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RIVERSIDE

The Racialized Pushout of Black and Latinx Students into Alternative Schools

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

by

Nallely Arteaga

September 2020

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Rita Kohli, Co-Chairperson

Dr. John Wills, Co-Chairperson

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The Dissertation of Nallely Arteaga is approved:

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Dedications

Esta disertación se completó durante una pandemia global y una revolución antirracista en la que muchos de nosotros estamos luchando por la justicia racial y otros están perdiendo la vida. Debo la terminación de esta disertación durante estos tiempos trágicos al apoyo que mi familia y mis seres queridos han brindado. Nunca imaginé que esta sería la forma en que terminaría mi doctorado de seis años, pero estoy muy agradecida por mi pueblo de seres queridos que me han guiado en el camino. Primero, quisiera agradecer a mis padres por inculcarme el valor y la confianza necesaria para enfrentar todos los desafíos que se me presentaron durante estos últimos seis años. Dad, fuiste el primero que me aseguró que si alguien podía hacer un doctorado, ¡era yo! Gracias por alentarme siempre a perseguir mis sueños y desafiar todo lo que se me presente. Mom, te aseguraste de que completara este doctorado. Tu cuidado cariñoso me dio la energía que necesitaba para terminar. Te encargaste de mi salud y bienestar mental, emocional y físico y te aseguraste de que dedicara todo mi tiempo a escribir sin distracciones.

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with me until I was done for the day. Our late-night walks felt so comforting and relaxing during stressful days.

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Sometime in April/May we realized I had to finish this summer, I thought it would be impossible, not during this pandemic, not during a time when people are fighting for their right to live, but you said “we got this” without hesitation. You were right, it got done!

Thank you for the labor of love you have put into seeing your first student finish!

I dedicate this dissertation to all of the students I had the privilege to work with while teaching at an alternative high school, especially the six students who took part in this project. I have learned so much from you, and I am not at all surprised by your resilience and acts of resistance. May I always have the courage to use my voice to challenge educational inequities, in the same way you have all demonstrated.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Racialized Pushout of Black and Latinx Students into Alternative Schools

by

Nallely Arteaga

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Education

University of California, Riverside, September 2020

Dr. Rita Kohli, Co-Chairperson

Dr. John Wills, Co-Chairperson

As a response to the national dropout/pushout crisis, alternative high schools were first developed to meet the needs of students that were typically unavailable in traditional high schools (Kelly, 1993). Since the beginning of their establishment, alternative schools gained the reputation of serving as “dumping grounds,” and softer “juvenile detention centers,” for youth labeled “troubled” and “problematic” (Kim, 2011). Scholars have also argued that alternative schools are often “second chance” opportunities that work as “idealistic heavens” for students deemed unsuccessful in a traditional school system (Inbar, 1995; Kim, 2011). Nationwide, traditional high schools are recognized as some of the top feeder schools in the alternative education system, yet there is limited critical research to understand the role of institutional and systemic racism in the overrepresentation (Malagón & Alvarez, 2010) of Black and Latinx students in alternative schools.

To hold institutions more accountable for the equitable education of Students of Color, this dissertation calls attention to the policies and practices governing schools that

force large numbers of Black and Latinx students into enrolling in alternative schools. Guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT), this study provides a deep dive into the process of school transfer in one California school district to reveal structural flaws and inconsistencies that are often racialized and are supported by deficit framed ideologies that result in internalized racism, anti-Black racism, and linguistic racism. Using qualitative methods, this study also draws on counterstorytelling methods to include counter-narratives of student resistance to demonstrate how they rely on their resistance capital (Yosso, 2004) to navigate their transition into continuation high school and defy normalized expectations.

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Chapter 1: Statement of Problem

In my career as a high school English teacher, one particular memory stands out above the rest. I was working at Rise Continuation High School (Rise)—the only continuation high school¹ in Los Pinos Unified School District—which serves students who have been transferred out or denied enrollment from the local traditional² high schools. It was my conference period during the second period of the day, and I was in the main office checking my mailbox when Danny³, a Latino sophomore, first arrived on campus. The student approached the school’s secretary and said he had just been sent from his traditional high school. While the school secretary reprimanded the student for showing up to school late, the student explained, “I’m sorry I am late, but I didn’t know I was transferred here. I showed up to my old school and they said I was no longer enrolled there and that I had to come here now.” The secretary confirmed that he was a new student and sent him to the school counselor for a class schedule. Confused and sad, the student asked, “Do you know why they sent me to this school? No one told me!” The secretary replied, “Talk to your counselor. You must have done something bad.” With the chaos of managing daily school business in the main office, the student was quickly dismissed to the counselor. After this and many similar incidents, I began to wonder how often Black and Latinx⁴ students are removed from their traditional high schools and sent to a continuation school without a warning or an explanation.

