in Brooklyn, New York, and that he was liberal. He emphasized his being politically liberal. He told me that “there is something ‘wrong’ with these Mexicans.” This put me on guard. At the time, my first thought was, does he know who he is talking to? However, this type of language was normal at the high school. Constant demeaning of Latinx students, of Mexican heritage itself, unfortunately by folks who were also Latinx or of Mexican heritage. Oftentimes, I would come home from a long day, and see what had happened at Rover High School on the evening news.

I struggled to strip away the punitive mentality I had taken on.

The final aspect of my positionality that I describe here refers to the fact that as a high school student, I myself was classified as being “at-risk”. I have always been a transfronterix student
in that I crossed the border to go to school (de la Piedra & Guerra, 2012). I went back and forth between Sunland Park, New Mexico, Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas.

While attending high school in Ciudad Juarez, I was expelled for failing almost all my classes, except for English and Literature. I walked out of classes, swore at teachers, smoked cigarettes, and occasionally drank at school. Like many “at-risk” youths, I did not notice that I was part of a spectrum of discipline and that I was seen as disruptive. After being expelled from school in Ciudad Juarez, I transferred to Burns High School (pseudonym) in El Paso. At this school, SROs, along with city police, would line us up against a wall outside the building, search some of us at random, and go into the classrooms looking for drugs with their K-9 units (Cox, 2015; Rios, 2011; Vaught, 2011). Once I started attending Burns, I knew I needed to calm myself down, as the last thing I wanted was a criminal record.

Fortunately, I took refuge in books, my own kind of bibliotherapy. I read Of Mice and Men (Steinbeck, 1984) and I identified with the protagonists, a pair of friends who were outcasts in a society being reshaped by the Great Depression. Were it not for my family, and a precious few educators who gave me books to read, I would not have graduated. I spent my days just reading as a way to escape. It is no coincidence that I have conducted a study about teachers, SROs, CPOs, and administrators in DAEP. I have both worked in DAEPs and have been an “at-risk” student myself.

The experiences of teachers, administrators, SROs, and CPOs are crucial in understanding how discipline materializes in DAEPs. Further, their input and ideologies frame how disciplinary decisions are motivated, produced, and reproduced. Their input sheds light on how the program functions, is conceptualized, and understood by the people who comprise it (Campbell-Rhone, 2014; Lopez, 2017; Phillips, 2011; Skiba, 2000). Previous studies
have aptly pointed out that the discipline gap is an unfortunate consequence of disciplinary education across the United States (Cortez & Cortez, 2009; Heitzeg, 2009; Hirschfield, 2010).

**Research Design**

My research question was:

How do alternative stakeholders on the borderland experience, interpret, and understand the dynamics of disciplining, alternative classrooms/programs, and disciplinary exclusion?

I addressed this question by conducting a phenomenological study that attempts to understand how stakeholders in DAEP programs on the U.S.-Mexico border understand their own experiences and ideologies within the DAEP programs.

Smith, Jarman & Osborn (1999) state the vitality of individual perceptual frameworks from participants ultimately gives detailed and sound data, provided they speak with ample latitude about their own experiences. This analysis acknowledges that a person’s subjective experiences are subject to the multiple realities of a phenomenon (Cresswell, 1997; 2008; Geanellos, 1998; Laverty, 2003; Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). With this study, I attempt to understand the experiences of my participants through their own reality. The end focus is to understand how they interpret their experiences with AEPs and DAEPs. How participants interpret their experiences is pivotal, as Moustakas (1994) noted, a phenomenological study is, “an analysis of the underlying conditions, historically and aesthetically, that account for the experience (p. 10).

Sokolowski (2000) suggests that exploring the intentionality of every experience related to the phenomenon in question is important and that it forms the basis of an individual’s perception. Essentially, what are categorized as lived experiences are what Schutz (1967) labels
as phenomena – that is, the construction of what things mean. Reflecting on a certain experience while it is happening and understanding that meaning and context are one, is also essential. This is especially the case when context can also be situational and dependent on conditions that surround the experience. This is what phenomenological studies do (Seidman, 2013 citing Blumer, 1969).

With this study, I attempt to understand the experiences of my participants through their own reality. The end focus is to understand how they interpret their experiences with AEPs and DAEPs. How participants interpret their experiences is pivotal, as Moustakas (1994) noted, a phenomenological study is, “an analysis of the underlying conditions, historically and aesthetically, that account for the experience” (p. 10). In addition to this, I incorporated Critical Phenomenology—while phenomenology strives to understand the perceptual experiences of stakeholders in a particular setting, Krist and Clark/Keefe (2022) argue how “classical phenomenology fails to account for the impact of historical and social structures in our experiences (p. 4).” Taking into consideration the perpetuation of societal structural issues that are often invisible such as racism, sexism, classism, and the “–isms” is integral in how we understand phenomenological experiences in particular settings (Behal, 2014). As Gunther (2019) points out, “These are not things to be seen but rather ways of seeing, and even ways of making the world that go unnoticed without a sustained practice of critical reflection (p. 12).” This is where Critical Phenomenology is there to examine the impact of these structures on how participants subjectively interpret them unconsciously and applied in their experiences or ideologies. Critical Phenomenology scopes these structures from a critical lens---in this study, the school-to-prison nexus (Fernandez & Kirshner, 2016) is the interaction and culmination of factors that make at-risk youth escalate until they are immersed in the legal system. I contend
that this escalation is often interchangeable, constant, and not often hierarchical, since many prison-like policies, factors, and conditions are already within schools. However, Critical Phenomenology tackles the need for change to counter it, “seeks not only to bring these structures and their impact on experience to the forefront for interpretation but also in doing so to provoke change” (Guenther, 2019). In sum, I gathered rich data from the participants, while building relationships of care and empathy. At the same time, I have rejected hegemonic and savior behavior approaches (Olesen, 2003; Weems, 2006). I have also addressed my own reflexivity (Foley, 2002; Gray, 2016; Madison, 2011; Weems, 2006), and have acknowledged my own changing perspectives over time.

**Context of the Study**

This phenomenological interview-based study was conducted on the U.S.-Mexico border of the El Paso/Juarez region, with stakeholders involved in DAEPs. El Paso has a population of 951,000, conservatively, and El Paso is across Ciudad Juarez which has a population of more than 1,300,000. Together, these binational cities comprise a metropolis roughly the size of Houston (University of Texas at El Paso, 2011; United States Census Bureau, 2019). The El Paso area is 85 percent Hispanic/Latinx; 12.6 percent White; 3.4 percent Black, and less than 1 percent Native American and/or Asian (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Further, El Paso has a poverty rate of 20.3 percent, 7 percent higher than the national average (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Any school district in El Paso is categorized as majority minority, because of the Latinx majority.

**COVID-19 in the Borderland**

COVID-19 hit the borderland as it did every major city across the United States and the planet. During the first year of the pandemic, in 2020, the major closings began. Stores and malls
shut down; schools transitioned to being fully online; and people who could, began to quarantine at home. Major technology companies, businesses, and governmental agencies found ways to provide remote resources to employees.

In the borderland, El Paso cannot survive without its sister city, Cd. Juarez, and Cd. Juarez cannot survive without El Paso. Their interdependence relies on relationships that are economic, touristic, familial, and historical. This cross-border mobility of people and capital has increased substantially for at least the last fifty years (Dunn, 2016; Miller, 2016; Slack et al., 2016).

Moreover, the borderland represents sociopolitical and historical spaces where border crossers navigate in increasingly militarized zones, checkpoints, and inspections. Border-crossers are perceived and often portrayed as a threat (Chavez, 2008; Hernandez, 2013; Stumpf, 2006; Urbina & Alvarez, 2017; Vasquez, 2015). As a result of an ever-growing nativist discourse that is incentivized by years of media attention and the former Trump administration, we transfronterixs see ourselves being criminalized (Vasquez, 2015). We are in the trenches of a historic moment in history that feels all too familiar.

The criminalization of immigrants, in particular Brown, Latin American, is a term coined as crimmigration—the subjugation of a racial class through propagandistic discourse, stereotypes, and stigmas that take aim at criminalizing the immigrant (Armenta, 2017; Stumpf, 2006). This is instantiated through militarized zones that include checkpoints and institutional surveillance. Crimmigration is a transmutation of the War on Drugs (Hari, 2015), immigration policies, and free-trade policies that continually intersect with transfronterixs (de la Piedra, Araujo & Esquinca, 2018; Armenta, 2017; Dagen, 2017). The previous administration’s zero-tolerance policies in immigration materially upped the ante with refugee camps housing
thousands of Central American migrants fleeing violence, persecution, human trafficking, economic instability, and/or terrorism (de la Piedra, Araujo & Esquinca, 2018; Dunn, 2016; Miller, 2016; Slack et al., 2016). Since the COVID hit the borderland, close to 15,000 deaths have been recorded (Johns Hopkins, 2023). Schools transitioned to being fully online, and this changed the structural functions of instruction, curriculum, and classroom management (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2021). This undoubtedly had a major impact on disciplinary education as well, as many of my study participants discussed. Today, we are still grappling with understanding the implications of COVID on discipline, or even alternative education.

My Enforcer Colleagues

As I wrote this dissertation, I could not help but think about the complexity of alternative classrooms and programs. My intention with this study was in no way, shape, or form, meant to point fingers at anyone in a disciplinary setting. Teachers, administrators, and CPOs play a fundamental role in schooling. The work they do, including the adversities they overcome and deal with daily, is admirable. Many spoke about the lack of resources and professional development for their work. They also discussed mental health issues, or wellness needs for themselves, as they dealt with students, parents, administrators, and in some instances, school shootings, gang-related violence, riots, sexual assault, suicides, and attempted suicides.

When I interviewed Jose Juan, for instance, he had recently suffered lower back injuries as a result of stopping a fight that had turned into a riot of more than twenty students. Another time, he had to stop a parent from assaulting another parent, as they rooted for different teams at a Friday night football game. Ms. M, another campus patrol officer, was in the hospital with a broken wrist, after trying to stop an altercation in the main hallway of Rover High School. I am
reminded of Officer F, whose position was eliminated due to budget cuts. Coach J advised me that when a student threatens you, tells you to fuck off, or when you have to stop a fight, knowing you are going to be assaulted as well, you cannot take it personally. You might get a “well done, Coach”, or not. I am reminded that Mr. R, an Afro-Latino male administrator faced both racism and classism in an upper-class school community because he wanted to implement GED classes for parents. Alternative education is central to their roles, their actions, motivations, and experiences, and has shaped their ideologies. Their daily practices are part of a structural foundation that informs how disciplining works in a post-pandemic era. Further, I’ve worked with some of these participants for years, although I do not identify which ones to protect their identities, as I still have colleagues along with folks that I consider friends in some K-12 schools. I too was part of that structure.

The Disciplinary Process in Texas

The disciplinary process in Texas is complex. I have attempted to describe how this process works in the table below. I outline the process that takes place when a student is referred to a DAEP, and how it is that the student is either returned to general education, returned to the DAEP, or is placed into the Criminal Legal System.
Mainstream instruction – student is removed by teacher, officer, or campus patrol.

Discretionary referrals (i.e., misbehavior, defiance, truancy, absenteeism).

Due Process – conference with the parent/legal guardian, student and administrator.

Mandatory referrals (i.e., drug possession, drug paraphernalia, fighting, stealing, possession of weapons).

Felony charges – automatic JJAEP placement and/or Juvenile Justice Department charges.

DAEP placement – 30 to 90 days, with a review on the 30th day or before pending behavior, grades & attendance.

The student fails to meet expectations: additional DAEP days or JJAEP recommended.

Additional mandatory infractions (i.e., felonies – placement in Juvenile Justice Correctional Facilities).

Successful review: the student returns to general instruction or the student.
Here, the process usually begins with the infraction itself, whether it be in the classroom, on school premises, or community. The student is referred by an enforcer, usually a teacher or administrator, removed from the classroom and subsequently given due process. Due process refers to a formal hearing between the student, legal guardian, school administrator, and a witness to document the hearing (this can be an administrative assistant or another teacher). This is where a determination is made. The student is set on track to either be sent to the alternative classroom or the school. This explains a hierarchy of disciplining that is interchangeable. That is, disciplinary interactions happen often simultaneously as students are assigned to alternative. A student can already be assigned without the formal hearing, or they can be sent to an alternative school and then have a hearing. Or in some instances, students can receive additional referrals or charges while in alternative, waiting for a hearing. Next, I describe my approach to sampling for the study.

**Sampling and Selection Criteria**

Each semi-structured interview (Harrell & Bradley, 2009; Harvey, 2015) lasted between an hour and a half, and in some cases, up to three and a half hours. This style of interviewing is functional since it is designed with a standard of conversational guidelines geared to the topic at hand, as Harrell & Bradley (2009) suggest, “used when the researcher wants to delve deeply into a topic and to understand thoroughly the answers provided” (p. 27). Most of the interviews occurred virtually, via Zoom. To ensure validity, I transcribed the interviews during the Fall 2022 and deleted the recordings soon after (Carlson, 2010; Heath, 1982; Longhurst, 2003). The selection criteria were a convenience sample (Kam et al., 2007), meaning it focused on stakeholders that were school administrators, alternative teachers, campus patrols, or SROs, all
of which are disciplinary enforcers that work daily with so-called at-risk youth and alternative students.

**Recruiting Participants**

Study participants were those who worked or were recently retired from DAEPs in four school districts in El Paso. Research that focuses on the experiences of DAEP stakeholders or enforcers is limited, especially along the U.S.-Mexico border (Diaite, 2015; Carver, Lewis, Tice, 2010; Cortez & Cortez, 2009). I conducted phenomenological interviews with DAEP teachers, SROs, CPOs, and administrators, between December 2021 to September 2022. Initially, I sent between 40 to 50 emails to different stakeholders across school districts in El Paso every two weeks. Most went unanswered, but I was persistent. I emailed stakeholders via district websites, where each school has a directory with teacher/staff names and titles/positions. Additionally, I still had connections with some stakeholders I had worked with, from which to protect their identity I will not name. Each participant chose their pseudonym and each it completely unrelated to who they are, they chose their names randomly. I explained the study to each stakeholder and obtained their informed consent. In one instance, I reached out to an SRO through Jose Juan, who initially wanted to be part of the study. However, one day he sent me a message through Jose Juan, telling me that he would like to talk to me, but that he feared retaliation on behalf of the school district. I felt like a journalist who was finding out about something that was off the record. Weeks later, while walking nearby a school in the Borderlands district, I noticed a school district police car (i.e., each school district has its own police force – SROs). I stopped the SRO in the middle of the street to explain my study, and he initially accepted, even giving me his personal phone number. During the following month, I
called him to no end, and except for someone answering and hanging up on me or just hanging up on me, I never got a response.

The following chart explains the stakeholders’ roles, along with their level of instruction, and their gender, race, and ethnicity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>K-12 Level of</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Coach C</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach H</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach J</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. K</td>
<td>Substitute/Teacher</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Afro-Latino</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach V</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Lambo</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>High School</td>
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<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. S</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. White</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. X</td>
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<td>High School</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose Juan</td>
<td>Campus Patrol</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. C</td>
<td>Campus Patrol</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. R</td>
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<td>Afro-Latino</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach N</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I explicated that the study was about trying to understand their experiences as enforcers in a DAEP in the borderland. Each participant was provided with a copy of the informed consent and a small questionnaire (See Appendix 1 and 2), detailing their professional experience. I also informed them that the study posed no potential threat, but that my study would give scholars insights into how disciplining works, what their motivations are, and how we can better support both them and the students who are in these classrooms. I utilized pseudonyms for all my participants, although I should note, some told me they did not care if I used their real names. However, that changed once we began the interviewing process. The following is a breakdown of the setting for the interviews, all of which were conducted during the COVID lockdown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Virtual or Face to Face Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coach C</td>
<td>Virtual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach H</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach J</td>
<td>Virtual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. K</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach V</td>
<td>Virtual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Lambo</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mr. S Virtual
Mr. White Virtual
Mr. X Virtual
Jose Juan Face-to-Face
Mr. C Phone
Ms. M Virtual
Mr. R Phone
Coach N Virtual
Officer F Phone

Note. Most interviews were conducted virtually.

Each semi-structured interview (Harrell & Bradley, 2009) lasted between an hour and a half, and in some cases, up to three and a half hours. Most of the interviews occurred virtually, via Zoom. To ensure validity, I transcribed the interviews during the Fall 2022 and deleted the recordings soon after (Heath, 1982; Longhurst, 2003). The following table highlights where each participant worked at in terms of school and belonging to which district in the region.

A Sensitive Topic in the School Districts

I knew from the start of this project that the school districts in El Paso were less than thrilled about a study of DAEPs. In Fall of 2021, after having my IRB proposal approved by the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), I submitted an IRB proposal to the largest school district in El Paso. When I inquired concerning the status of my proposal, I was told that I needed an
advisor from the district who would oversee my research project. This is highly unusual. I was also told that my advisor could end data collection for this project for no reason at any time and that I had to agree to these conditions if I wanted to conduct research at all. I asked the former principal from Rangers High School, with whom I had worked previously, to support my proposal. Soon afterward, my IRB Proposal was rejected by the school district. I was told the following:

- The study topic is sensitive in nature and there is not a clear benefit to the district;
- The study would require too much of a staff time commitment;
- The request for potentially protected information regarding interviewee questions to describe and provide comment on ‘the district’s’ student disciplinary incidents and level of agreement; and
- The participants selected for the study would not be able to provide a complete picture of policies and procedures involved in DAEPs, nor would they be able to discuss student placement.

The fourth bullet point in particular caught my attention, as it said that the participants would not be able to provide a full picture of policies and procedures, even though each stakeholder should have an idea of what the policies and procedures are. More importantly, this study was not designed to question participants on policies or procedures. Rather, it was about their experiences in the DAEP. I realized that I needed to gain access to stakeholders in a different way. I was advised by the IRB office to contact potential participants through email or social media, and to conduct interviews with them as individuals, not as district employees. In the next section, I present where each participant worked at when they were interviewed, plus profiles of each one.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coach C</td>
<td>Jameson High School</td>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach H</td>
<td>Bridges High School</td>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach J</td>
<td>Parks High School</td>
<td>Dunes</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. K</td>
<td>The Academy</td>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach V</td>
<td>Burns High School</td>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Lambo</td>
<td>Sunset Academy</td>
<td>Desert</td>
<td>New Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. S</td>
<td>McMillen Middle School</td>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. White</td>
<td>The Academy</td>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. X</td>
<td>Winds High School</td>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose Juan</td>
<td>Rovers High School</td>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. C</td>
<td>Benson Middle School</td>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. M</td>
<td>Rovers High School</td>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. R</td>
<td>Rangers High School</td>
<td>Borderlands</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach N</td>
<td>Mesquite Middle School</td>
<td>Mesquite</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Participant Profiles

Most of the participants in this study were or are currently coaches. This included Coach C, Coach H, Coach J, Coach V, Mr. Lambo, Mr. X and Mr. White. Mr. Lambo, Mr. X, and Mr. White had experience as coaches, although they were no longer actively coaching. Additionally, Coach N was a coach and an alternative education teacher before becoming an administrator for a middle school. Mr. S is a former Customs and Board Patrol (CPB) officer who worked at the international bridge. Mr. K is a substitute teacher who served in a permanent substitute position for the alternative school, The Academy (pseudonym). Substitutes are widely used (speaking as a former substitute, myself) for teaching positions in discipline. These positions are hard to fill, and often school administrators must appoint substitutes to serve in long-term positions, ranging from a semester to a year. These long-term substitute positions can be renewed indefinitely.

Mr. C, Jose Juan, and Ms. M have only held positions in education as campus patrols. All of them come from different backgrounds; Mr. C was a retired detention officer; Jose Juan was a car salesman; and Ms. M was an administrative assistant, then a substitute. Mr. R, an administrator, trained and worked as a microbiologist for a medical center in the Borderland and in Central Texas, before transitioning to education. Lastly, Officer F worked as a retired Borderland Police Officer and a School Resource Officer, before retiring from law enforcement and applying for the campus patrol position. All of them except for Mr. White, Mr. Lambo, and
Mr. K, were working or worked in alternative classrooms in middle schools or high schools. Mr. White, Mr. Lambo, and Mr. K’s experiences were in stand-alone alternative schools.

TEACHERS

Coach C
Coach C is a self-identified Latinx male in his 40s, a native of the Borderland with a degree in history from Borderland University (pseudonym). Since 2004, his experience in alternative has been dependent on his football placement. In other words, each football coaching position he has held was contingent on his accepting a teaching position in the DAEP. He has more than fourteen years of experience in the alternative setting, nine of which were at an El Paso middle school. The rest of his experience was as a coach with a culmination of nineteen years of coaching experience. He has been in the current alternative classroom for almost six years at Jameson (pseudonym) High School.

Coach H
Coach H is a self-identified White male with Latinx heritage, native of the Borderland in his 50s who stated that he had more AEP experience than anyone in the region. He said that he has more than twenty-four years of experience in DAEPs, and he is the head coach for track and football, as well. He has an undergraduate degree in kinesiology and his position at Bridges (pseudonym) High School is the only position he has held in the field of education.

Coach J
Coach J self-identified male in his 50s with Latinx heritage with a degree in kinesiology and is a central Texas native. He has more than twenty-three years of teaching experience, with fifteen years in DAEPs, both at the middle school and high school levels. He has also taught health
education for eight years. He has coached football at middle and high school levels teaching since the beginning of his career. He currently teaches a Special Assignment Class (SAC), which serves as In-School-Suspension in Parks (pseudonym) High School. He studied kinesiology as an undergraduate, and he stated that he did not want his career to be in disciplinary education, even though that is where is he once more, due to his position being contingent on him being a football coach at the same time.

Coach V

Coach V is a self-identified Latinx male in his 50s, who grew up in El Paso. He graduated from a university in a neighboring state, where he studied education. He came back to the borderland due to a tragedy in his family. He saw a position open for alternative, from which he did not know anything about, and took it. He has over nineteen years of teaching experience, with four in physical education at the high school level, and fifteen teaching in the DAEP. Equally, the alternative position he holds was accepted due to him wanting to be a football coach at the high school, he has coached his entire career.

Mr. Lambo

Mr. Lambo is a self-identified White male in his 60s with a degree in Chemistry and a former coach. With more than thirty-eight years of experience, he coached football and track at Burns High School in El Paso for three years. Afterwards, he moved to The Academy for nine years where he taught science. In 2008, he taught pregnant students at the Parent Center till 2017 when he retired. Once retired he wanted to continue teaching, therefore he applied to the Sunset Academy (pseudonym) the same year he retired in Desert (pseudonym) school district in New Mexico. He has been there ever since. Along with teaching science, he also teaches two types of
alternative students – at-risk youth, and students who work during the day and want to get their high school diploma, a last-chance alternative program to help students acquire their diploma.