¹ This dissertation uses “alternative schools” and “continuation schools” interchangeably

² The term “traditional” is used to reference any variation of schools that is not an alternative school including comprehensive, magnet, and charter schools.

³ Pseudonyms for student names are used throughout this dissertation.

⁴ Latinx is used instead of Latina, Latino, or Latin@, as a gender-neutral alternative term.

At Rise, many school officials and staff blamed Students of Color⁵ for their removal from traditional schooling. In the case of Danny, without knowing him at all, the secretary assumed that the student must have done something wrong to end up at the continuation high school, and with that quick interaction alone, she had already labeled him a troublemaker. Unfortunately, Danny's experience is not unique. The confusion, humiliation, pain, and anger that he felt was echoed by many of my former students about their transfer to the school.

When I was assigned to teach at Rise, I was not aware of how or why students were transferred there. I realized there were unjust and unexplainable practices with the removal of students from traditional high schools. However, what was observably clear were those who ended up there: Black and Latinx youth. Although the school district of Los Pinos is known for serving a diverse group of students, including Native American, white, and Asian students, it is Black and Latinx students who are overrepresented in suspension, expulsion, and enrollment at Rise.

For the 2018-2019 school year, the enrollment by ethnicity at Los Pinos Unified School District (LPUSD) consisted of 58 percent Latinx, 11.5 percent Black, 19 percent white, .2 percent American Indian/ Alaskan Native, 5.3 percent Asian, 1.8 percent Filipino, and .1 percent Pacific Islanders (California Department of Education, 2020). At Los Pinos High School (LPHS), the district's largest traditional high school, as Figure 1 shows, the enrollment by ethnicity is fairly representative of LPUSD with enrollments of

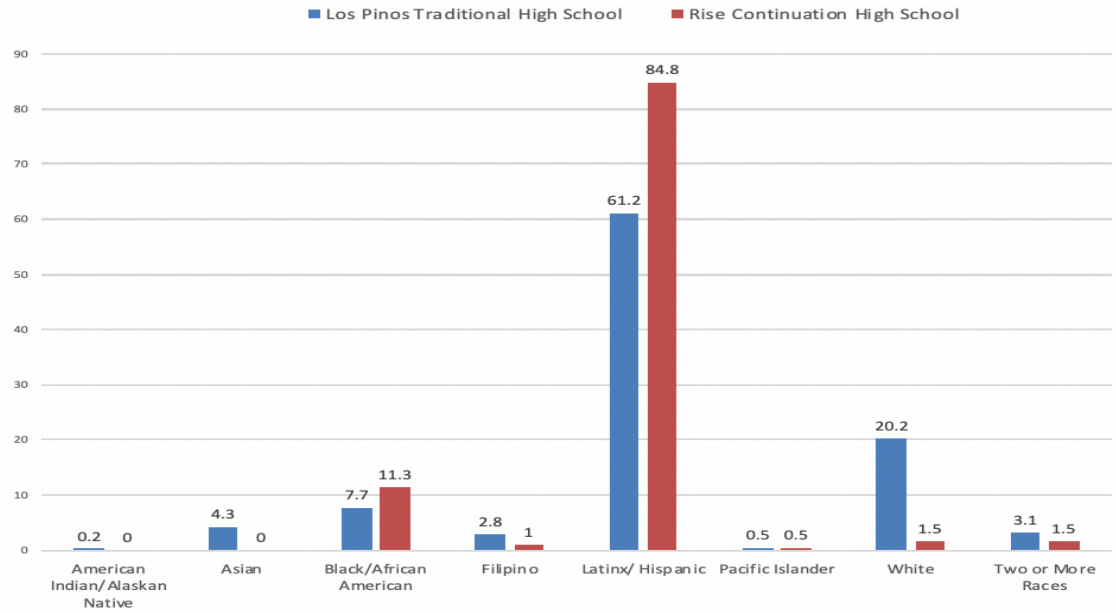
⁵ *Students of Color* is used to refer to persons of Black, Latinx, Asian American and American Indian ancestry (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001),

61.2 percent Latinx, 7.7 percent Black, 20.2 percent white, 4 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native, 4.3 percent Asian, 2.8 percent Filipino, and .5 percent Pacific Islander (California Department of Education, 2020). At Rise, however, Latinx comprise 84.8 percent of students; Black students make up 11.3 percent; and only 1.5 percent of students are white (California Department of Education, 2020). At LPUSD, 20 percent of the student population are also classified as English Language Learners, or emergent bilinguals (García, 2009); yet, only 5 percent of students are labeled English Language Learners at LPHS, and 28 percent of students are English Language Learners at Rise (California Department of Education, 2019). When we look at these numbers across the state of California, these disparities are reflected. Figure 2 disaggregates the demographics data by ethnicity of students who attend traditional high schools in comparison to students who attend continuation high schools in California. Unfortunately, the overrepresentation of Black and Latinx students is not unique to Rise or California and reflects an alarming concern of continuation schools nationally.