Mr. White

Mr. White is a self-described white male in his 50s with an Earth and Science degree from Kansas and worked for an Oil company for three years as a Lab Technician then moved up as a supervisor in charge of truck drivers delivering gasoline in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Due to the sharp decline of gas prices, he moved to San Diego and got a Masters in curriculum and instruction, then went to Arizona to teach high school science. Mr. White then transferred to the private sector to the adult education field and defensive driving school for about ten years before coming to the Borderland for a year to teach physics in a high school. A position he lost since he had a one-year provisional license where he could not pass the certification exam that first year. Once he did, the position was filled and given to a football coach. He was placed at The Academy, the alternative high school in the Borderlands district where he remains to this day.

Mr. X

Mr. X is a Latinx native of the Borderland in his 50s with a degree in English, and Masters in curriculum and instruction with a Social Justice emphasis. With over thirty-five years of experience teaching, Mr. X has taught English, Social Studies, History, and assigned to alternative. He taught at Jameson high school, before moving to Washington state and teach to immigrant and Native American communities in the 90s till 2003. He then returned “home” as he described it in 2003 when he was hired as a Social Studies teacher for Everglades (pseudonym) high school. According to him, he was assigned to alternative after an altercation that occurred at Everglades, he alleges that his alternative assignment was retaliation against him, pressuring him to quit by the former superintendent of the Borderlands school district (one who resigned
recently due to federal charges in California that were later dropped). He lasted four years there before transferring to Rangers high school where he currently teaches Social Studies.

Mr. S

Mr. S is a self-described White male in his 50s, a native of the borderland with a degree in psychology and a master’s degree in psychology. He is a retired Customs and Border Protection Officer, where he worked under Homeland Security for thirty years as an officer in the international bridge in El Paso. By 2014, he retired and wanted to keep on working. He was certified as a generalist and immediately hired on in an oil city three hours away from the borderland. For four years, he would stay in his RV during the week at (Central Texas) and return to El Paso on weekends. From the moment he was in that Central city, he started looking for a teaching position back home, in the borderland, due to his family, mainly his wife and children. When he saw a position for alternative come up at McMillen Middle School, he applied and was hired within weeks. He was hired at the beginning of 2020, weeks before the pandemic forced the nation to close schools and transition to online teaching and learning. For two years, he was the alternative teacher. I interviewed him in the spring of 2022.

Substitutes

Mr. K

Mr. K is a self-identified Afro-Latinx male in his 60s. He worked in retail sales in a department store for over twenty years before retiring. Afterward, he returned to the University and completed a Multidisciplinary Studies degree with a concentration on History and Chicano Studies. Going through the alternative certification program, where professionals get educationally certified to teach in Texas schools, he began substituting at The Academy for almost two years, accepting a permanent substitute position for the In-School-Suspension within
that alternative JJAEP high school. His position was then eliminated due to budget cuts. The academy was moved to another campus where it currently resides. Mr. K then accepted another permanent substitute position at an alternative program at the elementary level called Growing Up (pseudonym). He stayed there for a semester before leaving that position by the end of 2019. Shortly after, schools closed due to COVID-19. He is currently substituting for the district regularly—no longer in any permanent substitute position.

**CAMPUS PATROLS**

**Jose Juan**

The campus patrol, Jose Juan, is a self-described Mexican male in his 40s whom I worked with at Rovers High School. He asked me not to divulge many details about his professional past. He grew up in the Borderland in Mexico and was forced to move due to the growing violence of the 2000s. He became a car salesman in his formative years before applying to his current position. His only position in education was as a campus patrol for over ten years.

**Mr. C**

Mr. C is a self-identified Latinx male in his 40s from the Borderland. With a military background, serving in the Navy for three years active service and three years in the reserves. He later became a corrections officer for the Sheriff’s Department in the early 2000s, working at two different jails in El Paso County. For more than seventeen years, he worked with prisoners and local law enforcement. He retired in 2017 and started working as a campus patrol in 2018 at Benson (pseudonym) Middle School. However, that school closed and was consolidated with two other middle schools. By Fall 2022 he transferred to Wingman (pseudonym) Middle School where he continues his role as a campus patrol.
Ms. M

Ms. M is a self-identified Mexican female in her 50s with a high school diploma. She worked as an administrative assistant in a landfill and gravel company in Sunland Park from the early 2000s until 2008. When the market crashed, and fears of a recession grew, she was laid off. She then applied to be a substitute teacher at the Borderlands district. She spent three years as a substitute teacher before applying at Rovers High School, where she currently works.

Administrators

Mr. R

Mr. R is a self-identified Black male, in his 60s with a degree in microbiology, a master’s in counseling, and a second master’s in administration. He was the son of a Colonel in the U.S. Army. Due to this, he lived in both the U.S. and Europe between the 1960s and 70s. He worked as a microbiologist in the borderland and in central Texas before becoming an educator due to financial stability and pension funds. Although he was frank in how he transitioned into education because of the money, he later recounted how he fell in love with the profession. Once in education beginning in the 1990s, he confided in me that he enjoyed becoming a counselor for approximately two years before becoming the disciplinary administrator at Rovers High School in the latter part of the 1990s before transferring to Rangers High School in 2002. Rangers High School at the time was creating what would soon be called a freshman center where he would take over administrative responsibilities. This is where I worked under him for close to two years in 2016. He is currently retired. He told me that he retired due to personal reasons regarding the health of a family member.
Coach N

Coach N is a self-identified Latinx Borderland male, in his 40s. He holds an undergraduate degree in kinesiology from the Borderland University, with a Masters in Administration in Far West Texas. He taught in DAEPs for more than ten years and has coached football at Rangers High School for eight years. His first job was in construction, working with his father-in-law as a laborer, then project manager, superintendent, and then estimator. He climbed the latter in that company from 2001 till 2007, till he decided to change routes. He accepted his first teaching position in Rangers under Mr. R. From 2008 to 2018, he worked as the alternative teacher before accepting a position as an administrator in the Mesquite district, in Mesquite Middle School where he is currently in. This is his fifth year as an administrator.

School Resource Officer and Campus Patrol

Officer F

Officer F is another Borderland native in his 50s, a retiree from the Borderland law enforcement department where he served for more than twenty years. He began the academy in 1994 working the streets of El Paso. In 2004, he became a School Resource Officer for an alternative high school, part of a collaborative program between the school districts and law enforcement where officers served as SROs in schools as part of a collaborative program funding by the Borderland law enforcement department and the Mesquite school district. By the late 2000s, law enforcement in the borderland was short-staffed and he returned to being a patrol. He retired in 2014 from law enforcement and applied to be a School Resource Officer and a campus patrol for the Borderlands district. He was hired by Mr. R as a campus patrol for Rangers High School
in 2015 where he remained until 2021 when he resigned from his position. He is currently unemployed and looking for another job in the district.

Data Analysis

In this phenomenological study, I employed Thematic Analysis (TA) like Content Analysis (CA) (Bengtsson, 2016; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Stemler, 2001). Thematic Analysis is “a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set” (Braun & Clark, 2012 p. 57). Both are used in qualitative methodologies although CA is often utilized in quantitative analysis (Wolcott, 2008). It looks at words, concepts, and even themes within data (Delve & Limpaecher, 2023). TA is about patterns within the data that ultimately results in themes where qualitative data is organized, sorted, and analyzed (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Additionally, it is a type of analysis where I interpreted the data “through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005 p. 1278). This is done through immersion, meaning diving into the data, and exploring it to understand the experiences of a group of people, institutions, or phenomena (Stemler, 2001; Tesch, 1990).

Data Collection Processes, Coding, and Themes

The data for the study was first organized by analyzing how alternative stakeholders understand the dynamics of discipline, and disciplinary exclusion in alternative classrooms. The study was approved by the IRB office in the Fall 2021, by December 2021 I conducted the first interview with Coach J. The last interview took place in September of 2022 with Coach N. After each interview was conducted, I transcribed the interview within the week. With CA, I
approached the data using inductive reasoning or process in how the data is grouped together, usually done by patterns (Braun & Clark, 2012).

Braun & Clark (2006) categorize TA as the following: 1. Familiarizing oneself with the data—that is the initial process of data collection, in this case, interview transcription of all 15 interviews. First, I transcribed all the conversations I had with the participants, coupled with the questionnaire information I received from them. Once the transcripts were finalized, I read and reread the transcripts, and began doing preliminary coding of direct quotes from participants. These excerpts are grouped together into what Cantazaro (1998) referred to as meaning units. Initial remarks are made where patterns are identified of possible paramount initial perceptual intricacies that the participant deems necessary in the related topic, in this case, alternative education programs and/or classrooms, and the experience of the stakeholders. Second, generating initial codes—data-driven themes can begin to emerge which are often informed by the theoretical framework. The initial codes were as follows: 1. routine and structure, and the sub-category--lack of routine and structure, 2. microcosm of prison, 3. babysitters, 4. the troubled, single-parent student, 5. presence and respect, and 6. More than a placement. Each code was determined by how the participants understood disciplining, their role in alternative, how they described the “alternative” student, the overwhelming coaching appointments to alternative classrooms, and how they interpreted their evaluations as enforcers. This is a reflexive step in the analysis (Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, 2009). According to Braun & Clarke (2006) it is not meant to be rushed. I immersed myself in the data. The researcher must consider the levels of importance of the data even though one can consider everything is vital. The coding for this study was explicitly stated by stakeholders. Meaning words like, “I am a babysitter, convicts, they need routine and structure, prison, presence and respect” were utilized throughout
their interpretations of their experiences. Their understanding of the dynamics of discipline is highlighted by representations of punishment in schooling, segregated classrooms, often with cubicles, that serve as some form or should be a form of disciplinary punishment. The stakeholders interpreted their role, who they serviced, and how they understood disciplining underscoring metaphors that symbolized prison, prisoners, convicts, serving time, or students that usually came from lower-income, single-parent backgrounds that were in some way, “broken”. Many parts of the interviews were not chosen due to either the participants going on tangents, or other information that was not pertinent to alternative or discipline. Three, searching for themes—once the initial coding is organized, themes are interpretative based on what the data tells us/ On the attached table, I describe how each initial code began to take shape in what eventually became the themes in Chapter 4. Reviewing the themes—this part of the analysis is one of coherence. It is about reviewing the themes and the codes that inform them and drawing a line of explicit connections between themes, subthemes, and the data. This process took me approximately a month to ensure that the themes reflected what the data from the stakeholders suggested. Once the themes were identified, I highlighted who the enforcers saw they served, meaning the students.

1. How they identified the alternative students;
2. How they saw themselves as alternative enforcer stakeholders;
3. How they viewed disciplining in alternative;
4. How they viewed the classrooms symbolically and how it fit into education;
5. How disciplining was more than discretionary, it was circumstantial and bound to a hierarchical decision of school officials that often represent contradictions, and
that unfairness, while other times they offered empathy, and comprehension to the complexities of what students are going through in alternative.

Lastly, naming themes—for this, Braun and Clarke (2012), a “good thematic analysis will have themes that (a) do not try to do too much as themes should ideally have a singular focus; (b) are related but do not overlap, so they are not repetitive, although they may build on previous themes; and (c) directly address your research question” (p. 66). In this study, the themes were: 1. Disciplining is having a set structure for punishment. 2. Symbolic prisons in schools. 3. The broken alternative student. 4. Coaches, self-revered enforcers? 5. Facultative Enforcement. Next, I analyzed and interpreted the data utilizing Foucault’s disciplinary technologies (Foucault, 1977) and Bourdieu’s (1997) symbolic violence. I now dive into who the participants are and the findings of the study.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I presented my theoretical framework, study design, the context of the study, my positionality along with the methods and data analysis approaches I employed when discussing the alternative stakeholder experiences (Merriam, 1998; 2002). Additionally, I talk about my positionality as an intersectional (Chavez, 2008) insider/outsider, someone with experience in alternative classrooms in the borderland. This phenomenological study aims to shed light on how those enforcers view disciplinary education, and more importantly, on how they view their roles. In the next chapter, I dive into the data, including going in-depth into the participants, the salient themes, and the discussion.
Chapter 4: Findings

This study poses the question: How do alternative stakeholders on the borderland experience, interpret, and understand the dynamics of disciplining, alternative classrooms/programs, and disciplinary exclusion? For this, I interviewed fifteen stakeholders who are alternative enforcers. The study is situated in a transfronterix Borderland (de la Piedra, Araujo & Esquinca, 2018), where we share a sociopolitical space with an increasingly militarized border where diasporic populations flee their countries, fleeing war, gang violence, and variations of wars on drugs (Chavez, 2008; Vasquez, 2015). The dynamics of living in the Borderland often shapes the lives of those who cross daily, those who live on both sides of the border, and those who transit through (Tapia Ladino, 2017). This often impacts disciplinary enforcers as well, as I explain further in Chapter 5.

In this chapter, I dive into the findings in the data. The themes are as follows: 1. Disciplining is having a set structure for punishment. 2. Symbolic prisons in schools. 3. The broken alternative student. 4. Coaches, self-revered enforcers? 5. Facultative enforcement. Utilizing thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2012), I incorporated how the stakeholders understood their roles in disciplining, what they thought disciplining was, who are the alternative students, the overwhelming placements of Coaches in alternative classrooms, and their teaching evaluations or lack of. First, I briefly summarize each experiential interview. Each interview was usually divided into three sections: 1. professional background of the participant, 2. their role, disciplining, and the alternative student, 3. discipline gap and recidivism scenarios, and the borderland (See interview questions in Appendix 2).
Summaries

Administrators

Mr. R is a self-identified Black male in his 60s. Last summer, I asked Mr. R if he wanted to be interviewed for this study. He is someone with ample experience with five years as the discipline administrator at Rovers High School, coincidentally, before going to Rangers High School in 2002. Mr. R immediately agreed to be part of the study, scheduled an interview, and within two days we set up an appointment. The interview took place via phone call. Now retired for more than three years, Mr. R spoke about his formative years, and how they informed him being an administrator at two high schools, in different communities: Rovers High School, in a lower/middle-income neighborhood, and Rangers High School, in an upper-class community of the borderland. Each transition from a microbiologist to education was due to, as he mentioned, money. The hours and pension plan, according to him were better than working in hospitals. He noted the different approaches to alternative and disciplining in both communities. When he was at Rovers, he confided in me he had a grant to help the community in creating GED courses, along with helping the community with filing out their taxes. According to him, this was a great asset for the Rovers community. However, when he moved to Rangers in an upper-class community, parents were furious that he wanted to implement such classes and help. He had to close programs and end the classes so he lost the grant. He retired due to personal matters regarding the health of a family member. Today he affirmed that he was “enjoying retirement” and had no plans to return to education or microbiology.

Coach N is a native borderland Latinx male in his 40s. He had been an alternative teacher for a little over ten years before applying for an administrative position as assistant principal. Coach N accepted the alternative position under Mr. R for the freshman center because he wanted to coach
basketball and track. He had no knowledge of what alternative was before being hired. Initially, he was looking for a new career after working in construction right after college. I asked him if he would like to be interviewed, and immediately said yes. The interview was done visually via Zoom. A fit male, with a white shirt, crew cut and light skin, he was sitting at home when we spoke. The interview centered on his experience as an administrator and alternative teacher. He praised Mr. R as a mentor who steered him professionally to a more successful route in his career. His take on alternative, students, along with parents played an integral role in how alternative needs to function. As an administrator he saw parents as being too demanding of administrators without considering the challenges school officials and educators go through daily. His focus on disciplining centered around the students her/his/themselves. Meaning, it was up to students to do their time and move on. The interview also lasted about two hours, he shared with me how he was more than delighted with the position he is currently in with no plans in the near future.

**School Resource Officer and Campus Patrol**

Officer F is a Latinx borderland native in his 50s. After twenty years of law enforcement service and being retired, he wanted to come back to work and applied as a campus patrol in 2015. He worked for Mr. R and considered him a mentor so much so that when Mr. R retired, he quit his job as a campus patrol. He was unhappy with how administration was reorganized after Mr. R retired. He expressed his disappointment in how the new administrator treated staff. According to him, the new admin would scream at staff, including him in front of students, and micromanage them, as well as students. Fed up, one day, he stated, “I just left.” He abandoned his position. Without letting anyone know. To this day, he wants to return to work as a campus
Campus Patrols

Jose Juan, a Mexican male in his 40s. He had accepted this position because he was looking for a stable job. He applied for the position and got it. He did not know anything about alternative classrooms before he was hired. On a typical day, Jose Juan would see daily fights, students under the influence, school threats, and other issues that arose. I met with him face-to-face in his backyard. When I arrived, it was a cold sunny day, he lived about five minutes away from Rovers High School. He texted me, “go around the patio, door is open”. The patio had the shape of a square with a green storage room on the opposite side of the house. It had two levels, the top one had a cement floor opposite the storage room, surrounding the house. The lower level had yellow grass due to the winter weather. We went to his storage room in his patio where we sat. The first part of the interview is not used in the data because I do not have permission from him to talk about certain aspects of his career or his professional background. The rest of the interview, which lasted close to three hours and a half was about his role as a campus patrol at
the high school where we worked together. He was wearing a blue t-shirt, blue jeans, and white tennis shoes, brown skin, he had a bell beard, and short black hair with some white hairs. This interview was conducted in Spanish. His focus took me back to 2015, when a new coach took charge of alternative and would let students sleep all day, he criticized this since students there should be punished. They “messed” up, he noted, meaning school officials and the coach in charge of alternative. Jose Juan spoke of alternative students being truant most of the time, walking around campus, starting fights and nothing would happen to them. His role, he felt was one where support on behalf of school officials is contradictory at minimal in terms of discipline. Students would flip off staff or teachers, insult them, be drugged, and they would take them to the office where school administrators would not “do anything”. A sentiment that continues today, where he continues to work. Today, we still correspond and talk to each other weekly.

Ms. M, a Mexican female in her 50s with a high school diploma that works with Jose Juan as a campus patrol at Rovers. She had accepted her position as a campus patrol because she needed a job. She had been a substitute teacher for three years when she saw a position open. She had not heard of alternative before this position. I reached out to her, and she consented to being interviewed via phone but had to postpone due to her having a fractured wrist from an altercation at the high school. The interview lasted close to two hours. Like Jose Juan, her role, and her interpretation of it focalized on with her weathering her job while navigating through violence on behalf of students, physical altercations, drugs, students under the influence, and what she considered the lack of support from school administration. She described alternative as problematic, since the coach would let students sleep most of the time. I should note that I interviewed both Jose Juan and Ms. M without them knowing I interviewed each other. She continues to work at Rovers High School.
Mr. C is a Latinx male in his 40s. I reached out to Mr. C through another staff directory from Benson Middle School. However, he never responded to my inquiries. This was until about a month later, a student of mine at the university heard about my study when they were researching Zero-Tolerance policies. She approached me and asked me if I wanted to talk to some folks in the district. I agreed and she put me in contact with Mr. C. We arranged to meet in person, however, due to scheduling conflicts, he preferred we talk during his lunch breaks or walking rounds in the school via phone. As a result, our interview went on for five sessions, each between thirty minutes and an hour. When I added it up, it was around three to four hours. He focused on his experience and background as a retired former Navy and corrections officer. His experience, according to him, informed his role as a campus patrol, a position he applied for since he had applied for many positions in the district, including school resource officer. He received a call from that middle school and took the position. He did not know much about alternative or how it worked before accepting his appointment. He was distressed and upset over the lack of reciprocity on behalf of school officials since he described disciplinary issues. Alternative, he described it as students going “haywire”. He felt there were no consequences for disciplinary infractions in the school. School officials were too lenient with students. He would state that students would diminish him, other campus patrols, and faculty, calling them names, attacking them, insulting them, and they received no punishment. He made distinct connections to society, in particular to funding, since schools that are located in upper-class communities have more resources, tools, and performance than schools in “the lower valley”. His distress, he disclosed to me, led him to tell me he was actively looking for another position outside the district. He did not want to be a campus patrol anymore. Further, the last session of our interviews occurred as the Uvalde massacre happened in Texas. I talked to him once more after
the details came up about how the officers in that massacre waited more than forty-five minutes to respond. He called them cowards. Today, Benson Middle School is closed, part of a larger consolidation project with two other middle schools in the district. He was transferred to one of the middle schools, where he continues as a campus patrol.

PERMANENT SUBSTITUTE TEACHER

Mr. K, an Afro-Latinx male in his 60s. A former salesperson, and now substitute, returned to school when he retired after more than twenty years in sales in the now-closed, Mervyn’s stores. I contacted Mr. K through the Academy staff directory. He was listed as the in-school-suspension teacher. We met in a local café. I arrived five minutes early to the café and he was already there sitting on a table for two. Mr. K was a gray-haired, shaved male with a green polo, jeans, and tennis shoes. Immediately, the first question he asked me was, “how did you get my email?” Once I told him, he burst out laughing. He did not know he was part of the staff directory since he was hired as a permanent substitute. Once I explained the study, we began talking about how he ended up in an alternative school. He said he accepted a substitute position for one day, then, he elaborated, once the school officials saw he could be with the students, he was offered the in-school-suspension position within a week. He ended up staying there for three semesters, before leaving to another alternative program for elementary students. After a semester there, he left that position, to go back to substituting. He confided in me that he wanted nothing more with disciplining. His focus of the interview circled around how discipline at the Academy was punitive, a place where students were in a revolving door of coming back and forth from their respective campuses. That contrasted with his experience in alternative at the elementary level, where there were students in first grade onward. He liked those experiences
since they relied heavily on what he noted was social-emotional learning. When I asked him about that, he meant how there were a lot of conversations and dialogue with those students, with counselors and teachers in the classroom. A sharp contrast to alternative at the high school level. Today, he continues to substitute for the Borderlands district, even though he expressed that he was tired of that as well.

**Teachers**

Coach J is a white male in his 50s. His very first position as an alternative teacher was accepted due to it being conditional on him getting a football coach position only if he accepted being in alternative. When I met him, he was a thin, white male with jeans and a school football t-shirt. He had a bell beard, and crew cut hair. His reputation was “the coach”. He had a loud voice that you could hear from one hallway to the other. When I contacted him about this study, he immediately responded and agreed to participate. We met via Zoom at the beginning of 2022. I could not see him; his camera was not working, but he sounded the same, a raspy, loud voice. I immediately recognized him when he yelled out, “Jair!” The interview lasted close to two hours. In it, his focus was on being a coach and an alternative enforcer, where there are two kinds of disciplinary students: the ones who made a mistake and those who enjoyed it. Those who made a mistake, do their time, and leave alternative. Those who enjoy it, are the so-called “permanent residents or frequent flyers.” He remarked how he was proud that many former substitutes who worked with him used alternative as a steppingstone of educational experience for something better. We had mutual colleagues who would work with him as substitutes in alternative temporarily before becoming teachers, permanently. Today, he oversees the SAC
program at Parks High School in the Dunes school district where he took that position again, as he had accepted a football position.

**Coach H**, a white male in his 50s. With over twenty-four years of alternative, educational, and coaching experience all at Bridges High School, in the Borderlands district. He accepted that position as it was the first and only position he has held. I reached out to Coach H through the staff directory of Bridges. He was listed as an alternative combo position. I sent him an email and, within days, received a reply from him. He agreed to talk with me via phone call. Due to his responsibilities as a coach, he could only meet me in the evening. Our interview lasted two hours as well. Similarly, to Coach J. Coach H, a former alternative student himself, focalized on how students are either those who made a mistake or those who do not care or are “frequent flyers.” His philosophy aligned with not taking things personally. He asserted that not everyone could be helped. At the time, he was particularly struggling with a student that he asserted was a cartel member. Coach H mentioned that this student had been in juvenile detention centers already, in alternative schools, and was back in alternative because of drug possession and fighting. He described this student as someone insightful and intelligent, and what was sad about it, was the student affirmed he would end up in prison or dead. Coach was learning to reconcile with these how he denominated, tough students. This “Sinaloa” student, (he gave him that name because the student would always have a Sinaloa state cap on) was one of his most tough students that he did not know how to reach. Coach H was upfront about how he could not reach the “Sinaloa” student and felt frustrated. Today he continues to be the alternative teacher at Bridges High School.

**Coach C**, a Latinx male in his 40s, took the alternative position since it was conditional on him coaching. With more than fourteen years of alternative experience, I reached out to him thanks to his high school’s staff directory, at Jameson High School. He was also listed as alternative
combo. It took us weeks to set up a meeting due to scheduling conflicts. He was a track and football coach. Our interview was a two-hour Zoom session. Coach C wore a sweatshirt with the school’s logo. He had a crew cut, and shaved, brown hair. He was sitting in his office in the basement of his high school. He focused on his experience and the alternative experience in how it is designed to make students better people. His reliance on the program/classroom was one where he wanted to ensure students would not return to alternative, since it was a punishment. So much so, in the past, he would take the alternative students on field trips to the local annex prison, as a form of “tough” love environment to scare them. Letting them know if they continued down this path, they would end up in the legal system, therefore he also accentuated how he mentored/counseled the students as well. He kept an environment where students needed guidance, and he was tough, but gave guidance. Today he continues to be a coach and alternative teacher at Jameson High School.

Coach V is a Latinx male in his 40s. I reached out to him after I heard his name from a staff member in the district. He is the alternative teacher from the high school I coincidentally graduated from, Burns High School. I looked his email up through the staff directory and sent him many inquiries for weeks. Finally, after close to a month, he responded to one of my emails. I would initially send an email a week to stakeholders all over the borderland. He accepted and we scheduled a meeting. The first time he stood me up. Then I emailed him again to no response. I was giving up hope, and then he responded again, setting up a meeting. After more than a month and a half, we set up a meeting via Zoom. Coach V was sitting down in his classroom, he had a long beard with gray hairs, he looked like Forrest Gump after he ran across the country; he had long hair, long beard, and glasses. Also wearing his high-school’s sweatshirt, he first accepted an alternative position due to him wanting to coach football, but again, as with many
instances before, the position was conditional to him being an alternative teacher and a coach. He also did not know anything about alternative before he accepted the position. His focus revolved around how the students need support, the nurture since from his perspective, they are not receiving it at home. He highlighted the importance of having alternative programs/classrooms since the students need those connections, especially since many have made mistakes. Today he continues to be the alternative teacher at Burns High School.

Mr. Lambo is a white male in his 60s with over thirty-eight years of experience as a teacher and a coach, he set up to retire from the Borderlands district and is currently working in New Mexico. He has experience in two alternative high schools; the Academy and Sunset Academy where he currently works. We conducted the interview via phone. It lasted close to two hours. His focus was on how students needed support, yet considered the alternative students were failures, that is why they needed support. He would juxtapose his position at the Academy and the Sunset Academy, in neighboring Desert ISD; for the Academy in the Borderlands district, he considered it more like enforcers, disciplinarians, and even prison, while Sunset was organized by talking, and mentoring students. Focusing on their mental health and wellness. Here, alternative students with disciplinary infractions were mixed with credit recovery students, or students that were getting their credits to graduate high school, because they could not perform effectively in their home schools due to absences or them being parents. Like the Parent Center, he previously worked before retiring from Texas. These last-chance schools gave them the opportunity to regain their credit by going to school four days a week. He considered that students need empathy and support, since he concluded they came from broken homes. Mr. Lambo continues to work at Sunset Academy.
Mr. White, a White male in his 60s moved from Arizona, to teach science in a high school because as he stated, “they paid better” as an educator. Coming from the oil industry after college, he ended up in education the collapsing prices of oil back in the 1980s, he decided to enter adult education in California. Afterwards, he moved to Arizona as a science teacher for ten years before coming to the borderland in the late 2000s. He then applied to Anderson High School at Borderlands where he was conditionally hired as a physics teacher. When he could not pass the physics certification exam, he was replaced by a football coach. Later, he passed the certification exam, but by then the position was no longer available. He was sent to the Academy since he informed me, they needed a science teacher. “Wasn’t really a process. I got a notification.” He noted, that if he wanted to keep his job, he needed to accept the position, which he did. He was not informed of what alternative entailed before he accepted the position. This was in 2011 and has been there since. He agreed to be interviewed via Zoom. We had two sessions of an hour each. Mr. White wore a polo shirt, had grayish hair, and sat down in his classroom at the Academy. His interview centered on the lack of advocacy for alternative students. One of the first things, he mentioned was how as a science teacher he had no lab, and no hands-on resources, everything is done through computers. The lack of advocacy along with budget cuts put him and his students working with limited resources. He pinpointed how their role was babysitting. In the hopes that students understand they need to make better choices. Mr. White spoke of how these students needed more support and advocacy from the district, since he felt, they were invisible to their eyes. Today, he continues to be the only science teacher at the Academy.

Mr. X is a Latinx native of the Borderland in his 60s with over thirty-five years of teaching in Washington state, California, and the Borderland, he has taught English, Social Studies, History,
and assigned to alternative. I decided to contact him, and the first thing he asked was how I get his email? When I told him, he revealed that he was in the staff directory of the Winds High School in the Borderlands district was outdated as he did not work there anymore. We set up a meeting and our interview lasted close to three hours. His story stands out among the rest of the participants since he claimed his being assigned to alternative was one where he was punished by the superintendent at the time of the Borderland district. In this ironic turn, Mr. X was being punished with teaching alternative at Winds High School. When asked what his evidence was, he had a long history of challenging the last two superintendents of the Borderlands school district, both of which have been indicted, and one convicted for either illegal, unethical, and/or fraudulent activities. Records from which I found while doing some research on my own corroborated some of his claims, yet I chose not to include them here to protect Mr. X’s identity. However, he claimed his being assigned to alternative was one where they (meaning certain district officials) would hope he resigned. His appointment to alternative was the result of an incident that occurred at Everglades High School. The interview centered on how alternative was weaponized against him, to hurt his career while also, finding ways to connect with alternative students. The interview took place in January 2022. A champion of unions, and representative of one, he was accused of advocating for unions during school hours and was relieved of his alternative position once more and was placed under investigation again. Vindicate from those accusations, he was reinstated to teach and was transferred to Rangers High School where he currently teaches Social Studies. His interview centered on the retaliation he suffered from, was similar to the experiences many alternative students in his view lived through—a funneling system of oppression for disciplinary students.

Mr. S is a White male in his 50s I approached Mr. S through the staff directory of his school. At
the time, he was the alternative teacher for McMillen Middle School. We arranged our meeting digitally via Zoom, a shaved man with glasses and long blonde with shades of gray hair stared at me from the other side of the screen. He accepted this position with no knowledge of alternative beforehand. His interview centered on his classroom, where the students were out of control. He dealt with violence from them daily. From a student throwing a boiling noodle soup to another student, to arrests in his classroom for drug dealing. Fortunately, he emphasized, his quitting was interrupted by the pandemic, as this was March 2022. Schools closed for more than a year. Teaching and instruction moved online. No alternative was held. Students were returned to mainstream instruction. Mr. S spent a year assisting another teacher with tutoring. When they came back in Fall 2021, he restructured his disciplinary classroom, to one he described as “warden-type”. The interview centered on his frustration, with the lack of support of school administrators in dealing with disciplinary education. He was upfront about it, “I want to quit, I want to quit”. He contrasted his alternative experience with his CBP experience; dealing with drug, human, merchandise trafficking, and violence, and indicated that he’d prefer that over being in alternative. The interview was approximately two hours long. As of Fall 2022, he left the alternative position.

Summary of Interviews

For this section, I summarized the interviews with all fifteen participants. This is important to understand since it describes how they focused or centered their interviews. Moreover, it gives contextual background to the findings of the study. What follows are the findings of the study. The rationale for having fifteen participants is to have a broader/authentic perspective concerning what participant experiences are (Moustakas, 1994), in order to understand the dynamics of discipline in alternative classrooms in the borderland.
participant shed light on how they ended up in their positions, how their views were informed by their conceptualizations of alternative classrooms and their views of alternative students.

In the findings, I examined the data where the participants made meaning of their role, discipline, alternative classrooms, and students. When it comes to alternative classrooms, the concept stems from a branch of reinforced Zero-Tolerance policies in the 90s where students that posed a form of threat to mainstream instruction were to be segregated (Geronimo, 2010; Skiba, Arredondo & Rausch, 2014). This is why this study is vital. There is a need to understand the ideologies and perspectives of those enforcers that are in disciplinary education (Golafshani, 2022; Guenther, 2020). Especially, how disciplinary experiences and ideologies mirror broader themes socially, and culturally in education (Dunning-Lozano, 2015; Oksala, 2023; Smith, 1983). In this study, the data is verbal text transcribed via the interviews. However, each participant brings an array of perspectives, ideologies, and practices they use in alternative that informs a range of discursive practices—how they reproduce their roles with the intention of serving alternative students, for one sole purpose—to get those students out of alternative. Their language focalizes under a clear mantra that delineates the following—these classrooms are/should be a form of punishment, most of the participants with three notable exceptions from Mr. R, Mr. White, and Mr. X viewed alternative students deficiently, that is, these students are lacking “something” that prevents them from “succeeding” in mainstream instruction. This coupled with these spaces (alternative classrooms/programs/or schools) parallels a carceral space in schooling that resembles the carceral system in society. Through the themes, I spotlight the participant's use of metaphors, daily practices, and symbolic language (Brdar & Brdar-Savo, 2020; Mayr and Manchin, 2012) where actions, identities, reflections, or experiences garner how their perspectives speak to their role as enforcers in disciplinary education. In the next
sections, I describe the findings of the study categorized by themes.

**Disciplining is having a set Structure for Punishment**

How disciplining looks like, coupled with what their day looked like for participants, in particular teachers, since they were the main stakeholders in alternative classrooms was fundamental to my study. Disciplining in alternative programs and/or classrooms are dependent on how the teacher organizes schedules, students, arrivals, restrooms breaks, lunch breaks, with departures. Campus patrols, resource officers, or administration rely on the teacher’s classroom management to operate in their respective roles. Especially since disciplining is the action in which disciplinary education (Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; Nance, 2015). Discipline in alternative classrooms relies on the educator’s role in enforcing an organized method that underlies how students will be treated, and how they will interact with each other including the teacher’s interaction, all in their schedule (Fabelo et al., 2011). The data suggested that teachers interpreted their disciplining via how they structured their days. Alternative classrooms were organized in the following way: Students arrive during zero period, between 45 to 60 minutes before the rest of the school. This was the case for participants at the middle school and high school levels. Alternative classrooms in the borderlands have the main stakeholder assigned to alternative, in its majority a coach, or a substitute teacher. This is followed by teachers being assigned certain periods to alternative to provide tutoring or instruction. Or no other teachers are assigned, and the students are assigned work in two ways; via an online program where teachers assign work, or if alternative students do not have computers. This happened at Benson Middle School, where Mr. C worked. He told me that the students had either smashed or broke their district-assigned laptops. Due to this, they send
out a school-wide email to that student’s teachers and campus patrols walk around campus with
students to pick up their work. A typical alternative classroom was usually a portable, or
segregated classroom from mainstream instruction, as was the case with Jose Juan, Ms. M, Mr.
C, Coach J, Coach N, Coach C, Coach V, Coach H, Mr. S, Mr. X. For alternative schools, where
Mr. White, Mr. K, and Mr. Lambo taught, which was the Academy, a standalone campus, and
the only segregated classroom was ISS within that JJAEP. Typically the Academy usually had
half day instruction. This meant a group of students would come in the mornings only, and a
group of students would arrive in the afternoons. The rationale given to me was to ensure
students did not engage in fights. In the ‘90s, both Mr. Lambo and Mr. K informed me that there
were students from different gang affiliations that would constantly fight, harm each other, and
hurt teachers, along with security. To minimize risk, they divided the classes, the students, and
their schedules. This is where Mr. K was assigned. Not all classrooms had cubicles, it was
usually a classroom with individual desks. Notably, only Coach C, Coach H, Mr. S, Mr. K in ISS
in alternative, Coach J had cubicles in their classrooms or some form of individual separator in
their classrooms.

Disciplining is having a set structure of punishment is one where participants describe
what alternative students do daily, their schedules, and how the participants conceptualized
disciplining. Routine and structure were one that students needed to be successful in the
alternative classroom. The ideologies expressed by the participants in this section are explicitly
pointing to how students need behavioral control, or else they will misbehave, and in turn the
teachers, or enforcers will what they deem as lose control of their classroom (Geronimo, 2010;
Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016).
In this section, I analyze the responses of Coach V, Coach N, Mr. S, Coach H, Jose Juan, Ms. M and Mr. C. Each spoke of how their routine and structure is materialized, one where the students are the actors in the alternative classrooms doing a set of routines, formatted, and enforced by the enforcers, in this case the participants, where the goal is to do their time in alternative successfully (doing work, being obedient and not misbehaving) to return to mainstream instruction. Then, juxtapose is the testimonies of all three campus patrols, Ms. M, Jose Juan, and Mr. C defined what disciplining should be as a set classroom of punishment, where they expressed their disappointment when students became more like docile bodies (Foucault, 1977) in their interactions with alternative classrooms.

In the following excerpt, Coach V elaborated how disciplining is a matter of consistency, structured for students where alternative teachers are challenged by students in an effort, according to him, to see how much “can they get away with.” Instead, he argued, routines are needed for alternative students since that is how they can be productive in their alternative experiences, that is to leave alternative back to mainstream instruction:

What can I do to leave this place, simple rules, same routine, we do everything at a very specific time, they come in, got to be here at 8 am. After they come into my classroom, they have to sign in. Then they take a seat and zero period starts, and zero period is just an attendance period. But they can start working on whatever they need to work. At 10:30 am, we have our first restroom break, they all know that. They know they cannot go to the restroom between 8:00 am and 10:30 am. And then their 2nd restroom break is at 1:30 pm. We have lunch at 11:30 am, and then they know that after lunch, there is a teacher that comes in and helps them out with math, science, whatever the teacher is assigned, and they know they leave at 3 pm. They know that routine. Therefore, when
there is a routine, there is structure and when there is a routine, the discipline problems are very low, really low.

In this excerpt Coach V describes what he deemed the intentions of alternative students built into the fabric of his disciplining processes. He stressed that a matter of being routinely consistent minimized disciplinary incidents for the students. For him to do this, he had to set established times of actions daily where the students work, go to the restroom, eat lunch, and left for the day. The more the routine structure of his classroom was clear, the less the disciplining issues. Coach N, a former alternative teacher, now administrator made similar descriptions:

All right, just getting in there, getting the kids, come on in, sit down, find your seat, after establishing your routines and procedures, it became easy. You just need to establish that from the very beginning. As soon as the bell rings, you come in, sit down in your chair, and quit messing around. I don’t want you up and over your seat, you guys know where your seats, get your paper ready, pencils. Back then it was paper, pencils. Ready for your first class, whether that semester was math, social studies, or whether it was P.E, just get ready, we are here to learn, come on, and let’s go.

For both coaches, they are controlling students’ mobility (Foucault, 1977) where they should monitor what they do, when to do it, and how. Disciplining for them, centers on control and management. Mr. S for instance, talked about what happens when that control is momentarily interrupted by misbehavior:

Earlier than regular class, 7:20, zero hour I guess you would say, the rules are: there are no backpacks, no cell phones, two major issues right there that are nipped in the bud. If they come, and they are identified, I turn them away, they have to go sit in the office…It is not social time. Not play time in McDonalds, they sit in their seat, they raise
their hand for every little thing there is. Even if it’s to go to the bathroom or whatever. The third issue, there is zero, if I even hear, on their computer music, or something loud, I will confiscate their electronic device. As long as there is on earphones, I do not mind. So, some space. After that, we play it by ear. Bathroom breaks, I will give them an AM and PM (a restroom break in the morning and afternoon), if they can’t control the hallway situation. If I can’t trust you to be adult enough to go to the bathroom. We have a two-way communication here, if you are abusing that, we will go to that AM and PM break (he clarified, that he would take away a restroom break). Another, is lunch, be the first one for lunch. I let them go first. With my mental manipulation, they think I am giving them the first chance, available. We can’t maintain our hallway behavior; I have 15 of the worst of McMillen walking down that hall.

In this excerpt, Mr. S points out how students do not need backpacks, or phones, and if he finds any on them, it is an automatic trip to the administration office. He conceptualized his room as one where there is not “playing” around, even contrasting it to McDonalds. If his students misbehaved, he would take privileges away—such as taking their headphones for music, restroom breaks as a whole class, and physical education at the end of the day. The students sit in the classroom, do their work, listen to music, and if they misbehave, do not listen to Mr. S or his instructions, then restroom breaks, eating in the cafeteria, or having physical education at the end of the day are taken away. This hierarchical observation, as Foucault (1977; 1989) tends to produce docility among those that are subdued. Instead of drastic measures in the forms of power and control against a group of people; the teachers produce Foucault’s disciplinary technology, through subtlety. Aimed at being in parts to strip power from those that are aimed to be corrected, whose aim is to normalize these practices in their classes. Thus, the goals are those
daily privileges he takes from students should they misbehave in his view. Coach H, equally spoke of a rigid routine where he yearned when he could search the students for weapons:

Ten years ago, having kids empty their pockets, that is no longer a thing. Now we have to ask them, basically they are on the honor code. We can’t go through that, administrators are the only ones. And administrators are busy with other things, so we do spot checks. The district is stretched so thin, those are really rare. We bring them fifteen minutes after the other kids, we bring them in at 9 am, the rest go in at 8:45 am. That way we give parents a little more time to do what they got to do. After 9:10 am, we already gave them ten minutes before we even count them tardy, at minute eleven, you are already tardy. At fifteen, you are absent for your zero-period class. So, and then we take them, they have to be given breakfast opportunity. 9:10-9:15 am, we go give them breakfast, they eat their breakfast, after they start their online, Schoology (online curriculum program) classes, their teachers. Then at 10:30 am I take them to the restroom, then at 11:30 am I take them to lunch. They get their lunch, they bring their lunch back. Then at 12 pm when the rest of the school is uhh, is off, it is just basically, catch up, trying to do any work. After lunch, they get a 1 o’clock, restroom break and at 3 pm they leave for the day, before the rest of the school is out.

Coach H described an alternative day where student movements are monitored so that their goal is to do online work through Schoology an online platform widely used in the school districts of the borderland for curriculum instruction, posting assignments, and syllabi. Here the teachers can communicate directly with students without the need of having alternative teachers email mainstream teachers for work on behalf of their students. Moreover, to walk around campus for work, as is the only case of Mr. C, because the alternative students had destroyed
their laptops. Beneficiaries are those stakeholders that benefit from an act or action in the processes. In this case, Coach H once again benefits this structure and routine minimizes misbehavior. As he pointed out in the following excerpt:

First of all, usually self-monitoring, I usually tell kids I’ll teach you like an adult until you put me in a situation where I put you back as a child or a kid. We all screw up, how you react to me, is going to determine how I deal with you again. So, a lot of my kids understand that. Another thing is I give these kids a lot of leeway and a lot of freedoms, and as they screw up we take that away from them. They understand that it can get worse.

We don’t always go maximum hardcore, let them know, this is alternative!

The consequence for students is disciplinary action, either a visit to school administration, or privileges taken. The model for disciplining is one where students are obedient, otherwise, consequences are enacted so that a routine and structure is set for them to “understand.” For Coach J, he pragmatically recounted how his classroom was organized:

You do what you do to make sure the room is running quietly, and you know as well as I do, there are kids that are going to go in there and want work and do work. And there’s the kids that come in there, no matter how much work you put in front of them, they aren’t going to do it and you can’t make them. And you can only shake them and wake them up so many times that even if they are awake, now they are a discipline problem. If they are asleep, they are not causing anybody any discipline.

Coach J prioritized what he denominated as “not having discipline” in his classroom. The room must be quiet, with students doing their work, sitting in their cubicles, or by themselves. If a student refuses, he’d rather have them sleeping. Minimizing discipline according to him,
revolves around how he strategized his routine and structure. This meant having a room often with many if not all students sleeping.

Foucault’s (1997) first disciplinary technology, spoke of *hierarchical observations.* Where the institution monitors, controls, and “corrects” student mobility and behaviors. This is to produce docile bodies. Student routine and structure are interlinked to their mobility in alternative classrooms. 1. The segregation from mainstream instruction. 2. The schedules they must follow which includes mobility or lack of monitoring by the enforcers, or in this case the teachers where they spoke of their daily routines and structures. 3. Teacher/coach perception on restroom breaks, whether as a classroom they get one in the morning and the afternoon. 4. Breakfast and lunch, whether they get to eat in the cafeteria or not, subject to their behavior, according to the participants. 5. Lastly, in the case of Mr. S, physical education. Used as a reward for good behavior daily. Or Coach H where he stands by a “self-monitoring” space where students gradually get privileges taken from them the more they disobey. This constant monitoring remarks a hierarchical disciplinary structure that is enforced by teachers/coaches. Additionally, Bourdieu (1991) denoted *symbolic violence* as one that steps away from what is denominated as violent capacities of suppression in societies, be it through censorship, physical and bodily harm via weapons of war, stripped freedoms, or incapacitating “basic” human needs to name some. Instead, Bourdieu framed *violence* through a lens that examines power in hierarchical structures discursively that are internalized as normative and reproduced by those marginalized groups invisibly. This is done through sets of routines,

“Ways of looking, sitting, standing, keeping silent, or even of speaking (‘reproachful looks’ or ‘tones’, ‘disapproving glances’ and so on) are full of injunctions that are
powerful and hard to resist precisely because they are silent and insidious, insistent and insinuating” (p. 51).