National Context

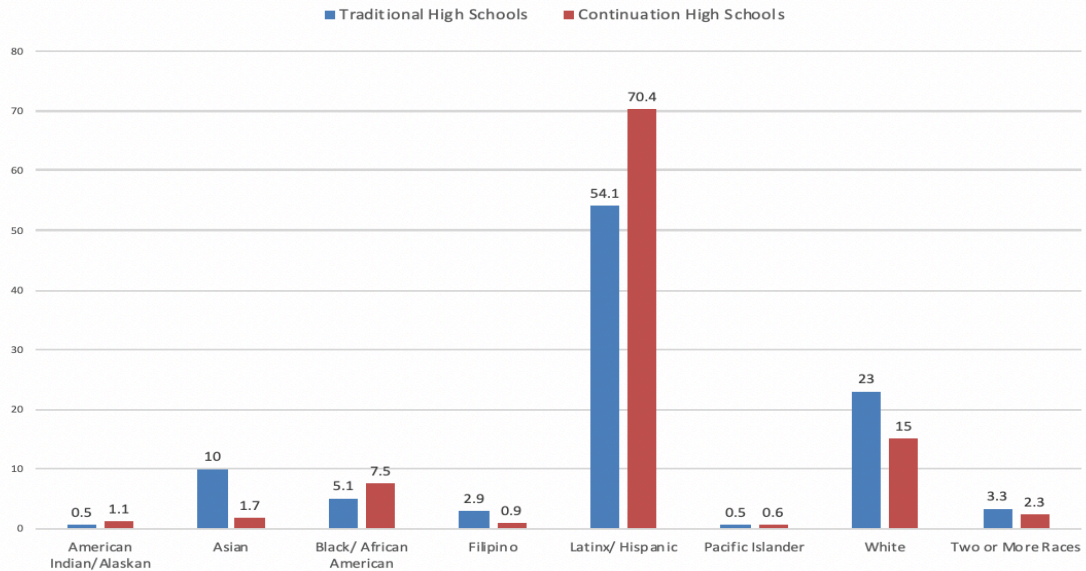
As a response to the national dropout/pushout crisis, alternative schools were designed to meet the needs of students that were typically unavailable in traditional schools (Kelly, 1993). Although “dropout” is a term used to refer to this population of students, “dropout” is a problematic term that does not acknowledge the institutional practices that push students out of schools. The key concept of “pushout” is used instead throughout this dissertation and will be unpacked further in Chapter 2. Since traditional schools were not meeting the learning needs of all students, alternative schools were

Figure1: LOS PINOS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (2019)
TRADITIONAL AND CONTINUATION HIGH SCHOOL ETHNICITY BY PERCENT



Source: California Department of Education, 2020

Figure2: CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOLS (2019)
ETHNICITY BY PERCENT



Source: California Department of Education, 2020

expected to provide a learning environment that would prevent “at-risk” students from dropping out of school (Kelly, 1993). Yet, only an estimated 12 percent of students who end up in the alternative education system were previously labeled pushouts with 30 percent of them were referred by home schools; 30 percent were truant; and 30 percent of students dealt with socio-emotional behavioral issues (Fooley & Pang, 2006). A 2008 report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2008) found that 61 percent of students were being transferred into alternative schools due to physical attacks or fights; 57 percent were transferred due to disruptive verbal behavior; 57 percent for possession/distribution of alcohol or drugs; and another 57 percent of them were transferred due to continual academic failure. While these statistics represent all students, racially disaggregated data demonstrates patterns of great disparity.

Suspension or expulsion from a traditional school site often results in the referral into alternative education. According to Civil Rights Data Collection (2019), Black students represent 38 percent of the total number of suspended students, and Latinx students represent 22 percent of suspended students. Many schools opt for suspensions and expulsions as a result of zero-tolerance laws and policies. Based on national estimates, Black students comprise 24 percent of expelled students, and Latinx comprise 30 percent of expelled students under zero-tolerance policies (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2019). However, as the number of suspensions increase, so do the racial disparities of suspended and expelled students (Wald & Losen, 2003), who are eventually pushed out of traditional schools and into the alternative education system.