These routines are seen in how the participants set a routine, procedures, and structures in place that are meant to produce complicity on behalf of students. Enforcers offer students a path of exiting the alternative classroom or of being further punished by having privileges taken from them, disciplinary referrals and time added to their alternative placement, or having them assigned to the alternative school, or the juvenile justice center (Simmons, 2005). Moreover, Selman (2017) coined the term docilization. one of inculcating students through everyday practices in alternative classrooms to domesticate their behavior to one were:

“An abundance of rules form the basis of this training and shape the daily experiences of alternative school students, controlling and limiting their behavior. While such rules are commonplace in most schools, the rules, regulations, and subsequent punishments commonly found in the alternative school are attempting to ‘correct’ behaviors associated with ‘failure’ in the mainstream school” (p. 219).

Selman focalized sets of structured daily experiences in alternative reminding the student that there is ‘correcting’ to be concluded due to that student’s inadaptation to mainstream instruction. A set of behaviors, mobility, along with domineering environments in alternative classrooms minimize what they termed as misbehavior. Further, it jumps to how students must be complicit for them to be “successful” in the program/classroom. As I will analyze in the following section, where all three campus patrols interview, Jose Juan, Ms. M, and Mr. C elucidated what they consider a lack of structure in their respective alternative classrooms is not what alternative should be.
LACK OF ROUTINE AND STRUCTURE

Disciplining is interwoven with the monitoring of student bodies in alternative classrooms. These spaces of punishment were a process of doing. Where students sat down, did their work, their movement was minimized, and no talking was allowed. If this routine was interrupted, then they had consequences (Phoenix & Kelly, 2013). In this section, all campus patrols alluded to what they were living on their campuses. Places with a lack of structure, where students were docile bodies (Foucault, 1977), for Jose Juan and Ms. M, who worked at Rovers High School, it was unfortunate that they were not being punished enough. I note once again, that I interviewed both without informing each other. For Mr. C, he explained that the alternative in his campus was a chaotic one that lacked structure due to misbehavior. In each of the following excerpts, each campus patrol shined a light on what they consider the lack of structure creates more disciplinary hindrances.

Días normales esta carajo, Jair, porque siempre tienen los pies para arriba todos. Este, como vienen los niños vestidos, y si no van así, ahí tenemos camisas para comprarles. A veces que iba uno, entres, no que fulanita tiene que ir al baño, todos están dormidos! Entonces como aprenden, si están ahí porque están mal, como aprenden las lecciones que están dando, si están dormidos. El maestro que los está cuidando por qué permiten que se duerman, para que no les de lata, que no les de guerra. Yo pienso que los deben de poner a estudiar. Que tengo sueño, vienes a la escuela, este es un castigo, no es un premio, por haber hecho lo que hizo, está castigado.

Translation: Normal days are hard, Jair, because they (students) always have their feet up. If the student does not bring their uniform (white shirt and black pants), if they don’t bring it, we have shirts to buy for them. Sometimes when you arrive (to alternative), you
come in and a female student needs to go to the restroom, and all of them are asleep! How will they learn, they are there because they are wrong, how will they learn a lesson, if they are asleep? So that they do not bother anyone, so they don’t give war. I think they should put them to study. You come to school, this is a punishment, not a prize, because you did what you did, you are being punished.

Ms. M describes an alternative classroom where students are asleep, doing nothing. She conceptualized that alternative lacked structure since they were asleep all day. With this said, if that was the case, then this was not punishment. Jose Juan offered a similar rationale:

_Hace diez años, les daban treinta a noventa días, y si servía, yo lo viví. Los chavalos no querían entrar a alternativa, y ahorita le dices a un niño te vas a ir a alternativa, “puedo dormir, puedo hacer lo que yo quiera, me acuesto”. No tienen teléfono, pero pues están sin hacer nada, están dormidos._

Ten years ago, they would get thirty to ninety days, and it worked, I lived it. The kids did not want to go to alternative, and right now you tell a kid, you are going to alternative, “I can sleep, I can do what I like, I can lie down” They don’t have a phone, but they can do nothing, they are asleep.”

The docile bodies (Foucault, 1977; 1989) described in this alternative classroom by both Ms. M and Jose Juan, and the _material process_ is one where the enforcers in their view, have a structure of students sleeping so that they are not bothered. In our interview, Ms. M for instance, pinpointed how it was often amazing how students could sleep all day. In contrast to Jose Juan, when he compared alternative ten years prior when I was there because students could not talk, move, ask for a pencil, go to the restroom, or lunch without me giving them permission. He confided in me that he missed those days. Even though students today were still docile bodies
since the coach in charge of the alternative classroom had them sleeping all day. This was not disciplining for Ms. M and Jose Juan since they were not being punished, they claimed, students enjoyed sleeping. Their lack of structure meant punishment was missing.

Mr. C on the other hand interpreted a chaotic classroom where students were in charge, and school administrators did not punish students enough. He told me they had a long-term substitute with up to six students:

Chaos, you walk in, you getting called in the room. The person (alternative substitute) has a radio (walkie-talkie), you can hear on the radio the kids are telling them off. They are like nah, “the guy pushed me (referring to the substitute),” cause he is in there by himself you know. “He pushed me,” and you know, it’s not true, and you take them down to the office and then the other ones are just laughing. It’s just chaos, they aren’t getting any work done. Maybe one or two are, you can tell two girls are. They are actually trying to do their work. They could be a lot better if they are in other surroundings cause the other three are boys, just acting up all day, every day.

Mr. C recounted a classroom where the long-term or permanent substitute does not have control. He informed me that he would have to assist the substitute daily, while school administrators must intervene constantly to assist the substitute as well. When asked why a teacher wasn’t assigned to alternative instead of a substitute. He informed me that no one applied nor wanted the position. He discerned those disciplinary infractions overwhelmingly came from male students and that the chaotic classroom was due to two or three students. The rest of the students, two to be exact, were females, and according to him, did their work. The ideologies he presented were gendered based on his experience. When asked about their ethnicity, he pointed out they were all Latinx. A label that has been studied by scholars (Fenning & Rose, 2007;
Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; Noguera, 2003; Rios, 2011) where disciplinary students are disproportionately minoritized males. This normalized judgment is informed to the second disciplinary technology Foucault (1977) spoke of, where labels are deconstructed as normative. Students need to be punished, according to all three campus patrols interviewed. Punishment for them is not making students feel comfortable in alternative classrooms but instead making them pay for their infractions or crime.

**Summary**

In this section, I analyzed the routines and structure of teachers/coaches/campus patrols who are the enforcers that spend more time in alternative classrooms. In them, two disciplinary technologies were notable in how they viewed disciplining—via routines and structures, and normalizing judgments (Foucault, 1977). Their perspectives helped identify the actions of students in the classroom only through what they considered to be their structures of punishment to maintain order in their classroom. This hierarchical observation and monitoring (Foucault, 1977) and normalizing judgments label the behaving student as one that is obedient, docile, and constantly working throughout the day so that they can “learn” their lesson, for them to exit alternative classrooms. When this does not happen, the campus patrols, Jose Juan, Ms. M, and Mr. C, delineated how a lack of punishment in the classrooms looks like: equally docile bodies, asleep all day, which were the descriptions of both Jose Juan and Ms. M, where they disliked students being asleep since they considered this was some form of reward for them. While Mr. C, pointed to a chaotic classroom that needed constant intervention from him, and administration. Next, I explore how the participants conceptualize alternative classrooms/programs.
Symbolic Prisons in Schools

In this section, I dive into how the participants understand what alternative is. From my experience where often, I heard students talk about the correlation between jail or prison and alternative. To the school-to-prison nexus (Fernandez et al., 2016; Hartnett, 2011) there are interchangeable applications of perspectives, ideologies, policies, practices, and institutions that force students into the legal system. I arrive at this section through the alternative participant lens. This means that I asked the participants either what was alternative for them, their role, or what it meant to be in these classrooms for them. Their conceptualizations revolved around alternative being a metaphor of a jail, microcosm, or prison. The characterizations of students as microcosmic convicts that if they continued the alternative path of recidivism or incept to the juvenile justice system or, in some instances, (in Texas students can be tried as adults at seventeen) move on to the legal system, all the while already having a record. Additionally, the section is divided into a subsection, Gatekeepers, and Babysitters, which pinpoints how some participants see themselves in terms of alternative classrooms. This type of discourse relates to alternative as symbolic prisons since their being disciplinary enforcers marks how prison and monitoring students is the role of an enforcer.

In this case, the enforcers utilized metaphors and symbolic language, interlinking alternative classrooms and the carceral or legal justice system (Kupchick, 2010; Turner, 2015). Metaphors establish dissemination of the human experience. It helps unveil how we experience not only our human condition but can help with validation. That is to say, they are pivotal since they help legitimize or discredit understanding arguments one can make (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Mayr & Manchin, 2012). This is done in partly because, “when we use metaphors, we can highlight one aspect of experience while at the same time concealing others” (Mayr & Manchin,
Essentially, they are lexical tools that help clarify, persuade, and often suppress intentionality, rhetoric, or normativity. To explain the latter, normativity, Semino (2008) asserted that not only do they clarify intention, or an argument, it also becomes a norm, “these become the commonsense or naturalized way of understanding the world” (p. 33).

For the participants—in this section I focalize on Mr. K, Mr. Lambo, Mr. White, Ms. M, Mr. R, and Mr. S, making connections between alternative and jail, prison, or incarceration was done as a matter of fact. It flourished in our conversations naturally. They described what they perceived to be jail, jail time, convicts, alternative is a microcosm or prison, prison, relational to alternative, alternative students, and/or alternative classrooms/spaces. In the following excerpt from Mr. K when asked about his role in alternative:

They get bored, they start fidgeting around, and they start skipping school, because we don’t have the resources. A school does not have the resources, things that I look into your thing, it was the pipeline (referring to the school-to-prison pipeline). I believe it is true, we are just preparing (students for prison). One of the things is that the Academy was downtown (next to the police station, in front of the courts). We have the big building with big window and then in front of the building with the small building (county courthouse) we used to call that university (laughs). I mean, it is bad, oh yeah, you are going to go college, city college (referring to the county jail). We have to say sometimes with a smile.

Here, Mr. K emphasized how “bored, fidgeting” students who commence absenteeism meshed with the lack of resources in schools. His first metaphorical reference is the school-to-prison pipeline (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Wald & Losen, 2003). However, the metaphor itself is one that is a one-way directional cause and effect explanation (McGraw,
Mr. K targets the pipeline through the following: the location of the Academy. At the time the alternative school was placed in the middle of the judicial branches of El Paso. Next to the police station, in front of the courthouse and the county jail with the FBI building behind (something Mr. K does not mention, however I noticed when I visited the now vacant location). For years it was situated next to these buildings, implicitly sending a message to alternative students. Something Mr. K alluded to when he told students, “You are going to go to college, city college (referring to the county jail).” He emphasized that the university was the court, and rhetorically he substituted an academic institution with the carceral justice system. And the city college with the county jail, with the city college, another substitution for higher education in both instances. The notion that he used city college as the county jail attributed to city colleges usually being a stepping stone to a university. In this case, the courts were the university, meaning that those students in the county jail would graduate to the university through carceral recidivism (Mallet, 2013; 2016; Weissman, 2014). A revolving door between alternative schools and the legal justice system. In the following excerpt, I asked Mr. Lambo what his expectations were as a teacher when he worked at the Academy.

Mr. Lambo: It was basically mostly discipline you know. When the kid wanted to go to the restroom, we had to call the office and ask for security, and when security came by, you have to escort them to the restroom. Then bring them back. It was more disciplinarian, more than education.

Jair: It sounds like you are describing a small, like a microcosm, of—

Mr. Lambo: Prison, very good, because you know, we even get the kids of, where did you come from? I came from juvie. They didn’t go to their home, school, when they came from juvie, they came straight to the Academy, we also had the Juvenile Justice
Alternative Education Program, and so those kids were really treated like they were in prison.

In this excerpt, Mr. Lambo described how at the Academy there were lower expectations for students, it was an environment where student movements were restricted and penalized. He stated, “it was more disciplinarian, more than education.” Then I made a follow-up comment about how it sounded like he was describing a small jail. He interrupted, to complete my statement with the prison metaphor. He referred to how students were treated as if they were in prison. Like Mr. K, Mr. Lambo suggested that the setting for alternative is one that is tarnished with metaphorical associations to prisons (Turner, 2015). Even so, students were treated based on their status as alternative students. This implied that students were treated as prisoners. On the other hand, Mr. White protested how there was a lack of resources, he was protesting budget cuts on the Academy that occurred back in 2017-2018. Which is when the academy was moved to where it is housed today, and Mr. White went from being one of the three science teachers to the only one science teacher in the alternative school, teaching over three classes in one classroom due to budget cuts. Mr. White expressed his frustration with alternative students, he described everyone at the Academy as the “the red headed stepchild of the district”. He meant that the alternative school was the unwanted institution in the entire district since it housed alternative and disciplinary students.

If you do have them here (housed in alternative), why just have the attitude of housing them, that’s the same, exactly like prisons. We are not going to rehabilitate, we are just going to house you, because you screwed up, and after than you’ll go back to genpop (general population – term used in prisons) and we’ll bring a new herd of convicts” Mr. White narrated the revolving disciplinary door of students from mainstream
His metaphoric comparison identified students as a “heard of convicts” that go back to genpop—a slang abbreviated term used in prison vernacular (Barksdale, 2019; Edvinsson et al., 2010). He expanded on how if resources and advocacy for alternative students were not expanded, this revolving door would be continuous and unending. A recidivist revolving door is characterized by many participants throughout the study, when I asked them in their perspective, “who is the alternative student?” Ms. M for instance, her response centered on the first time she worked as a substitute in alternative. The same program Mr. K worked more than ten years later called Facing Choices (pseudonym), where elementary students from 1st grade onward, were placed due to disciplinary infractions. She interpreted that experience as the following:

“Lo único que me acuerdo es que los ponían separados, uno si, uno no, uno si, uno no. Y este, la muchacha los cuidaba por lo que es el tiempo completo de la escuela. Les llevaban la tarea a ese salón, ella los llevaba a comer separados de todos los demás, ósea no los juntaban, estaban siempre apartados. Siempre comían dentro de la cafetería, pero no con los demás. Solos, como si fuera una, un tipo de cárcel chiquita. Con niños de primaria.”

The only thing I remember is that they would put them (alternative elementary students) separately, like, one yes, one no, one yes, one no. And this girl (referring to the teacher) would watch over them full-time. She would take work to the classroom (from their respective teachers), take them to eat separately from the rest of the school, not together, always separate. They’d always eat inside the cafeteria, but not with everyone else. Alone, as if it was like, a type of small jail. This is with elementary kids.

Ms. M remembered her first alternative experience as one where the alternative
elementary students were segregated. She elucidated how a female teacher would go around to the student’s mainstream teachers to gather work as well. Not unlike the middle or high school level. In it, she realized how students would eat and work separated from everyone else, “as if it was like, a type of small jail”. This metaphor symbolized how alternative functioned similarly in her view, as a small jail. One where alternative students were not part of mainstream populace, their privileges, as other participants have pointed out. For Mr. R, in another example, the administrator in charge of the freshman campus for Rangers High School. He recognized the vulnerability of alternative students while comparing them to prisoners. He stipulated that the most vulnerable populations end in alternative classrooms. His response was: “It always has been that way. Look at the prison, with all the Blacks and the Mexicans, everyone else. We tend to punish the underdog, extensively, extensively.”

Mr. R compared alternative to prison, where minoritized communities, in particular “Black and Mexicans” are punished, he metaphorically calls them, “underdogs” juxtaposing both the prisoner in prison, and the alternative students to alternative). A frame, large attributed to the prison industrial complex (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008; Smith & Hattery, 2010) where people of color, mainly Black and Brown, are incarcerated disproportionately, contrasted to their White counterparts (Noguera, 2003: Losen & Martinez, 2020). Here, Mr. R metaphorically identified the “underdog” where alternative students are like prisoners in the prison industrial system, are singularly vulnerable (Dunning-Lozano, 2015; Noguera, 2009). This metaphor is meant to underscore how alternative students are a population that needs advocacy and support. Instead, he related, schools did not provide spaces any for that advocacy and support, thus creating a back and forth of students coming and going from mainstream instruction to alternative.
On the other hand, Mr. S saw alternative spaces as a mentality. Once instructed to be tough on the students, as he saw himself as an authority figure.

I have to maintain this warden-type instruction. I even told them, I said look, now that you are in alternative, I have here to give you a lesson to what is going to feel like when you finally go to the big house. This is going to be a little taste. When you have some of your rights taken away because of the consequences that we have to be expecting when we are doing something we are not supposed to be doing so, coming in here, I am not your friend.

Mr. S explicitly stated that he was no friend to students. His classroom functioned as a warden-type instructions where he was going to make sure students did not go to the “big house.” In this case, this meant prison (Turner, 2015). His mentality was one where he compared himself to being a warden in prisons, and alternative students are the convicts. Like Mr. K, Mr. S observed his alternative classrooms as a microcosm for bigger spaces, implying that alternative students, if they could not go back to mainstream instruction, prison awaited them. In their view, the student is isolated with their behavior, if they misbehave, it is because they have personally failed (Harvey, 2005). Instead of examining what are the mechanisms or structural foundations the produce alternative students.

Metaphoric analogies to how the participants saw their spaces is also interrelated to how some viewed themselves. In this next subtheme, because participants understood that alternative classrooms were prison-like spaces within schools, they were there not necessarily to teach, but to hold a position of power that delineated what their role is. It is an onset of introspection in how many participants saw their role in relation to students. The conceptualization of their role is
tied to how they viewed alternative classrooms—small jails or prisons that work similarly to jails or prisons in society. This coupled with how they viewed alternative students.

**Gatekeepers, Mentors and Babysitters**

This subsection analyses how participants reflected on their role as enforcers, and Disciplinarians—essentially how they see themselves in alternative classrooms. Their role as enforcers is one of authority that provides gateways for students to leave or remain in alternative class. In the following data, they view themselves through metaphoric personifications (Mayr & Manchin, 2012). In this subsection, I pinpoint how, Coach C, Mr. R, Officer F, Mr. X, Mr. S, and Mr. White, they analogize their role as teachers, campus patrols, administrators, or officer symbolically to what their role is in fact like in alternative classrooms or in being disciplinary enforcers (Curran, 2016). The following excerpt examines how Coach C, alternative teacher from Jameson High School saw his role in alternative.

I tell them, “You know what, (to students) I am your gatekeeper and at the end of the end, if you and me are not ok, most likely you are not getting out of here.” So, I give them three things that are school – its attendance, its discipline, and its the grades. In order to do those three, and may have a review and maybe get out a little bit earlier, depending if they do get a review or not. If you have those three, I’ll have no problem releasing them, I’ll be the first one to tell them. Because I know releasing them, and somebody else comes in.

Here, Coach C, metaphorically substituted his role as teacher, as one of “gatekeeper”. He dissected what he looked for in a student in order for him to help with their “appeal” process. At a meeting, he told me that administrators had to assess whether a student was ready to return to
mainstream instruction, like a prison (Noguera, 2009). Further, once again, Coach C, as other participants have already, spoke of this revolver recidivist aspect of disciplining, “because I know releasing them, and somebody else comes in.” Indicating that he is counting on more students being assigned to alternative.

This gatekeeping that some participants felt as, indicated a power role, either as an authority figure, that dealt with student placements, assessments, or counseling students, to help them understand that their ways will help end up in jail or prison in the long run (Wald & Losen, 2003). In the following excerpt, Mr. R, an administrator, displayed himself and Coach N with compliments. “If prisons had a warden that was like you and me, and Coach N, I think you could really habilitate a lot of those people in there,” here, Mr. R continued about alternative and how students of color, in particular Black and Brown youth. He juxtaposed alternative classrooms and prison as similar institutions that worked with vulnerable populations. What’s more, he symbolically characterized himself as a mentor to Coach N, given the fact that we worked under him. That role would of “warden,” a metaphor that connected jails and prisons to alternative, alike Mr. S in his “warden-like instruction.”

As an enforcer with experience in actual prisons, Officer F, who worked with for approximately six years as an SRO in an alternative school called Alamo (pseudonym). Officer F considered himself a “mentor” to the students.

Well, you are there as a mentor, you know, you are not just there to arrest them, you know mentor them, and talk to them. But if the time comes when you got to stop them.

You got to stop them. No matter what.

Officer F characterized himself as a mentor to students while being an SRO for the
Alamo alternative school back in the 2000s. He believed his role was related to arresting students “you are not just there to arrest them,” since he was at the alternative school. It shows an emblematic characteristic as to what SROs are in schools for. Officer F disseminated how arresting students if needed was instrumental to his role. He would walk the hallways of the school as part of his daily routine. However, he would not let this role be encapsulated to being a branch of the legal system in schooling (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008; Geronimo, 2010). Oftentimes, he would check who entered the school. He was always cautious of parents, he recounted how he stopped a parent of a student that was under the influence. This person entered the school and asked to see his son since it seemed he did not have custody of the student. Officer F noticed his bloodshot eyes and slurred speech. He warned the parent that he could not be coming “high” to school to check on his son. Officer F did not arrest the parent out of respect for his son. He confided in me, he was furious and wanted to take him down. Still, he was composed since that parent was not disorderly. This instance, Officer F told me, among other things, served as an impetus to talk to the students.

You got to think about where these kids come from, these are drug addicts, prison, jail, what example do they have? They have us, but they don’t see us as their parents, you know. I think that’s what is so hard, all he knows is drugs and jail, it was pretty hard.

His mentorship characterization depended on how he viewed alternative students. He substituted himself with a father figure/mentor persona that would talk to students daily. He continued to embody this “mentor” persona till I met him in 2015. Only he did it as a campus patrol. Valencia (2010) attests that the fabric of deficit perspectives among students that fit a minoritized or subaltern community in schooling deals with established structural norms that have taken generations in the making where students are framed within a series of identities not
akin to what the “ideal” student should be. These inequities can be social, classist, or even racial, where the individual is viewed as the origin of academic failure, instead of the structures in place both in educational institutions and society. The student in essence is discursively isolated (Dunning-Lozano, 2018). That is how these participants see their students. They are misrecognized as being academic failures from familial homes that are hindrances to society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Other participants saw their official role as one of, “babysitting”. In them, all expressed frustration in how their roles compromised their capacities to keeping students working and obedient (Foucault, 1977). One of the first questions I asked every participant was whether they received any training or professional development to prepare them to alternative prior to their appointments. Mr. X responded:

No, no. I saw it, complaining of this kid. They sent me to this defense training. And other than that. I got to tell you. I can see why some coaches or some lazy teachers would want those assignments because I was not beholden or anything. All I had to do was just be a babysitter.

Mr. X was sent to a defense training when he expressed his concerns over a student who wanted to physically assault him. School administration sent him to a defense training to help him defend himself in case that student assaulted him. I asked Mr. X if there were any other interventions on behalf of school administrators due to the apparent threat of that student to his physical well-being. His response was, “the training.” Additionally, Mr. X critiqued some coaches and teachers that wanted the alternative position since, according to him, only babysat students. This metaphor substitutes them as teachers with one that takes care of babies or
children. In this case, alternative students. Similarly, Mr. S classified his role as, “I am a very well-paid babysitter. I have to follow the stress-the mental acumen. This is pretty much were we are at, at this point.” Mr. S represented his role as one where he is making sure students misbehaved. He is not part teaching, or curriculum instruction whatsoever. He informed me, how him maintaining classroom management is a navigating through privileges given to students if they behave or taking them away if they did not follow his structure.

On the other hand, Mr. White interpreted his role metaphorically like Mr. X and Mr. S. However, I asked Mr. White what the usual qualifications for alternative teachers were, including a certification of any sort. His response was:

I would think that would be they might have been chosen for that. Someone who is used to doing lessons and curriculum, etc. I would have being an alternative teacher, because to me, it’s just babysitting. I would, hopefully, I would, altruistically, I am going to set goals for each one of these kids and make sure they get all their work done.

Mr. White equally considered his role, unfortunately one as “babysitting”. He explained that there is no certification needed to be in an alternative classroom. His role, he expressed disappointingly, was one of where students get their work from other teachers, sit down, and do their work. Discouraged, Mr. White opposed teachers who did not send work or check in on their students, which were substantial. Often, he alleged, some alternative students had teachers who would only see them once in a semester. He lamented:

There is no excuse for a teacher not to have a freaking lesson for your student in alternative. Then why is nobody from the fucking district office say, we do not accept that there is not going to be work for them to do. You should be accountable for that. If you are in alternative, and you are not giving students their work, your principal should
be saying to you, what’s the problem? Why aren’t you providing lessons to him, no one gives a shit.

Mr. White symbolized the school district through personification. Mayr & Manchin (2012) identified it as, “human qualities or abilities are assigned to abstractions or inanimate objects” (p. 171). Mr. White personified the “fucking district office” as an entity that in his words, had not reached out to faculty in making sure they check on their students when they are in an alternative classroom. Further, he objected to teachers who did not check in with alternative students and provide them work in alternative classrooms. This, in turn, Mr. White attested were students being left behind. He classified the Academy as the, “we are the red headed stepchild of the district. It’s like, we don’t really get a lot of—the last superintendent visited once, and he happened to visit when school was out.” Here, Mr. White spoke of how they received one visit from the district office, and that was the superintendent after school hours. He personified the Academy as the “red headed stepchild” meaning the illegitimate child of a family (Clifford, 2007). This meant that for Mr. White, the alternative school in the Borderlands district meant they were the outcast institution that housed students that no one advocated for, in a way, the forgotten students.

Geronimo (2010) spoke of the systemic marginalization of poor and minoritized students in alternative education programs. The scholar featured how via institutional application of punitive measures that isolate so-called at-risk youth, this results in segregating students from the entire schooling community which can have serious repercussions for them. Such as more interchangeable—hands-on experiences with the legal system from their early years in middle school or high school. Geronimo identified disciplinary alternative students as an underclass (p. 439) in the educational system.
Such marginalization is built around how alternative classrooms are understood and the role the participants shared with me is one where power hierarchies are normalized through a set of ideologies and perspectives that inform how they view disciplinary classrooms (Geronimo, 2010). The participants classified alternative classrooms metaphorically as jails or prisons (Miller, 2020; Dunning-Lozano, 2018; Valencia, 2010). They would refer to alternative students circulating back and forth between mainstream instruction and alternative. They accentuated how alternative are microcosms, or smaller versions of jail or prison in schooling. Likewise, with Foucault’s (1977) second disciplinary technology, the participants normalize their judgments of where students are and should be excluded, marginalized, and normatively labeled within the alternative classroom/school. Their normalized judgment regarding students converges on how they the space they share as so-called “at-risk” youth (Smith, 2015) comes mechanically with them being alternative students in alternative classrooms. Meaning they are interdependent. What is more, Simmons (2005) termed “Prison Schools” to “the presence of the carceral” in a discipline culture embedded into schools (p. 90). The scholar dissected how exclusionary education is one that feeds into a reciprocal relationship between how schools’ discipline and the criminal justice system have interlocked since the Zero-Tolerance policies of the 1990s. Therefore, alternative spaces are explicitly identified by most participants as spaces of punishment, where if a student does not conform to what an alternative student should be, there is a recidivist door structurally and institutionally operating as they return from mainstream instruction repeatedly (Simmons, 2019). Further, Simmons identified discourse surrounding alternative students as one where delineations of prisoners were identified for so-called at-risk students (Simmons, 2019). This is a clear example of symbolic power (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) one where it, “manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by
concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to those power relations” (p. 4). In this section, there are two fronts that are quintessential in the data from this section where *symbolic power* is at the forefront; that is where participants identify alternative disciplinary spaces, where students are on a repetitive disciplinary cycle from which alternative students navigate in, analogous to prison and recidivism in prison. Students were referred to as soon-to-be in members of a carceral system within schools, or they would graduate to more punitive exclusionary displacements in schooling, or had already been there (Simmons, 2019). Next, how participants saw themselves, as gatekeepers, wardens, mentors, or babysitters. An authoritative figure where these metaphors are identified by the participants as such where they exercise disciplinary power---hierarchical meant to minimize misbehavior, or in the case of babysitting, guarding students in exclusionary classrooms (Brdar & Brdar-Savo, 2020). This can create a subaltern class of students within schools (Apple, 2006; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). It frames a set of perspectives where enforcers, in this case, teachers, campus patrols, administrators, and SROs make symbolic comparisons to jails or prisons, which in turn can shape how they view students themselves. Which is what I explore in the next section.

**Summary**

In this section, I talked about alternative classrooms and programs as disciplinary spaces that are identified and metaphorically analogized by participants as microcosms of jails or prisons, or spaces of punishment (Simmons, 2005; 2019). The section was divided between how participants understood the spaces while also some participants characterized their role within these disciplinary spaces which as enforcers aligned with *symbolic power* (Bourdieu, 1990) as gatekeepers, wardens, mentors that were there to “correct” students, or babysitters. It was pivotal for me to note that I needed to understand how participants understood who they are. How they
are characterizing them, and why. In the next section, I dive into how the participants described alternative students.

**The Broken Alternative Student**

In this section, alternative students are further conceptualized. Officially, alternative programs/classrooms are constructed to serve as disciplinary spaces where students are housed because of either the discretionary, or mandatory infractions (Aaron, 2006; Fabelo et al., 2011; Nance, 2015). In this section, I asked them, how did they see, describe, or who is the alternative student. I analyzed excerpts from Mr. Lambo, Coach C, Mr. K, Officer F, Mr. R, Coach V and Jose Juan. For this, the participant responses circled around labels that overlap with greater overtures in society, on that is usually reserved for prisoners (Curran, 2016; Fernandez, Kirshner, & Lewis, 2016) that is the “lost, poor or low-income, single-parent, or failure” alternative student. How enforcers view their students is fundamental in order since it can serve as their impetus to the role alternative serves in schooling (Dunning-Lozano, 2018; Simmons, 2019).

Power relations according to the participants, are linked to how students are disciplined daily, through a set of routines and structures, along with how they identify alternative classrooms, which are one that symbolized prisons in schooling (Simmons, 2019). I considered it vital to ask participants how they viewed alternative students. During the interviews, I made this follow-up question since the participants were analogizing alternative classrooms to carceral spaces (Selman, 2017; Simmons, 2005). I noticed it was crucial I asked how the participants defined them. In this case, “their identity is defined through a given society or institution normal differentiates between classes of people” (Simpson, Mayr & Statham, 2018). That is to say, the students are classified as fitting a set of reduced to a series of features, exclusively defined by what it means to be an alternative student.
In the following excerpt, I asked Mr. Lambo how he characterized alternative students. Working in two alternative schools, his experience is substantial with more than thirty years in education along with more than twenty in different forms of alternative education.

They’ve been pretty much failures all their lives. Absenteeism is high right, they are from dysfunctional families, most of them are from single-mom families. I don’t know if the parents are even working, they have low-income jobs. These kids are watching their mom bust their butt on, I don’t want to do that you know. They have low self-esteem. Don’t have much success in their lives.

Here, Mr. Lambo classified the alternative student as, “failures, coming from single-parent dysfunctional families, with low self-esteem and from a low-income stratum.” Mr. Lambo connotes a *symbolic* student who is a failure who comes from a lower working-class status and an *incomplete* family (Valencia, 2010). This fits the stereotypical and largely criticized *Culture of Poverty* (Lewis, 1966) where lower-income, or denominated at the time, *poor classes* tend to adapt, iterate, and incarnate a set/practice/culture of low expectations, attitudes, learned behavior, or aspirations where they assimilate their being *poor* (Gorski, 2008). This theoretical approach to poverty has been widely scrutinized and discredited, since it often serves as fuel that fills in how educators stereotypically poor, marginalized, and often minoritized students (Bomer et al., 2008; Foley, 2012; Gorski, 2008; Lundy, 2003). Further, it gained momentum due to the perpetuation of standardized curricula/linked to standardized testing since the early 2000s, with NCLB, schools kept homogenizing lower-income, marginalized, minoritized student experience as one that needs “fixing” or “improvement” (Au, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Massey & Fischer, 2000; Rogalsky, 2009). The participants buy into these stereotypes, where students need “fixing” otherwise they will end up in the legal system (Dunning-Lozano, 2015; Selman, 2017). Mr.
Lambo preaches these stereotypes by encapsulating who alternative students are, including where they come from. Relatedly, Coach C with more than fifteen years of alternative experience classified alternative students as:

A good majority, a lot of them, don’t have a very good foundation in their homes. A lot of them come from single-parent families. I am not saying all of them. (Pause) I am saying a lot of them. They don’t have any guidance at all. If you combine all those things. They are more prone to be out there in the streets.

In this excerpt, Coach C classified alternative students by once again classifying them as belonging to the lower social strata, struggling familial backgrounds, with no guidance in their lives. Van Dijk (2008) alluded this representation as giving a guise of “objectivity” loaded with ideologies that are misguided as there are no questioning any structural oppressions that produce inequity in society (Foley, 2002; Valencia, 2010). These ideologies misrepresent disciplinary students, as it tends to ignore the structures that reproduce how disciplinary students are produced, instead, they are conceptualized through a deficit ideology/perspective (Foley, 2012; Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016; Rios, 2011; Valencia, 2010). Coach C talked about alternative students not having “good foundation” at home, from single parents, then stated, “I am not saying all of them.” While pausing for at least a second before continuing, “I am saying a lot of them.” These abstractions hint at a supposed reality where Coach C correlates students with no foundations that end up in the streets. He ideologically framed students as societal hindrances that can end up as being some form of burden to society since they lack guidance at all (Kupchik & Monahan, 2006). Along with this, these social hindrances are conveyed through how the participants saw alternative students if they continued down a disciplinary path, or if they did not behave to get out of the alternative classroom/program. As was how Mr. K, a former
marketer, encapsulated alternative students, through a set of features that makes them well versed in both schooling and in the legal system:

Socioeconomics, they come from broken homes. A kid used to say, “I go home, I open the refrigerator, there is no food in there.” Don’t you get food stamps, “oh yeah, ask my mom what she does with them. Or I sometimes don’t want to say much, oh you are going to call social services on me, and they are going to come and put me in a foster home.” Those kids have been around the system and what happens when they become 18 and they do criminal—they’ve been around, they know the system, they’ve been in the back of a police car.

Here, Mr. K criminalized alternative students. For him, alternative students coming from broken homes, meaning from a lower-economic status once again. Inferring that students do not have food at home since their mothers commit fraud with the food stamps they receive. The features Mr. K referred to identifying an alternative student were, “broken, low-socioeconomic status, and from a single parent home”. He continued, “they have had handcuffs; they are not afraid of handcuffs because it is not their first time. They are not afraid of none of that. I think that we are using resources in the wrong places, we are building jails” Conversely, Mr. K noted how alternative students had experience in the legal system, not being afraid of a key element of enforcement in the legal system; that is, handcuffs. The criminal-alternative student (Dunning-Lozano, 2015; 2018) is once again exemplified by how Mr. K conceptualized the alternative student. A student who comes from a broken, single-parent home, with experience in the legal system (Simmons, 2019). Officer F, analogously, referred to the alternative student in the same vein:
To me, they really come from a single-parent family. On the poor side of the income bracket. I think they want to belong to something or somebody, I think that’s why they start hanging out with the wrong crowd. End up, you know, alternative kids, and some of them just don’t want to be in school, they just want to go to work.

Officer F, a former SRO, and campus patrol, saw students through the “single parent family” and “poor side of the income bracket”. He classified alternative students as belonging in the workforce, and not in school. He clarified that some students “want to go to work” something he built on, when he mentioned that school was not for everyone, (referring to alternative students) and they should be given the opportunity to work instead. This classifications through socio-economic status, links disciplinary students to the workforce. Kupchik and Monahan (2006) criticized the expansion of police presence in schools. One that has helped create a dominion of social control (among other resources from metal detectors, security cameras, electronic tracking to name some) cementing pervasive student disciplinary surveillance in charge of normalizing these conditions to a hierarchical system designed to cater to market ideologies that aim to produce generations of abled bodies. This is to deal with the constant market changes and needs in what they framed a “post-industrial life” (p. 621). The post-industrial life, according to Kupchik and Monahan, expands on avoiding of capitalist economic collapses through ‘flexible accumulation’ one where the market targets a diversified variety of services instead of solely ‘manufacturing products’ (pp. 620-622). This shift to services brace for “low-wage service sector jobs become concentrated around sited materialities—or ‘global cities’—of the information economy” (p. 620 citing Sassen, 1991). This in turn produces inequality:
Some of these practices include labor outsourcing, just-in-time production, decentralization, computerized automation, and temporary employment. The social and environmental costs of these changes are then externalized, contributing to the decline of the welfare state, the neutering of organized labor, the fueling of uneven international development, the advancement of environmental pollution and degradation, and, arguably, the rise of mass incarceration (p. 620).

Kupchik and Monahan argue that the spillover of mass incarceration reached schools via disciplinary surveillance (Criminal Justice Reform, 2019). Further, “adoption of market logics that harmonize public education with the needs of a post-industrial marketplace characterized by the rise of high-tech industry and the adoption of technological solutions to complex social problems” (p. 625). In this case, Officer F, instead of reflecting on structural policies, systems, bias, discourse that surrounds these students, or the vicissitudes they often face daily (Vaught, 2017; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). He gave a logical, simple solution to disciplinary students that did not like school; that is work. A market logic (Harvey, 1990) that surpasses how disciplinary education often produces disciplinary students (Kupchick & Monahan, 2006; Rios, 2011). Instead of offering support, resources, policy changes, or structural changes, alternative students, according to Officer F, have a choice. That is to follow a job. To individualize the student experience, separate from institutions, societal or discursive practices (Fairclough, 1989) that embody or create a disciplinary classroom. A finger is pointed at what the student should do, as an alienated social actor.

Alternative students as alienated social actors are how in this following excerpt, Mr. R, an administrator whom I worked for, epitomized the alternative student:
One of the things that is a downer for alternative programs. It is made for the other kids, like the immigrants, the problem kids, the slow learners, the uninterested, with the sad demographics, the low achievers, underachievers, etc. It is made for those kids. Those are the kids that really lack, lack, the, not only peer support but professional support. They lack being included, they lack the attention, and the spotlight being given because they are the other kids. They are the gangbangers, the immigrants, the migrant kids, the kids that struggle with the English language, the ESL programs, the special ed programs and the 504 programs. They don’t have the ability to have the focus and the attention, cause they don’t fit in. They are not diversified, or multicultural, their parents are locked up in quinta (jail), divorce rate, the parents are not married. Menial jobs, blue collar jobs, or no jobs at all, welfare. Etc., etc. They are with their grandparents. They are not like me, my dad is putting up the credit card, I am going to a private school.

Mr. R, as mentioned, worked in Rovers and Rangers high schools. In this classification of alternative students, he exemplified to whom the alternative classroom is made for--where the alternative student is anyone that does not fit in mainstream education. His description is a culmination of a subaltern class that is the symbolic disciplinary student (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). One that is the underperforming, low-income, otherized student that is homogenous as Mr. R reflected, “they are not diversified, or multicultural.” Here, Mr. R homogenized alternative students (Herr & Anderson, 2003). He framed them as those with dysfunctional families, with locked up parents, or working “blue collar jobs, or no jobs at all, welfare” he highlighted alike classifications that frame their representation as one with limited features where they are identified as disciplinary underclasses in schooling (Blumenson & Nilsen, 2002). He coined them as the “problem kids, immigrant, slow learners” any student that is deemed a so-called
burden to the system, stereotyping their role in schools (James 2012; Simmons, 2005). Further, Mr. R contrasted his own experience when he detailed, “they are not like me, my dad is putting up the credit card, I am going to a private school.” Growing up during his formative years in Kansas, coming from a military family, his father understood, according to him, that discrimination was pervasive:

   During the time when I was in Arkansas in Fort Smith. Young officers would not salute him because he was Black. He would make them salute. Soldiers you will lock your f-ing heels and salute. It was salute a huevó (metaphorical colloquialism in Spanish meaning, forcefully) (Grande, 2007). That was like ‘69, ‘68. My dad raised me to be diversified and multicultural. The need to be in control in my life and be successful.

   His upbringing was marred with racial instances that gave him a life philosophy where he felt empowered in being, “diversified and multicultural” meaning he was knowledgeable, and equipped with agency to be in control of his life. This is in sharp contrast to alternative students. To Mr. R these students are not like him, they have a parent in jail, divorced or working, “menial jobs”. What’s more, Mr. R spoke of his privilege where his father financially supported his private schooling. A sign of class and privilege. These classist ideologies focused on these students were not, “getting help” from alternative classrooms, or schools. He accentuated how alternative students lacked that identity—a diversity and multicultural one.

   Coach V and Jose Juan contrastively noted how the alternative student is one who either lost or getting in trouble. For instance, Coach V echoed, “they are lost a little bit. They just need to be redirected. Once they are in here, never to return. As soon as they are in here, they don’t want to come back to this place.” Here, Coach V focused on ensuring students that were “lost a little bit” would not return to alternative. Implying that it was a space for correction only (Turner,
Further, Jose Juan saw alternative students as mentioned as needing punishment. However, when asked about who the alternative student is, his reply was, “es un estudiante que no esta aprendiendo nada en clase. Es un estudiante que dentro mismo de alternativo, siguen metiéndose en problemas. Porque ellos creen que no va a ver consecuencias. It is a student that is not learning anything in class. A student that even in alternative, they keep getting in trouble. Because they believe they’ll receive no consequences (for their actions). Jose Juan assumes that alternative students do not understand the weight of their choices and they are not learning in class. A subaltern class that needs punishment (Buras & Apple, 2013).

Here the participants classified alternative students as the symbolic subaltern student in schools (Apple, 2006). He prompted the lack of “help” these students lack, while also making a point of underlining his own experience, juxtaposed to them in how they are different from them, lacking control of their lives, or to be “successful”. This symbolic violence is invisible (Bourdieu, 1977). In it, the participants normatively view alternative students punitively, as broken social actors that are constantly reproduced in classrooms thanks to structural classrooms in place equipped to house so-called at-risk students (Dunning-Lozano, 2015; Cortez & Cortez, 2009). Through misrecognition, (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) alternative enforcers reproduced how they viewed alternative students in their experiences. Their internalization was framed towards isolating these “broken” social actors due to their social location, speculation about their family structures, along with them “failures, broken, problems, with parents in jail, did not like school, or were experienced in the legal system” the participants normalized their self-evident interpretations which produces inherent ideological symbolic violence in how the participants as enforcers see the students they interact with daily (Bourdieu, 2001). For Bourdieu, domination is socially reproduced through symbolically largely through discourse in different forms (Bourdieu,
1984), here, through their experiential and interpretive lens, participants consider alternative students deficiently, with no agency, or in need of fixing (Selman, 2017; Simmons, 2019).

**Summary**

In this section, I dove into how the participants see alternative students. In it, the participants encapsulated their views by classifying students as broken, failures, or low-income social actors who come from dysfunctional or single-parent families. Stereotypes are largely perpetuated for students who are denominated as “at-risk” (James, 2012). Relating it to symbolic violence, (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) the participants normatively misrecognized who the students are in favor of more deficit perspectives that spill over criminality for the sake of their implicitly invisible ideologies that permeate in their disciplinary experience as enforcers. The participants have bought into the stereotypical debunked narratives or the *Culture of Poverty* (Lewis, 1966) confining a student to their social location, while explaining why they are alternative students to begin with (Bomer et al., 2008; Gorski, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

In the next section, I identify the main social identity that embody enforcers—coaches.

**Coaches, Self-Revered Enforcers?**

In this section, I dove into coaches as enforcers. I analyzed excerpts from Coach C, Coach J, Coach H, Coach N, Mr. R, Ms. M, Jose Juan, and Mr. White. This was not part of the official interview protocol; I initially had no intention of examining coaches at all. Until it would come up with several participants naturally within the course of our conversations. It made me reflect on my own experience as an enforcer. Since I first began working as a substitute in New Mexico in 2009 I noticed coaches were hired to oversee alternative classrooms. I saw this at the time in at least two high schools, and two middle schools when I worked at Desert ISD. When I went to the Borderlands district, this was not an exception. In almost every alternative classroom
I subbed for, or with, apart from the permanent positions I took on later, there was a coach in charge of alternative. It was no surprise that most of the participants were coaches at one time—Mr. X, Mr. White, Mr. Lambo, Coach N (one of two administrators interviewed, who was a former alternative teacher), or continued being coaches, Coach C, Coach J, Coach V, Coach H. Most alternative teachers I interviewed, except for Mr. S, or Mr. K (who was a substitute) were or are coaches to this day. While I was talking to teachers who would want to be part of this study, I reached out to at least five more coaches in the Borderland district and in others when I noticed that many alternative teachers, and often some administrators were/are coaches.

Coaching is an integral part of the educational system in the United States (Parker & Curtner-Smith, 2012). They embody Americanism—a symbolic traction that builds a milieu of meritocratic normalization and achievement across educational institutions not only in K-12, but in higher education (Halterman, 2019). In K-12, they serve as P.E teachers or coaching different sports that represent a sense of identity and pride of that institution (Adams, Anderson, & McCormack, 2010). For this study, it was easy to find out who alternative teachers were in the borderland because the staff directories included athletics, or alternative and alternative combo, or combination. Most of my experience when I subbed or got hired as the “alternative” guy was with coaches or other substitute teachers.

In the borderland, many coaches are alternative teachers since their positions come with coaching. Usually, a coach spends half a day in an alternative setting, then in the afternoons go on to teach, football (as was the case of Coach C, H, J, V). In my experience, I oversaw ISS, alternative in the afternoon, because I worked with a basketball coach, the brother of the coach who now oversees alternative in the mornings, while taking her responsibilities in volleyball every afternoon. I worked with coaches at the middle school level, high school level, or even
coaches in behavioral special education classes or BIC. Coach J, for instance, worked with an English teacher, also a golf coach back in 2012, he had 1-2 free periods (class periods, usually an hour long) in the morning, which is why he was assigned to alternative. Coaches are placed pervasively in the Borderland district, at least. This was also the case when I first began in education more than fourteen years ago, back in 2009, I was subbing in the Desert district when I was assigned to my first alternative classroom. And yes, two coaches oversaw that. I found out through other teachers and staff directories in different high schools that this was also the case in many schools across the borderland. Coaches are enforcers, even though I did not include this in the questionnaires, it did come up with many coaches/participants addressing why are they hired to alternative classrooms.

Their rationalization as to why they are overwhelmingly assigned to alternative classrooms centered around a presence, signified with respect that students could connect with that other stakeholders could not. The coaching participants saw their approach to disciplining students as one that is paternal (Steinfeldt et al., 2011). They embody a symbolic role in education. The section is divided among those coaches who see themselves in this manner, and those participants who see coaches from an outsider's lens—examples from Ms. M, Mr. R, and Mr. White. I further asked why in their perspective was this the case since alternative teachers or enforcers are overwhelmingly coaches. For Coach C, coaching is integral to his role as an enforcer:

When you come in a room, people know you are there. You have a certain presence. I feel. And I am not just saying my alternative kids. When I walk and sometimes, I have to play a persona in a way. I am a nice guy man you know what I am saying. I love my job, and I love kids. I am a football coach, but how I am as a coach, in a way it’s the same, the
kids—I demand respect but I give respect—presence, assertiveness, confidence, need to know how to talk to the kids, and have that discipline, routine and structure, and have heart as well.

Here, Coach C saw himself as a coach and an alternative teacher, or enforcer. I further asked him, what he meant by heart, what did it mean to have heart. The Coach elaborated:

Let me give you an example, this kid was dealing dope because his mom had lost her job, and she was a single-parent family. So, he is underage, so he felt that the easiest way to help her mom was to do that. But obviously this was the wrong way to do that. That’s what I am telling you, some of these kids, living in low socioeconomic families, sometimes is a big reason to why they do certain things. He got caught here and got placed in alternative. So, I basically told him, your heart is in the right place, but it’s not necessarily the right thing to do. You could have helped out your mom in different ways. Your job is to come to school and be successful.

Coach C’s example dealt with a student who was caught dealing drugs. As punishment, he was assigned to alternative since his mom was having trouble making ends meet, and the student wanted to help her family. Coach C empathized with the student, “your heart is in the right place” he asserted, “your job is to come to school and be successful.” When I asked another follow-up question regarding how the student could help the mother, his attention resorted to having a “solid home environment”. Coach C once again isolated the student’s experience to their own home circumstances or familial failures (Valencia, 2012). Pointing fingers to where they come from while dismissing structural needs including changes to empower or support alternative students or disrupt the school-to-prison nexus (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Fernandez, Kirshner & Lewis, 2016; Pearman, 2023). In this case, that student was trying to help
the mother according to Coach C, he also assumed that the easiest way to earn money was dealing drugs, a big leap into speculation, since youths risk their well-being to be a part of a drug-marketed network (Fast et al., 2010; Henning, 2021; Shetgiri et al., 2009; Rios, 2017).

Unfortunately, we do not have evidence for a complete context of what the student’s life and his experiences were. What’s more, for Coach C, having a heart meant sympathizing with the hardships some alternative students go through, yet not questioning the educational hierarchies he belongs to, thus permeating this overseeing, disciplinary technology of hierarchical observation (Foucault, 1977). Meaning, to oversee the students in alternative classrooms, judging their actions, to produce or mold them into becoming obedient (Selman, 2017).

Concordantly, for Coach J, him understanding his role through a self-embodied identity representing standing out from other in schooling, and as a presence that equals respect.

**Coach J**: Most of kids look at coaches a different way. We are, I mean, most of us, not to say all of us, are elective teachers, you still got your CORE (math, science, reading, and writing) teachers, but for the primary, we are predominantly elective teachers, and a lot of kids, like the elective classes. You know, you teach health, you teach art, you teach P.E, they want to play you know, you can have fun. Math, science, all that you got to do tests you know. There is, like when I was at Lorenzo high school Jair, kids would come to my health class, and it was the only class of the day they would show up. Literally (laughs) literally, and principles know that. We’ve been told for years you know, in-services, you elective teachers, you connect to kids way different than a lot of the other teachers do. A lot of kids, they want to be in your class, they don’t want to be in Algebra I.

**Jair**: And this has a lot to do with how you taught kids, how you—
Coach J: --right, plus, when a kid sees a football coach come in, they know, hey, it’s a football coach! You know, pretty much, I am not going to say that it always happens Jair but sometimes does a curse word come out of my mouth every now and then, sure it does. In fact, always, sure it has, from day one of my day of teaching. And they look at you different.

In this excerpt, I asked Coach J about his coaching identity that was overwhelmingly represented in disciplinary classrooms. He highlighted how “most” coaches taught elective classes, and with it, students had fun, contrasted to the CORE subjects or teachers that teach math, science, or reading. Coach J identified coaches, as a statistic where most of them stand out, are fun, and command authority, where students like to show up for their classes, instead of going to the CORE subjects like math or science. He explicated the veneer of being objective when he interpreted his role in the classrooms. This “fun” objectification centered on how students liked to go to his class and not other CORE classes. Added to this, referring to teaching, “when a kid sees a football coach come in, they know, hey, it’s a football coach!” This status he gave himself as a coach is one, he attested was reflected on students. He understood his role as one of authority and being known, by mentioning words like, “sees, does, come, look, been, know” to accentuate, “they know who you are” implying coaches hold seniority in schooling, as people recognize them, while also giving him certain privilege that other teachers may not have, which is cursing. Coach J admitted using “curse” words daily, and he could get away with it because he is a coach. For Coach J, this identity held water in how he enforced discipline in alternative classrooms throughout the years. His presence, as I remarked in previous sections, was to solely minimize disciplinary infractions, even if that meant having students sleep part or all day. For Coach H, as also a former alternative student, it is about identifying the hardships of
students, and having a unique connection in how, coaches “bring up the best in kids,” as the following excerpt pronounces:

> It is very simple. We have to bring up the best in kids. We are not in a situation where every kid is blessed with talent. I feel like my advantage is, I understand that every kid is individual, and a cookie-cutter format is not going to work. I also understand that not every kid learns the same. Just like when I am coaching a kid, I have to try to get the best part out of them. So a teacher, like my sister is a great example, she was very uhh, she didn’t start out as a teacher, she was a business major. She was very good in school, whereas I was a poor student, and so when she decided to go to education. She failed. She had to learn, she came to me, and asked, what did I do wrong? And I said, you are trying to teach kids the way you learned. That is just wrong, you have to understand that most kids struggle through school, they don’t want to be in school. You loved school, you gravitated towards school. That is not the majority of our kids. Plenty of our kids are going because they need a meal, and two they are trying to get with their friends.

In this excerpt, Coach H simplified his coaching identity as having to connect with students in ways other teachers do not, ergo his own sister, whom he exemplified, was a teacher who lacked meaningful connections with students. Coach H individualized the student’s experience (Kennedy-Lewis & Murphy, 2016) and with him being a coach he alluded he understood them by making analogies to coaching, “just like when I am coaching a kid, I have to try to get the best part out of them.” He contrasted his experience with his sister who is an educator, an academic, and fond of school. “That is not the majority of our kids.” He elaborated how his sister did not understand the students because of how different she was from them, and he did since he was a coach along with him being a former alternative student due to fighting. “I
say, look you screwed up, now what are you going to do about it.” He recognized how students go through great strides to overcome hardships, as he stated, like getting a meal for the day or socializing. Persistently, Coach H talked of how students need to “work themselves” out of an issue they have.

This is part of alienating their experiences as one of what Harvey (2005) terms *responsibilization*, coined as part of *neoliberal logics* where a person is responsibilized as the sole exclusive actions, including personal or social failures. Enclosing alternative students as those that do struggle, need to overcome barriers, need advocacy and support, yet cannot get it, still falls on *them* entirely to better themselves (Franzen, 2015; Selman, 2017; Nguyen, 2013). Coach H responsibilized (Selman, 2017) students in carrying their own weight, something he mentioned, tried to help with, and unfortunately, educators do not have the coaching or alternative experience he had.

Enclosing the coaching experience through how they see themselves is pivotal to how they view their students as well. Regarding Coach N, a former alternative teacher, now administrator, and assistant principal in a middle school on the Borderland, reflected on a stereotype that he contradicted. In this last excerpt, he reflected on supposed overarching placements of coaches throughout the state of Texas:

**Coach N:** It is like a stereotype or a prejudice, I don’t know what the words it, but they assume that coaches have a loud voice, because a coach with a loud voice is able to dictate what he needs to be done to all, this and that on the sideline, if they have that control over so many kids that they should be able to have that control over an alternative setting. That is typical of what you have seen in the past. I don’t know about recently, in a lot of, like mid-central, to east Texas schools a lot of the principals, a lot of the bosses,
the lead administrators are former coaches. Because they become established, oh this coach is awesome, he leads our program to here. Coach, whatever, and then they just retire from coaching and they just make them principal. It’s like, they can run a football program, they should be able to run a school. Kind of like the same, they could coach a football team, a basketball team, they should be able to run and maintain discipline, order, in a disciplinary classroom.

**Jair:** What is your reaction to that?

**Coach N:** It is a stereotype, but I guess in a way it is kind of true. Kind of true because, yeah, I mean they have the managerial skills to control that many kids and they also know how to build relationships. It is what it comes down to. Cause you get all kinds of kids over there, on the football field, the basketball field, the track, you get all kinds of personalities, so you got to be able to adapt to many of them. Be able to learn about your kids, who your kids are and just in the end have fun with them and make learning fun.

Coach N stereotyped coaches in his response with the following characteristics; “loud voice, dictate, control over so many kids (referring to sports).” Usually males, coaches around the state, Coach N inferred, were being assigned to administrative roles due to, “this coach is awesome…they can run a football program, they should be able to run a school.” Relating to alternative, “they coach a football team, a basketball team, they should be able to run and maintain discipline.” Coach N having more than ten years in alternative experience echoed how this stereotype has helped coaches statewide get administrative positions in schooling. Something I could not verify. However, he did speak of anecdotal experience in having family in east Texas and Mid-Texas where coaches were assigned to alternative and/or these roles. Moreover, he contradicted this stereotype by transitioning his tone of coaches being stereotyped
too, when asked about his reaction, “in a way it is kind of true.” Where coaches have the
“managerial skills to control” many students along with building relationships. Further, in how
they can manage different sports in schooling, is enough for them to manage an alternative
classroom, likewise, an entire school. According to Coach N, coaches distinctly have the skill or
talent to which he refers to how they approach students, manage them, control, and build
relationships under these two conditions (Harvey, 2005). A managerial standpoint to education
is one that closely aligns with neoliberal stances reigned by market ideologies surrounding a
banking form of education; where a teacher-centered classroom positions knowledge to
her/his/their agenda, and students receive that information in a top-down approach (Austin, 2015;
Freire, 1973). This undermining pedagogical, curricular, contextual, systemic, historical, critical
analysis and socio-cultural foundational premises that surround the educational experience
(Freire, 1973; Street, 1993; 2009; Optlaka*, 2004; Selman, 2017). According to Coach N, what
is needed to manage an alternative classroom are the coaching, managerial, and relational skills
coaches have, an account that is largely accepted, he suggested, anecdotally in different parts of
Texas. For them, their enforcement is interwoven to who they are as coaches. However, what is
paramount to point out is what is missing.

In the next three excerpts, these responses would also happen naturally. I focused on an
example of each of the enforcers, Mr. R, an administrator, Mr. White, a teacher, Ms. M and Jose
Juan, both campus patrols. In the only interview I had with an officer which was Officer F, he
chose not to talk about it. For Mr. R, initially he was hesitant in talking about it. Until his
response was more about stereotypes, like what Coach N alluded to:
Well, a lot of it deals with our teaching background, football, P.E, and the other thing is, the mentality of trying to use them because of their size. Keep the boys and girls down, intimidate them, and stuff like that.

Mr. R referred to coaches as overwhelmingly male, large in stature, and loud. His reasoning behind why many coaches are assigned to teach in alternative classrooms is related to a stereotypical identity that coaches have in schools. More importantly, he mentioned, “keep the boys and girls down, intimidate them, and stuff like that.” The intention according to Mr. R, has less to do with exceptional skills and more to do with intimidating alternative students. In a way, the function of alternative as previously stated is to scare off students so that they return to mainstream instruction and do not come back. Discourse is analogous to prison or the carceral system (Nolan, 2011; Sojoyner, 2016).

For Ms. M, and Jose Juan however, the dynamics as to their reaction to coaches being designated to alternative is much more practical. Ms. M detailed:

_Sabes porque, porque los periodos que son cero, los tienen los coaches. Ellos son los que están, sin salón ese día o que no tienen niños. Son los puros coaches que están metiendo ahí, porque no tienen niños. Son los que tienen que cuidar. Ahorita le dijeron a Ms. Rodriguez (pseudonym), dijo, ¿y porque yo? ¿Y le dijeron, tienes periodo? Dijo ella no, ah pos por eso. Ya me acorde porque, no tiene niños._

You know why, because of zero periods (hourly classes before the official school day schedule). The coaches have them. They are the ones that have no classrooms (at that time of day) and have no kids. It is only coaches that are being assigned there. Because they have no kids. They must take care of them (coaches taking care of students). When they told Ms. Rodriguez (the alternative coach at Rovers High School in charge of
alternative), she said, and why me? And they told her, do you have a period? She said no, and there you go, that is why, she has no kids.

Ms. M essentially told me that they were coaches were distinctly assigned to alternative due to their scheduling availability. They either have zero periods and alternative students usually come in during zero period at least at Rovers High School, therefore, they have a teacher on standby to monitor the students. Similarly, Jose Juan, when I asked him his reaction, his response was blunt, “porque tienen mucho tiempo libre. Because they have a lot of free time.” When I asked him, what made him think of that, his response was, “tienen muchos periodos libres. Because they have a lot of free periods.” Unfortunately, I could not verify their claims with official records.

In this last excerpt, Mr. White, a former coach has a distinct view on coaches and their designations to alternative:

Because they don’t want to bother him with something to grade. And there is not a P.E class available for him to teach, because some other coach has the P.E class. That person is chosen because the head football coach or head basketball coach wanted him as an assistant, he wasn’t qualified to teach chemistry of AP Social Studies, so where can we put him? Oh, alternative. I don’t—that’s just me guessing, there is no. Do you need a certificate, to be an alternative teacher? In other words, you can just have a general ed certificate. Probably yet to be certified to be a coach. Do you know if they are certified?

Mr. White assuming coaches, or the symbolic coach is male is placed in alternative classrooms where there is nowhere else to place them. He asked me if coaches need to be certified to be designated to alternative. I told him that they needed any certification whatsoever from the state. There is no special certification for alternative classrooms.
In retrospect, coaches viewed themselves as singular models of disciplining where enforcement and inspiration cross paths. They singularize their experience as coaches where they hold key skillful abstract attributes that help engage both alternative and mainstream students unequivocally which helps them hold a schooling status. And their sports analogies, or managerial functionalize how they discipline students effectively (Harvey, 2005). Their main focal point for discipline is to minimize disciplinary incidents. This misrecognition (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) normalizes their identity and posits their role above in a dissimilar step as other educators’ experiences, approaches, connections, or rapport with students. However, in turn for those participants where it did come up that were not coaches, at least not anymore in the case of Mr. White, it was a combination of either having free time. More research is needed in what I think is an important aspect of disciplining. I will discuss further in chapter 5.

Summary

In this chapter I analyzed how coaches reflected on why they are overwhelmingly assigned to alternative classrooms in their respective districts. In their responses, coaches self-revered their roles, whom they serve, and how they can manage, connect, or build relationships with students, due to their honorifical title and status in schools including alternative classrooms. This view misses an entire veil of educational conditions that are imperative in schools - cultural connections, professional careers, training, pedagogical, curricular, contextual, systemic, historical, critical analysis, and socio-cultural foundations that surround the educational experience (Freire, 1973; Street, 1993; Optlaka*, 2004; Selman, 2017). While for those participants that talked about coaches, it was clear to them, they either fit a stereotype, or simply had the scheduling time to be designated to alternative classrooms. In the last section, I explored the discretionary nature of disciplining, through the eyes of the participants.
Facultative Enforcement

In Texas, 70% of all placements in alternative are discretionary (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). This gives range to how school enforcers, be it school administrators, teachers, campus patrols, or SROs in how they interpret and enforce disciplining. As I have explored, the participants spoke of routine and structure while conceptualizing alternative classrooms as prisons within schools, students as broken, and coaches as the self-revered enforcers. In this last thematic section, the participants delineated their perspectives on the circumstantial nature of how students are placed in alternative, or not. Especially its overdependence on school administrative interpretive maneuvering of each circumstance that comes their way. Often referring to the circumstances of when something occurs, represented through actions limited, lacking vision, or narrow. Here, the participants versed instances where enforcements were materialized through the power administrators hierarchically hold, and their reaction to this. In the following data, I analyzed excerpts from Ms. S, Coach V, Coach J, Officer F, Coach N, and Mr. K. I note the importance of referrals, their use, lack of, or latitude in how they document disciplinary infractions, or not.

Referrals are the examination (Foucault, 1977) the third disciplinary technology that culminates in hierarchical observation and normalizing judgements, which partakes in making decisions as to who, and why students are placed in alternative. Referrals are contracted as the tool for disciplinary examination. It is the incontrovertible documentation that decides the future of a student in schooling, being sent to the alternative school, or even the Juvenile Justice Center in the Borderland.

For Mr. S, a middle school alternative teacher, former CBP officer, him following disciplinary guidelines from school was met with warnings from his assistant principal:
**Jair:** What happens if you give them a referral?

**Mr. S:** I tried that; they don’t want me to! Here I am thinking ok, I am coming over, making everybody follow the rules. The school back in order, top-notch middle school in Texas—yeah right. I got these kids acting up in my class. I am going to write them up, in Teams, referrals. One of my assistants (assistant principals)—he pulls me aside, “look, you got to lay off on the referrals man. We can’t take care of every single referral.” I said, “why do you want me to enforce, no hoodies, no ripped-up jeans.” Force them, wearing their pants down, if you are not going to anything, “well you got to understand,” and here we go in the politics—"the ones that are in control of admissions,” to Juvie (Juvenile Justice Center, “we only have so many beds available.” Then they start getting upset, we can’t send people for just stupid little reasons. Ok, well, “guess what guys, wear your hoodies, wear them in my class. Because they won’t enforce it.” You have teachers yell down the hall, “pull your pants up.” And they do and then do it again once they are out of there.

In this excerpt, Mr. S explicated how his enforcement is dependent on having slots (beds available) in alternative schools, or in more severe cases, the Juvenile Justice Center or Juvie. For Mr. S, his frustration circumvented how he could not enforce the school rules since his supervisory assistant principal approached him, asking them to not write so many referrals since there was more demand than there were punishments. Due to this, Mr. S, disciplining became pointless, “guess what guys, wear your hoodies, wear them in my class. Because we won’t enforce it.” This lack of enforcement for Mr. S came from school administrators. A lax approach to disciplining since they could only put so many students in alternative or send them to the alternative school. Further, this caused students to challenge teachers, including him, “what are
you going to do? Mr. S told me discipline in the middle school where he worked disciplinary enforcement was about mismanagement. I interviewed him on a Friday evening. He mentioned he received two new alternative students in the latter part of the day. The students showed up to alternative, came up on his door, and informed him they were alternative students. Without him knowing or being able to confirm whether they were assigned to alternative since no administrator reached out to him. He needed to wait till Monday to find out if they were assigned to alternative or not.

This disconnection is reverberated as well by Coach V when he reflected on alternative placements:

Placements in here that make no sense to me. I get to read what they are in here for (through referrals). That is what the leadership thinks (school administrators—assistant principals and principals), the consequence should be an alternative placement and we have to do pretty much what they tell us to do. Example, this happened a few years ago, this was a pair of students, male and a female and I guess there were boyfriend and girlfriend and I guess they were both in here because the female was sitting on the male’s lap, is that inappropriate to me? To put them in here. Like I said, a lot of people said that was inappropriate. Ten years ago, fifteen years ago, that would be something like Jesus, every other couple would do. Now, you know, it’s inappropriate. Of course, they were exited right away. They were pretty good students, they never had any issues regarding discipline. I always wonder, what exactly what does that constitute as being put in alternative?

Coach V attested to a disciplinary incident that made no sense to him, these students were what Coach V assumed were an intimate couple. One was sitting on the other and this was
enough to be referred and assigned to his alternative classroom. Coach V questioned what does it “constitute” being put in alternative after he conversed, “we have to do pretty much what they tell us to do” referring to school administrators. This hierarchical enforcement lies at the hands of assistant principals along with principals. While the students were placed in alternative, they were released back to mainstream instruction since they had no priors in alternative. Coach V questioned the legitimacy of the administration’s rationale since he is an enforcer who does what is needed to discipline students (Simmons, 2018; Turner, 2015; Weissman, 2014).

These decisions are discretionary; however, they are also circumstantial in the eyes of enforcement by school administrators. Whether policy is followed or not, there is a miscommunication with alternative enforcers on what constitutes justified alternative placements. That conversation is not happening.

In the following excerpt, Coach J further expressed his disconnection with how enforcement materializes with school administrators at the forefront of their flexible interpretations of discipline for students. Here, Coach J expressed his dissatisfaction in how each assistant principal has a set of guidelines that means they will discipline not even discretionarily, but of them being new to that position, in wanting to set a tone to disciplining students:

**Coach J:** We have an administrator right now and she’s fairly new and I haven’t had a chance to, it’s really not my job, that she feels that SAC is her answer. Because she is so new, and if a kid is in trouble, it’s automatic SAC, SAC, SAC. She is predominantly one of the four assistant principals that keeps me busy. It’s here, the other assistant principals find creative ways of discipline. “We are going to give you lunch detention for two days, after school detention for two days, we are going to come and get you in this period and
make you do that” well she’s new, I don’t know if she doesn’t want to, or that’s just her answer, she thinks that SAC is the answer but it’s not.”

**Jair:** It sounds like you are also saying, hey there is not one way to discipline right?

**Coach J:** Yes, yes, and eventually in passing, or when I get a chance, at the end of the school year eventually I’ll say, ma’am can I have a little word with you. I’ve been doing this a really long time, you know, take my advice for what you want, that is all it is. It’s just advice. That is not the answer. Sure, you put a kid in there because they did something, but if it’s for a minor offense. Like she put a kid in there three days the other day, because he told the teacher, “no I am going to give you my phone, I’ll just put it up in my backpack.” He put his phone up. A kid like that, you give him two days of lunch detention.

**Jair:** And the kid put it away?

**Coach J:** Yes! This is what gets me with her Jair, check this out ok, and you can use this or not this is just me rambling. We have kids that are truant from class, they are ditching, they are hiding, in the field house, they get caught. They get taken to the assistant principal. The assistant principal then, guess what she does for discipline? She assigned them three days for SAC. Ok, so this is what a kid came in, he goes, Mr. I don’t want to be in class, I got caught ditching and now this lady is giving me three days to be out of class. This is a reward (laughs)! I can be in here, get on my computer and still do all my work, and not have that teacher teach. Not have to listen people talk. So, the principal one day, he was all talking about instruction time, kids got to be on instruction time. I said Mr. Salazar (pseudonym), I got kids that caught ditching, then we give them three days of SAC? So, they can miss more instruction time? He goes, I know coach that’s always

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been, because of the Code of Conduct, yada, yada, I said, well can’t we find alternative ways?

In chronicling how their new assistant principal wanted to establish a disciplinary tone in Parks High School where Coach J worked; he alleged her response to disciplinary issues (whether they are infractions or not) was automatic SAC (a day or up to a week alternative classroom, often compared to ISS) placements. Coach J offered advice to that assistant principal for an incident where a student refused to give up their phone, instead putting it in their backpack. He later confided in me that she did not take his advice. That was enough for a SAC placement. Something Coach J protested vehemently. Consequently, the consequences of this new assistant principal ignoring Coach J’s advice was an admission from students where they would like to be assigned to SAC with Coach J since they could do their work and not be bothered by the noise, teachers, or other students. Due to this, Coach J later confronted his principal since students were caught ditching periodically. Coach J equally questioned the principal’s motives for placements in disciplinary classrooms. “I know coach, that’s always been, because of the Code of Conduct.” A continuation of the status quo which perpetually encloses hierarchical enforcement based on oftentimes, nothing. Selman (2017) argued that the latitude of which student conduct emerges on behalf of enforcers aims to polish students into docile beings, *responsibilized* for their actions, isolated due to their behavior, or in this case, misbehaviors to fragment their identities into being stigmatized (Pesta, 2018). I asked Coach J what happens after his discussions with school administrators, and his reply was, “it’s up to the assistant principal how they want to handle that disciplinary matter and what their course of actions is.”
This hierarchical enforcement that is bound to circumstantial feelings, tones, or perpetuating what Coach J denominated as “Schools of Conduct” often had larger repercussions, as was the case with Officer F. Throughout our interview, Coach F felt disappointed in what he termed, the “politics” of the job in how for instance, when being a police officer for the Borderland he was denied professional opportunities since he did not give in to that he called the “Quota” system. This meant that officers were unofficially pressured to have a certain amount of traffic tickets, parking tickets, and the likes. This would earn them, according to Officer F, status, better schedules (days off on the weekends, holidays, or day shifts) or climbing the law enforcement ladder to more lucrative opportunities (Bronstein, 2014). This seemed familiar to me, like what other law enforcement departments have seen across the country, in terms of cases of other forms of Quota systems which led to corruption investigations and charges against police officers in different parts of the country (Bronstein, 2014; Brown, 2006; Golab, 2005; Moskos, 2008). In schooling, one of his grievances remarked how students with White privilege (Bhopal, 2020) where their misbehavior was covered up or surpassed thanks to their family’s social standing in the Borderland district:

Of course, of course, (example) this kid came from a wealthy background, (parents were part of the school board) influence the school board. There was an incident at the, it was at the magnet. These kids were giving one of the teachers a hard time. It was so bad that the teacher left the classroom, they were giving her a hard time, did not want to do their assignments. One of the students there was the daughter of one of the school board members. I am telling you bro, nothing happened with any of those students. I wasn’t surprised. I talked to the teacher, she was upset, y estos chavos (and these kids) I knew
nothing was going to happen. The students were being assholes, but they were all gavachos (White) so nothing happened.

In this last excerpt, Officer F attested to a group of students when he was a campus patrol, (after retiring from law enforcement) that were misbehaving in a classroom to the point the teachers walked out of that class. However, when he took them to be disciplined, “nothing happened with any of those students.” Further, he alleged he knew nothing would happen since one of the student’s parents was part of the school board. This could not have happened without administrative consent. Yet it did. I further asked Officer F what would have happened if it had been a student of color, his reply was, “ahh pinche (ahh fucking), ISS, facil (easy).” This resonates to the how scholars have long termed the discipline gap in enforcement (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008) where students of color are disciplined harsher or for longer periods of time, be it in exclusionary education (such as alternative) or through suspensions or expulsions, than their white counterparts. Placements and referrals usually land on the power or influence of school administrators, here the participants reflected on the disconnection they often see with placements, referrals, to see not only discretionary enforcements, but facultative, bound to tone, reputation, appearances, status quo, and oftentimes feelings. Depending on the circumstances.

The implications of not only discretionary enforcement, but a facultative one that stems from disconnections, or nepotism can help explain what further aggravates the discipline and/or opportunity gaps (Carter & Welner, 2013; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Losen et al., 2015). Take for example, Coach N’s take on how policy can ultimately negatively impact students, in the following excerpt Coach N described an instance that impacted his professional career:
I remember to this day, I had a kid, he came in, freaking genius, smart, he came into alternative because he brought a screwdriver, they (school officials) considered it a weapon. I was like, why did you bring it? “I brought it cause my friend’s camera broke.” and I told him I was going to fix it. They gave him thirty days, and so, he ended up there thirty days, with a great relationship with this young man. Great kid, down the line, I don’t know, 5 months later, right before the end of the year. He ends up in alternative, I don’t even recall what happened. I remember, the parent called me. I still remember on July 7th; I remember that day. I got a phone call, the young man committed suicide. They wanted me to be a part of the funeral. “He loved you so much. I just wish my son would talk to you, before doing what he did, take his own life.” Damn, I sometimes wonder if I should give out my phone number.

In this tragic excerpt, Coach N built rapport with a student who was assigned to alternative for a month for bringing a screwdriver to help a friend. This was considered a weapon, according to Coach N. Later, the student committed suicide. I remember Coach N told me he thought about that student a lot. It meant a lot to him, that he could reach him. He questioned himself since teachers usually do not give their phone numbers to students due to security reasons at least where Coach N was located. Coach N questioned himself following protocol. However, he told me later, how could he have known?

Advocacy and support for alternative students is an uphill battle. Coach N struggled with his role as an teacher in alternative. Coupled with this, all participants noted that they struggled daily decisions that had to be made, whether they agreed with placements, tragic events unfolding, or empathizing with how alternative students struggled in their lives as well. In the case of Coach N, Especially when the student, even though did not bring a weapon to school, a
screwdriver was considered a weapon due to Zero-Tolerance policies (Martinez, 2009). They are met punitively, often contradictorily through disciplinary referrals, the discretion of school officials, and the consequences of alternative, all stacked on one another. Coach N continued; he juxtaposed that experience with another that almost cost him his job.

Coach N: I even had a kid one time, pushed me, and wanted to hit me. I was like, “you need to go back to class, don’t make me write you up.” He pushed me out of the doorway, and I hit my elbow and I was bleeding. He ended up telling mom a different story. One of the ones that wanted to get me fired, for putting her son in a—I was like, ahh, look I got the cut in my (pointed at his elbow), they (district officials intervened) investigated, and look, they asked all the other kids around, asked the kids, what you all see. “Nah this jerk did this (referring to the student), Coach N was just at the door, and this kid pushed him, and Coach N fell back, still I understand he is a kid, making a silly mistake. I still followed him to the track at the end of the track, then I left him, I got all the other kids waiting.

Jair: Did this student end up in alternative?

Coach N: matter of fact, this student, that caused him, because of the investigation, administration pursued further disciplinary action. It ended up going in front of a judge, and the judge told him, ok look, cause this kid was, he was already older he was like a freshman, but he was like sixteen, maybe seventeen, like, I don’t know it was a strange situation. The judge said, “you know what it is obvious you don’t take your education serious. You are old enough to where you can enroll at EPCC, I am giving you 30 days to enroll in EPCC, you will begin classes, you and your parents will pay for them. And you will no longer receive public education. You will pay for them, and if you don’t come
back and show me that you have enrolled, I will issue a warrant for your arrest and your parent’s arrest.”

Coach N maintained in this instance a student falsely accused him of assaulting him. When, according to him, it was the other way around. The student’s mother went to the central office and reported Coach N which prompted an investigation. What’s more, that student had a history of infractions and his experience in alternative was cut short due to this investigation, and Coach N’s vindication. It was in the legal system where a judge threatened arrest to both him and his parents if he did not enroll in school. This is an example of how school officials and the legal system determine the fate of alternative students (Dunning-Lozano, 2015; Martinez, 2009; Vaught, 2017). There is an educationally structural immersion fused with the legal system that simultaneously work synchronously in alternative classrooms (Geronimo, 2010). Once again, it is facultative in nature from the standpoint of enforcers.

In this last excerpt, Mr. K pinpointed the contradictory, often discriminatory nature of enforcement:

I had a kid who ended up in Juvie because a pizza guy went to deliver pizzas at school, and he left the car door open while he is carrying the pizzas. So, they (the students) picked up one of those bags and five, seven dollars apiece, they ended up in jail (for stealing). Depending on the offense. I do sometimes look at the offense and ask myself, “why was he sent here?” I’ve heard principals say, “why is he here? He doesn’t belong here” Oh yeah. It is because the school they came from they don’t want to deal with that. We had a kid who was mentally challenged, they send them to the alternative school because he was autistic. He couldn’t read or write.

Mr. K termed many instances questioning the rationale behind alternative placements
finalized by disciplinary referrals. While his first example was a group of students that stole pizzas to eat, he reflected on how he has seen JJAEP principals question the veracity of school officials in schools when they are confused as to why certain students get sent to the Academy. In one instance, he pronounced a discriminatory incident where a differently-abled student was sent to the Academy only because he was labeled as autistic and that student’s home school did not want to deal with them. In another instance, he said:

Another thing, this kid was sent to alternative school, in middle school because he refused to go to class, he always wanted to carry a basketball, a ball, he was not a bad kid. He was autistic, that’s all it was.

A differently abled student was sent to the Academy due to him wanting to carry his basketball in school. Mr. K expressed concern over the decisions of home schools sending them students who did not deserve to be assigned to alternative, especially to the Academy. This act of discrimination is not unfamiliar territory, in terms of the discipline gap, minoritized communities, including differently-abled students get disciplined and punished more than their White counterparts (Losen et al., 2015; Losen & Martinez, 2020; Skiba, Arredondo & Rausch, 2014; Tanner, 2020). When asked later about who makes these decisions, Mr. K, the ISS substitute teacher of the Academy was not sure, yet guessed it was school officials from the home schools.

**Summary**

In this last thematic section, I analyzed how the discretionary nature of disciplining provides a bare stepping stone to other more arbitrary circumstances where the participants dealt with what they saw as negligence of school administrators, their often contradictory, sensical actions that impacted them and students negatively due to disciplinary enforcement. The
participants shed light on what they considered contradictory practices of disciplining of school officials that hierarchically utilize referrals to performatively exercise disciplining power on alternative students (Foucault, 1977). This meant that circumstances taken by school officials were surrounded by bias, policy, the setting of the infraction, or even discrimination. Disciplining is not only discretionary (Booker & Mitchell, 2011), but this is also a loaded term. Behind that decision, there is a contextual arena where several enforcers come into play in determining alternative student placements, or even synchronizing legal power over students, as was the case in Coach N’s investigation against him. In the next chapter, I will talk about the limitations of the study, its implications, and further research.
Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings

In this final chapter, I discuss the findings, limitations, and implications of this study along with recommendations for further research. First, I begin by highlighting the findings of the study, along with implications juxtaposed with research in this field of study. Then I follow up with the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. Essentially this phenomenology study endeavored to understand how stakeholder enforcers—administrators, teachers/substitute teachers, campus patrols, and SROs in the U.S-Mexico border (Borderland) understand discipline, as I asked this question:

How do alternative stakeholders on the borderland experience, interpret, and understand the dynamics of disciplining, alternative classrooms/programs, and disciplinary exclusion?

To answer this question, I interviewed fifteen stakeholders—all alternative enforcers and used a convenience sample (Etikan et al., 2016) of these stakeholders for my study. I interviewed two administrators, Mr. R and Coach N (former alternative teacher), seven alternative teachers, or coaches, Mr. Lambo, Mr. White, Coach C, Coach J, Coach H, Coach V, Mr. S, Mr. X, a former permanent substitute alternative teacher, Mr. S., three campus patrols, Jose Juan, Ms. M, Mr. C, and a former SRO along with former campus patrol, Officer F. I applied semi-structured interviews (Harrell & Bradley, 2009), organized the data and themes employing thematic analysis (Bengtsson, 2016; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Terry et al., 2017). In this chapter, I summarize my findings and connect them to broader themes in education, talk about the limitations of the study, and discuss recommendations for further research.
Discursive Ideologies Gestate Disciplinary Technologies and Symbolic Violence

Next, I summarize the findings of the data using the following themes identified in the analysis of the data: 1. Disciplining is having a set structure for punishment. 2. Symbolic prisons in schools. 3. The broken alternative student. 4. Coaches, self-revered enforcers? 5. Facultative enforcement. For the identification of themes, as mentioned in Chapter 3, I appropriated Foucault’s (1977) disciplinary technologies in schooling, in particular, alternative settings. The first disciplinary technology in alternative is one of hierarchical observation. This disciplinary technology included the pervasive control of student bodies limiting mobility and movements to produce docile bodies (Foucault, 1977). This was identified in the first theme, disciplining is having a set structure for punishment, as hierarchical observation (Foucault, 1975; Simmons, 2005) where routine and structure fill up a disciplining day. Enforcers’ ideologies were explored through a lens of what they understood to be disciplining; a set of routines and structures that students had to follow to return to mainstream instruction. While also identified in the fifth theme, facultative enforcement. Here disciplinary resources such as surveillance, monitoring, disciplining, and assignation students to alternative relied heavily on circumstantial, often contradictory actions on behalf of what the participants deemed, hierarchical actions of school officials. It served as a watchful eye in schooling to determine placements. The second disciplinary technology (Foucault, 1977) in alternative is one of normalizing judgments, for this, the third theme, the broken alternative student, where the participants labeled the alternative students as coming from broken, single-parent homes, low-income families that are isolated, stigmatized and segregated to alternative. Concordantly, the second theme, symbolic prisons in schools, are how participants conceptualized alternative classroom/spaces as versions of microcosmic prisons in schooling that resemble jails, prison, of the carceral in society (Brewer
Lastly, Foucault’s third disciplinary technology, examination, is a combination of hierarchical observation including normalizing judgment, which revolved around the last theme, *facultative enforcement*, which is bound by circumstantial, discretionarily and not informed by policy, often not informed at all, basically enforcement that classified students often interconnecting alternative classroom and legal system discourses (Brewer & Heitzeg, 2008; Fernandez, Kirshner, & Lewis, 2016).

This interconnection between alternative classrooms and the legal system highlighted by participants builds a subaltern, subordinate class of students in schooling (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997). Who are alternative students? How are they identified? Where are alternative spaces in schools? Who are the self-revered enforcers in alternative who as the fourth theme, *coaches, self-revered enforcers* claimed to mirror respect, status, and authority? This along with how participants understand enforcement creates *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu, 2001). The themes suggested that their understandings of disciplinary enforcement are covered by a hierarchical veneer produced by school officials. Which produced disciplinary power (Hoskin, 1979; Lila & Vinthagen, 2014).

This disciplinary power can have serious repercussions in terms of disciplinary education. Further research is quintessential to understand on a larger scale how alternative disciplining, disciplinary power, and enforcement are understood from the perspective of enforcers at least across the state--something I discuss in the implications section. In the next section, I dive into the limitations of the study, including possible avenues which I deem need further exploration.

**Limitations**

Limitations of the study relate to reflecting on the limitations of phenomenological studies—incomplete avenues I saw in the data that are worth exploring. For phenomenological
studies, the task of the researcher is to “understand” a stakeholder’s experience (Dukes, 1984). Phenomenological research seeks, “to find out what the actual experience is, what it means to individuals, and what the personal implications are” (Wilson, 2015 p. 40). With it, the value of this type of study is decisive in terms of understanding the participant perception of their social reality in terms of their role as enforcers (Moustakas, 1994; Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999). Moreover, it is not generalizable, nor meant to be (Moustakas, 1994). It is one of introspection, not to solve a problem in schooling or education, but instead to point out the lived experiences of stakeholders (Smith, Flower & Larkin, 2009; Tuffour I, 2017) to open a conversation or have a dialogue on that stakeholder’s role, identity, experience, or actions (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). It relies contextually on the sample of participants designated by the researcher, in this case, disciplinary alternative enforcers—school administrators, teachers, substitute teacher, campus patrols, and SRO.

This study gave a range on how the participants interpreted their disciplinary roles, and experiences, along with their understandings of students in alternative classrooms. Fundamentally, research is needed to understand enforcer ideologies and experiences across communities. I consider it vital to take this study onward in how alternative disciplinary enforcers in different contexts, whether it be in different alternative classrooms or schools in different school district at least across Texas. This is something I explore in the last section of this chapter.

A theme that was not included in the findings was that of evaluations along with obscure reflections of the discipline gap. For the first one, regarding evaluations. It was not in the scope of what I was aiming to do with the study. However, I considered it later as a limitation since asking how school administrators evaluated participants is crucial in how hierarchical power can
operate. Some participants spoke of evaluations as either not being evaluated as teachers, but with classroom management, or not being evaluated. While other participants spoke of how they were evaluated based on how the alternative students were doing in their classrooms. In terms of the discipline gap (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). While there is ample evidence suggesting that alternative classrooms produce a discipline gap in Texas (Booker & Mitchell, 2011) here those reactions from participants were incomplete. They would refer to the discipline gap anecdotally, noting that since they worked in a minority-majority community, it was logical that most students in disciplinary classrooms were Latinx or minorities. In other instances, as was the case of Mr. C, he alleged that the real minority in the United States were White people (Goldberg, 2023; Siddiqui, 2021). Usually akin to fringe conspiratorial thinking seconded by alt-right factions in the United States (Obaidi et al., 2022; Walle, 2023) and popularized by former presidents (Dixit, 2022; Ekman, 2022; Ellison, 2021; Goetz, 2021; Ramirez, 2023). These ideologies are certainly worthy of further exploration.

Next, I talk about limited data on issues I consider pivotal for further research, in this next section, I explore the last limitation to the study which dealt more with ulterior reasons such as corruption, which I did not include in the analysis, one where a participant was placed in alternative as punishment, for him. That is Mr. X’s alternative placement.

**Mr. X’s Alternative Placement**

Mr. X’s interview complexified other underlying issues he alleged were occurring in the Borderlands district. One of retaliation that led to his placement in alternative as a teacher due to his constant animosity against two superintendents in the Borderlands district. In this section, I consider what Mr. X spoke about concerning how ironically alternative was used as punishment for him. A vocal critic of the actions of district administrators, something I could confirm with
follow-up with other colleagues I have in the district. Regardless of this circumstance, I am interested in his interpretive experience on how it all began as I noted in the participant summary, when he told students to call their parents on an exam day which resulted in flooding calls to the district, hinting that the more than 700+ students in a high school gym monitored by a handful of teachers were not practicing safety in a school environment. According to Mr. X this was enough to warrant an official investigation on behalf of the district where he was demeaned and escorted outside the school premises. Here, he became a whistleblower when he saw discrepancies in the reported number for the special education department. Unfortunately, I could not verify these claims. What I could verify was that Mr. X was indeed placed in alternative for four years, from 2015 to 2019 under the principal he mentioned. Furthermore, this principal was indeed sanctioned by the Texas Education Agency for taking part in a federal investigation scandal. This principal continues to work for the district today as an executive member. Mr. X alleged this principal had a reputation for making teachers quit their careers due to this person’s aggressive managerial anti-union behaviors against teachers, such as Mr. X. Another aspect I could not confirm, I knew of this principal when I started working at Rovers High School as one that was corrupt in taking part in a cheating scandal that gained national attention back in 2011. Still, the reputation this principal had was an incomplete and anecdotal one. As for Mr. X, “they moved me to the music fine arts warehouse. Where I put to clean and dismantle instruments.” A 20-year plus educator cleaned musical instruments while his career was on the line for coming forward. Again, something I could not verify. When he was assigned to alternative in Winds High School in the Borderlands district, where he had no previous experience nor training. When I followed up on whether he had received additional instructional training or alternative training, Mr. X responded he did, only when a violent student threatened to assault him, his complaints
fell on deaf ears to school administrators. He purported after numerous pleas with school administration due to threats to his wellbeing, he was finally sent to a self-defense training in case this student would try anything. In the end, that student was removed not due to the threats against Mr. X, but for additional charges pressed against him. In essence, Mr. X contended he was left to fend for himself as an alternative teacher, with no support from school officials. In 2019, Mr. X was accused of protesting the displacement of low-income elementary students to another school where the soil had large quantities of lead and exposed students to toxic metals due to its location. Parents, schoolteachers (including Mr. X), community organizers, and researchers felt that this elementary school closure was associated more with it being overwhelmingly an immigrant community. Mr. X along with others protested outside one of the offices of one of the board of trustees during his lunch hour. Still, he was reprimanded once more, removed from alternative at Winds High School, and sent to the district office again while an investigation pended on whether he violated the law by protesting during school hours. After months in the district once again, he was vindicated, news that came out in local media outlets, and today Mr. X is now teaching at Rangers High School.

Mr. X’s story itself is one that relates to broader issues of retaliation, corruption, and displacement. While I could verify many aspects of his story, he clearly overshadowed some underlying issues happening in the Borderland community. I also argue is worthy of further exploration. Especially relating to the impact of high-stakes managerial, market neoliberal logics on majority-minority communities (Harvey, 2005; Selman, 2017). Next, I will talk about the implications of the study, including further research avenues.
Implications and Recommendations for Further Research

In 2020, the Office of the Attorney General in Texas released its School Crime and Discipline Handbook (Office of the Attorney General, 2020). In it, it laid out the disciplinary guidelines for which a student is placed in alternative settings/classrooms/or schools along with further statutory punishments for students who should be assigned to other punitive institutions be it, Juvenile Justice Centers, prosecuting parents due to truancy, or even incarceration. What is more, it merged the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program Texas law, Texas Education Code §37.008, dictates that alternative students be provided with the following:

- a setting other than a student’s regular classroom
- located on or off a regular school campus
- ensures the separation of students who are assigned to the DAEP from those who are not.
- focuses on English language arts, mathematics, science, history, and self-discipline
- provides for students’ educational and behavioral needs
- provides supervision and counseling
- employs only teachers who meet all certification requirements; and School Crime and Discipline Handbook 19 Office of the Attorney General
- provides not less than the minimum amount of instructional time per day required by Section 25.082(a).

The guidelines have enough latitude for school districts to adapt how they implement these DAEP classrooms/schools to fit the context of their communities (Office of the Attorney General, 2020). This means they are broad enough so that the school, or school district can have leeway to how they need to operate. In Chapter 4, for the fifth theme, facultative enforcement, I began the theme by indicating how most of the participants recognized that students were in alternative due to drugs, in particular THC and/or marijuana. Further, I discussed two instances
from Officer F and Coach N, where students committed crimes outside of school, not within 300 feet of school premises, and were assigned to alternative as punishment. When asked whether this way is legal, they noted they were not sure, they just serviced the students since the punishment came from the legal system. A limitation of note, that needs further exploration. Yet what is notable, is how the Office of the Attorney General (2020) does have guidelines for those students assigned to alternative:

- a felony;
- assault;
- selling, giving, delivering, possessing, using or being under the influence of marijuana, a controlled substance or a dangerous drug;
- selling, giving, delivering, possessing, using or being under the influence of an alcoholic beverage;
- a serious act or offense while under the influence of alcohol;
- an offense involving an abusable volatile chemical;
- public lewdness;
- indecent exposure; or
- retaliation or certain forms of harassment against any school employee.

Here, the Office of the Attorney General underlines how each student can be subjected to disciplinary punishment in the form of alternative assignation, while also being charged in court for any of these offenses. This is vital to point out since the school-to-prison pipeline is a concept where there is a clear delineation from school to the criminal justice system. The metaphor itself, has been criticized due to its minimalist, linear motion that does not “address the complex interaction of broader social phenomena and the macroeconomic context” (McGrew, 2016 p. 357). Meiners (2011) critiques the metaphorical pipeline as one that is simplistic where its cause-and-effect nature ignores the active interaction economical, and structural forces surrounding
schooling and the legal system. Which in turn, the term has evolved to the school-to-prison
nexus (Goldman & Rodriguez, 2022; Nuñez-Eddy, 2020) as that culmination of forces that factor
in the relationship between schooling and the legal system. However, I propose an addendum to
this, as I noted before, discipline is the underbelly of education, from the moment I began this
study, it was an uphill task between permissions, barriers, and even caution on behalf of other
alternative stakeholders that did not want to take part in the study. As Jose Juan put it when I
received word from an officer in the Borderland district about wanting to be interviewed yet
fearing retaliation on behalf of district authorities, “it’s discipline, who wants to talk about
discipline.” Talking about discipline in the context of this study, especially of alternative, means
talking about the ideas, interactions, policy, and enforcement behind how every enforcer
interacts with students daily. Therefore, the school-to-prison nexus is that culmination of
interactions, still, in Texas at least, policy as written by the Office of the Attorney General
(2020) setting the standard for discipline and the school of conduct across the state does not
describe a connection between schools and the legal system. In fact, the legal system is in
schools, with alternative classrooms/programs (Dunning-Lozano, 2015). They serve as
interchangeable punishment, replacing the legal system if an infraction occurs in or around
school premises, although there are at least two testimonies where it extends even further with
placements coming directly from the legal system directly to alternative for penance of an
offense (Vanderhaar et al., 2014). And schools accept it normatively as a vacuum for
enforcement. This is not a nexus, this is structural immersion where policy is the legal system,
the authority setting that standard is the Office of the Attorney General--a judicial entity, not the
Texas Education Agency (2010a), and alternative schooling is the carceral within schools.
Alternative is the legal system in schools.
With this said, the carceral within schools needs further exploration. The participants for the students discursively spoke in terms of *responsibilizing* students (Harvey, 2005; Selman, 2017), and alienating their actions to deficit perspectives where they need to be fixed. Thus, creating a marginalized subaltern class (Bourdieu, 1977) in their perceptual process where they conceptualized their roles, what disciplining is, who alternative students are and what alternative classrooms mean to them. They are indeed what Simmons (2018) termed as *prison schools* as previously mentioned. The participant ideologies form part of establishing ideologies that set up discourse around criminalizing students where alternative is part of the carceral in schools (Dunning-Lozano, 2018; Hirschfield, 2008; Kupchik & Monahan, 2006). Next, I make known who can benefit from this study, then what are possible avenues of further research.

**Dialogue in Alternative Spheres**

This study shined a light on how alternative enforcers see disciplining, alternative spaces, their students, their singular role, and their understandings of distorted enforcement they witnessed daily. When I interviewed Coach V, he had recently attended an alternative conference called the Texas Association for Alternative Education where different alternative stakeholders ranging from counselors, teachers, probation workers, administrators, and everyone working in DAEPs, AEPs, or JJAEPs meet annually to collaborate on the work they do across the state. This study is the first step of dialogue between disciplinary enforcers, school districts, the community, policymakers, and scholars to reflect on how alternative education impacts schools across the state, or even the nation. Alternative education relies largely on state authority incontrovertibly, yet there is scholarship that suggests Texas has been a beacon in merging state law, school codes of conduct, and the legal system (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Cortez & Cortez, 2009; Vanderhaar et al., 2014). It is pivotal we understand the experiences along with the ideologies of those
stakeholder enforcers that are in alternative since they deal with discipline and its complexities. Their power is substantial since they can decide the fate of thousands of students. With this said, in what ways can further research help us understand disciplinary enforcers more effectively in Texas? I will discuss this next.

Complexifying Enforcement; Escalating to Advocacy

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, my analysis is not meant to point fingers at how enforcers amplify the school-to-prison-nexus (Fernandez, Kirshner, & Lewis, 2016). Rather, this case study is meant to open a conversation (Moustakas, 1994; Smith, Flower & Larkin, 2009) about what is disciplining for the participants that actively or formerly worked in alternative classrooms. Their intake on their experiences complements what other scholars echoed in terms of how often disciplinary spaces are ones where students that fit a label are secluded in schooling as a form of punishment (Rios, 2011; Vaught, 2017). It is normative, logical to think exclusively that students need to get “their act” together. This is part of responsibilizing their actions and holding them accountable (Harvey, 2005; Selman, 2007). However, I also conclude that enforcement is not homogenous.

Participant’s roles and experiences are not monolithic, their input is complex. As a matter of reflection, Facultative Enforcement often questioned how disciplining is managed, viewed or enforced. They often struggled with their roles, how to approach students, unfair placements in alternative, tragedies that beset them, and so on. This in turn, meshed their input or how they viewed their roles with frustration, or often struggled to make sense of how enforcement occurred in classrooms, school setting, or in placements. Yet that frustration was also met with acceptance--noting that while it was frustrating, it was part of the job. Dealing with discipline daily is part of schooling. They knew they had a job to do, and they saw it done, whether they
agreed with it. They have responsibilities, families, and bills to pay. Consequently, how are enforcers produced?

I utilize the term “Enforcers” to identify how they handle alternative classrooms. The label itself is not meant to homogenize their views on disciplining or undermine the pivotal roles each have in schooling. It is paramount we also ask, how are stakeholders in alternative spaces/classrooms produced. Further research is needed to understand how structures shape the perceptions of enforcers in alternative. Whether it be in professional development, academic training, or experience, their roles are fundamental in shaping how so-called “at-risk” youth is worked with in schools. Love (2010) spoke of liberatory consciousness as one where collaborative connection via allyship. This allyship in terms of social dominance and frameworks within society are not binary, i.e., meaning us vs. them (Catalano, 2015) where subaltern groups are oppressed while being allies or advocating for someone is a solitary journey or stance (Thompson, 2008). Instead, Love denominated allyship via empathy—engagement or awareness, analysis via reflection, practice or active steps in inclusivity and intersectional communication among identities, between stakeholders (accountability). This consciousness creates a scope of emphatic relationships.

In disciplinary education: How can we abnormalize and reject punitive/deficit perspectives from stakeholders? I partake that Love’s (2010) account of liberatory consciousness is one where these four factors can spark a critical consciousness (Freire, 1974). All participant input is valuable in a complex setting that is alternative classrooms. Due to this, they undergo along with students a structural foundation of a mix milieu of synchronous legal systems within schools. The response is to listen to enforcers, i.e., administrators, coaches, teachers, campus patrols, and school resource officers. Along with listening to students. They are the experts in
solving disciplinary punishment in schools including to foster quality educational opportunities for both students and those educators that serve them.

**Research Needed**

Further research is needed to get a thorough understanding of the ramifications alternative classrooms/programs/schools have on different communities. Who are the stakeholders, and what are their motivations, training, experiences, and discursive practices (Fairclough, 1989) that inform their decisions daily? Research is needed for 1) How are alternative enforcers evaluated, namely teachers? What are the guidelines followed by school districts since there is no state policy that mentions any unique requirements for alternative teachers? Since they do not have CORE subject, participants expressed either they were not evaluated, or had to be given a subject to teach on the side or to alternative students. What is clear is that they are not evaluated as enforcers exclusively. 2) Not only how do alternative enforcers understand the discipline gap, what are their views, and reactions to it, and how does this inform or not their performance or actions in an alternative classroom. 3) In the case of Mr. X, how is alternative viewed perceived by enforcers across the state as a disciplinary space? Are there instances of alternative retaliation towards enforcers themselves, if so, what does this look like, or was Mr. X’s perceptual interpretation singular, if so, what is the impetus behind these perceptions? 4) How are alternative classrooms/programs/schools implemented in across communities in Texas, and what patterns can be drawn when it comes to enforcement, structure and routine, school administrative enforcement, campus patrol enforcement, and SRO enforcement? 5) How do alternative enforcers understand, identify, and conceptualize alternative spaces, students, and parents? 6) Regarding alternative teachers, and following what Coach N mentioned, what is the role of coaches in alternative placements, why, and how does this impact
alternative classrooms/programs/schools. Are there overwhelming numbers of coaches in disciplinary positions, if so, what are the implications of this? 7) How do alternative programs/classrooms/schools reproduce disciplinary or so-called at-risk youth? Through Dunning-Lozano’s (2015) ethnography shed insight on how a set of institutional practices, enforcement, guidelines, ideologies, and action on behalf of school officials, teachers, produced a label of deficient alternative students. These sets of practices and applications inform stereotypes, labels, and/or interactions between school officials, law enforcement, students, and their communities, a term coined as punitive social control (Rios, 2011). 8) Lastly, how is this punitive social control (Rios, 2011) reproducing alternative students across communities in Texas?

All these avenues can produce an in-depth understanding of disciplining in a rigid state that embeds the legal system with schooling via disciplinary alternative education programs.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the findings of my study shed light on how the participants discursively interpreted disciplining, alternative classrooms, alternative students, and enforcement. In this chapter, I summarized the findings of the experiential interpretations of the participants, through a phenomenological lens, in particular their constant iterative parallels between alternative and the carceral, how their perception of the student was one of being deficient, broken, in need of fixing (Dunning-Lozano, 2018; Selman, 2017), how coaches see themselves as enforcers, and that of circumstantial complex enforcement that is more than discretionary. Next, I spoke of the limitations of the study based on sets of data that I deemed are worthy of further exploration; evaluations of enforcers, contradictory understandings of the discipline gap, and Mr. X’s singular
case where alternative in his view was punishment for him due to his activism. Lastly, I reflected
on the implications of the study, those who can benefit from it since it opens a pathway of
dialogue and the need for further research in many avenues. The latter focuses on Texas as a
State that is largely punitive and one that embeds the legal system within schooling, and
alternative classrooms are at the epicenter of this structural immersion.
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APPENDIX 1: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

The Teacher, the Counselor, the Cop, and the Guard: Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs Experiences in a COVID Era Borderland

Principal Investigator: Jair Munoz PhD Candidate
UTEP: Teacher Education Department

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jair Munoz PhD Candidate from The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). You are being asked to take part voluntarily in the research project described below. You are encouraged to take your time in making your decision. It is important that you read the information that describes the study. Please ask the study researcher or the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

Why is this study being done?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Alternative Education Programs and Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs have been at the forefront on how discipline is structured in U.S. schools. The main stakeholders of how discipline is produced and reproduced at teachers, at-risk coordinators or counselors, school resource officers and security guards from either alternative schools or programs house in-schools. This study explores how these stakeholders experience, understand and interpret these program’s function, it’s challenges and successes. Approximately, 15 teachers, 15 at-risk coordinators or counselors, 15 school resources officers, and 15 security guards will be enrolling in this study where they will be interviewed in a place of their choosing or the institution they work at. This with a focus to better inform practice and policy. You are being asked to be in the study because you are someone that is directly servicing students in an alternative education program,
disciplinary alternative education program, or alternative school. If you decide to enroll in this study, your involvement will last between 90 minutes to 150 minutes, per participant.

What is involved in the study?

STUDY PROCEDURES
If you agree to take part in this study, the research will ask to take part in:

1. **Survey:** This is a brief demographics survey to tell the researcher your pseudonym, preferred pronouns, ethnicity, and your role in the school district. That should take you approximately 5-10 minutes. This survey can be done electronically, or in-person before being interviewed.

2. **Interview:** You are being asked to meet with me for one interview. This interview will be scheduled at your own time and in a place of your choosing or via phone, or on an online platform or web conferencing if you choose to, but do not have to. During this interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences and responsibilities related to alternative education programs or disciplinary alternative education programs and at-risk youth. This interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. You are being asked to be audiotaped or recorded. This can be done remotely on in-person. If you do not want to be audiotaped or recorded, I will be taking handwritten notes. Please let me know your preference. All answers are voluntary. You have the right to not answer any question you choose to. After our interview, I will contact you for a follow up to clarify and ensure I processed and understood your answers, and to add any additional comments.

3. **Member checks:** Clarify researchers’ understanding after interviews, member checks. This should take you approximately 30-60 minutes. You may be contacted via email a month after the interview takes place to provide participant validation.

“Please note that your participation in this study involves remote and/or virtual research interactions with our research staff. You will be audio-video recorded by the web conferencing
system **AND/OR** a device that is separate from the online conferencing system. Therefore, privacy and confidentiality are not guaranteed due to the nature of the research environment.”

What are the risks and discomforts of the study?

The risks associated with this research are no greater than those involved in daily activities. There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participation. However, in some instances the participants may be asked to recall past events may bring up unfavorable or stressful memories. Such can cause stress, anxiety, and/or distress; if so, counseling may be needed. Also, the study may include risks that are unknown at this time. **Counseling information:**

*Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe, 1314 E. Yandell, El Paso, Texas 79902 – United States. Phone number: 915-534-7979*

Are there benefits to taking part in this study?

You are not likely to benefit by taking part in this study. However, this research may help us to understand how discipline and disciplining works in alternative education programs in the Borderland. You have great insight to inform practice and policy, your experience is vital in helping understand the intricacies of disciplinary education.

What are my costs?

There are no direct costs.

Will I be paid to participate in this study?

You will not be compensated for taking part in this research study.
What other options are there?

You have the option not to take part in this study. There will be no penalties involved if you choose not to take part in this study.

Choosing to withdraw or not participate will not affect your employment, departmental, or district standing.
What if I want to withdraw, or am asked to withdraw from this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you do not take part in the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit.

If you choose to take part, you have the right to skip any questions or stop at any time. However, we encourage you to talk to a member of the research group so that they know why you are leaving the study. If there are any new findings during the study that may affect whether you want to continue to take part, you will be told about them.

The researcher may decide to stop your participation without your permission, if he or she thinks that being in the study may cause you harm. The study may be stopped if there is any indication it is harming you psychologically and/or emotionally.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may call Jair Munoz at 915-526-6334 or email me at: jamunoz2@utep.edu

If you have questions or concerns about your participation as a research subject, please contact the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-6590) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

What about confidentiality?

Any information provided by the participant will remain confidential under required by law. You will be assigned a pseudonym (chosen or pretend name) to protect your privacy and ensure confidentiality. The results of the research will be discussed in scholarly conferences and published. Such information will include no trace of your name or identity. Your part in this study is confidential. The following procedures will be followed to keep their personal information confidential.
All records will be stored under lock and key in a filing cabinet or on a password protected computer. This data will be kept for 10 years and then destroyed to ensure confidentiality.

The results of this research study may be presented at meetings or in publications; however, your name will not be disclosed in those presentations. Every effort will be made to keep your information confidential. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Office of Human Research Protections
- UTEP Institutional Review Board

Because of the need to release information to these parties, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

**Mandatory reporting**

If information is revealed about child abuse or neglect, or potentially dangerous future behavior to others, *the interview will be stopped, and the PI will report such information to the proper authorities, such as district and local authorities.*

**Authorization Statement**

I have read each page of this paper, electronic copy about the study (or it was read to me). I will be given a copy or electronic copy via email of the form to keep. I know I can stop being in this study without penalty. I have read the informed consent form, understand what the research
entails, and agree to participate in this study. I know that being in this study is voluntary and I choose to be in this study.

______________________________________________
Participant’s Name (printed)

______________________________________________
Participant’s Signature                          Date

______________________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent             Date
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your professional background.
   1. What is your title and the position you currently hold?
   2. In what institution?

2. Tell me about your responsibilities in this institution.

3. Tell me about your experience as a [Teacher, At-risk Coordinator/Counselor, School Resources Officer, or Security Guard] in general.

4. What made you apply to this position?

5. How did you first learn about this program?

6. How did you first become part of the program?

7. Tell me about your experiences in the alternative classroom.

8. What is the process through which a student is placed in the alternative classroom?

9. What is your role in this process of students being placed in the alternative classroom?

10. At your institution, are you currently in an alternative education program or disciplinary alternative education program?

11. Tell me about the first time you were assigned to the alternative education program or disciplinary alternative education program.

12. What does it mean for you to be a part of the alternative program as a [Teacher, At-risk Coordinator/Counselor, School Resources Officer, or Security Guard]?

13. How does the alternative program in your institution work?
   1. How does a typical day look like?
   2. Talk about some of advantages and challenges.
14. How would you describe the “alternative student?”

15. What do you think are the student expectations in this program?

16. What do you think are the expectations for you as a [Teacher, At-risk Coordinator/Counselor, School Resources Officer, or Security Guard] when it comes to your role in this program?

17. Research has shown that minority students, particularly African American and Latin@/x are more likely to be disciplined 2 to 3 more times than their Anglo-American counterparts. This includes them being assigned to an alternative program, be suspended, and oftentimes being expelled. Why do you think this is so?

18. Research has also shown that at least 70% of all alternative placements in Texas are discretionary. Meaning, they are mainly left up to school officials, without state guidance, to make decisions about misbehavior, defiant behavior, and truancy, for example. What do you make of this? Why do you think this is so?

19. Tell me about a time when a student committed a disciplinary infraction and ended up placed in the DAEP program.

20. Was it a mandatory or discretionary placement? Why?

21. Did you agree with the decision? Why or why not?

22. What does discipline mean to you in an alternative classroom?

23. What does it mean to be an effective [Teacher, At-risk Coordinator/Counselor, School Resources Officer, or Security Guard] in this program?

24. At-risk youth is denominated as those students that are at-risk of dropping out of school. What do you think is the role alternative programs play in assisting at-risk youth?

25. A landmark study suggested that minoritized students, African American and Latin@/x were also between 3 to 4 times more likely than Anglo Americans or White students to return to an alternative program once released, this is usually known as recidivism.
1. Have you seen this pattern of recidivism happen?
2. What patterns of recidivism have you seen in your institution?
3. Why do you think it happens?

26. How do you think COVID-19 has shaped education, in particular disciplinary education in your school district?

27. In 2019, the border region was stunned by the Wal Mart massacre where a young Anglo male with nativist ideologies killed 23 people and injured dozens more. How do you think this event has changed this community and the institution you work in?

28. Consider the following: if you had funds and resources, what would you do with them in an alternative classroom or program?

29. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about today?
Vita

Jair Munoz has a Ph.D. in Teaching, Learning and Culture from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). He also holds a Master’s in education as an instructional specialist, and a Bachelor’s in Creative Writing. His areas of interest include the school-to-prison-nexus, literacy/biliteracy; multicultural education, minoritized students in K-12 schools; marginalized communities, educational anthropology, and advocacy. Jair has served as a college lecturer at the university and community college levels; formerly worked at the Teacher Education department at the University of Texas at El Paso and currently working for the English and the Educational Psychology departments for community colleges in the Borderland region. Additionally, he has worked as a substitute teacher, safety communicator and coach/youth activities specialist for the City of El Paso. Formerly, he served two years as the Graduate Student Representative for the Council of Anthropology and Education, branch of the American Anthropological Association. He is currently the advisor for an LGBTQ student organization at UTEP where he also works as a coordinator in a campus advocacy department apart from teaching. His publications include: Duncheon, J. C., and Muñoz, J. (2019). Examining teacher perspectives on college readiness in an early college high school context. American Journal of Education, 125(3), 453-478. Muñoz, J. (2020). Assault on Mexican American Collective Memory, 2010–2015: Swimming with Sharks. Journal of Latinos & Education, 19(1), 101-103. Ullman, C., Mangelsdorf, K., and Muñoz, J. (2020) Graduate Students Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Ethnographic Study. New York: Routledge. ISBN: 978-1-138-08730-9.

Contact Information: jamunoz2@utep.edu