Despite alternative schools serving as a means of retention and intervention, there remains an overrepresentation of Black and Latinx students leaving school before they graduate. The NCES reports that while 9.2 percent of Latinx and 6.5 percent of Black students “drop out” of high school, only 4 percent of white students do (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Moreover, there is a general assumption that alternative schools only enroll disruptive, underachieving students (Brown & Beckett, 2007), and that these schools were designed to serve students who are labeled truant and academically poor achieving, have a negative attitude towards school, participate in norm-violating behaviors, and reject to participate in extracurricular activities (Fuller & Sabatino, 1996). Despite being created to offer more educational opportunities than traditional schools (Kim, 2011), the negative stigma that follows continuation schools makes it near impossible for Students of Color to succeed in this setting as they are often criminalized by the same educational system that is supposed to protect their educational rights (Annamma, 2015).

As Danny tried to enroll at Rise, he was not aware of why he was being transferred. He was simply given notification that he no longer could attend his former school and was sent to Rise. Nationwide, traditional high schools are recognized as some of the top feeder schools in the alternative education system; yet, rarely do traditional high schools offer a deeper and critical understanding of their own practices that explain how they remove students from their schools. Current research may identify where and which students are sent to continuation schools, and what negative behaviors schools have labeled them as engaging with. However, with limited research in the field of

alternative education, there is little understanding of how Black and Latinx students are pushed into continuation high schools as well as the institutional responsibility in this racialized process.

Research Problem and Study

It is imperative to hold institutions more accountable for the equitable education of Black and Latinx students. In this study, I provide an understanding of how race and racism are implicated in the process of removal—the pushout—of Black and Latinx from traditional schools as they find themselves asked or forced to enroll in alternative schools (Fine, 1991). I also explore how race, as it intersects with other social factors, such as class, language, and immigration status impact the treatment of Black and Latinx students once they are enrolled in continuation high schools. The purpose of this research is to understand how traditional schools are failing these students, and what the student experience is like once they enter the alternative education system, as there is a social responsibility to educate all students under an equitable and fair system.

To unpack the role of institutionalized racism in the pushout of Black and Latinx students into alternative schools, I bridge two critical concepts and theories: (1) Critical Race Theory (CRT); and (2) student pushout, which I explain in detail in Chapter 2. In Chapter 2, I begin with a review of the literature, offering an overview of what alternative education is and what research gaps exist in the field. Chapter 3 details the qualitative methods that were used to collect data and explains how student voice was used to construct and present counter-narratives of the students in this study. The findings of this dissertation are presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Chapter 4 unpacks the institutional

transfer process for how students are sent into alternative school from traditional school from the perspective of various stakeholders across LPUSD. Additionally, Chapter 4 explores how administrators and teachers make sense of the transfer process. Chapter 5 focuses on the perspective of Black and Latinx students to reveal how the transfer process is actually a racialized pushout from school that is perpetuated through nuances of internalized racism, anti-Black racism, and linguistic racism. Chapter 6 centers the counter-narratives of three of the focal students in this study. Through counterstorytelling methods, Chapter 6 highlights student resistance to uncover the experiences of Black and Latinx students after their transfer into Rise Continuation High School. Chapter 7 outlines implications for alternative education and limitations in the research study, providing recommendations for future directions in research and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This review of the literature begins with an overview of what alternative education is. This section briefly traces the historical rationales for why alternative schools, including continuation schools, came to exist in the education system with a focus on the negative stigma associated with alternative schools and the students who serve them. This section also discusses the characteristics that research has used to categorize the field of alternative education followed by highlights of research studies that have found an overrepresentation of Students of Color enrolled in alternative schools. This review also includes studies that have found alternative education to be a useful and necessary system to meet the needs of marginalized youth and how alternative schools succeed in helping students who are not successful in traditional schools. The review of the literature then turns to zero-tolerance policies and how that affects the school-to-prison pipeline and the pushout of Black and Latinx youth.

Alternative Education

Kelly (1993) published a book that remains one of the only books in the alternative education field that focuses on continuation high schools and how continuation high schools came to exist in the education system. The book traces the historical significance and purpose of continuation high schools that were aimed at educating students considered non-academic (Kelly, 1993). Although continuation schools were developed as an intervention to prevent student dropouts (Kelly, 1993), much of the negative stigma associated with continuation schools is found in current literature. After over 20 years, Kelly's (1993) book remains one of the only books

contributing to the literature on continuation high schools in the field of alternative education with other journals and articles attempting to expand on this work to point out how alternative education schools have been a part of the schooling system in the United States since the 1960's (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010).

Alternative schools were developed to offer schooling experiences with greater freedom and opportunities for success than students were receiving in traditional high schools (Kim, 2011). These schools are often perceived as a direct response to the public concern over the rapidly growing number of pushouts in California (Kelly, 1993). Alternative education programs were meant to either recover dropouts or to reduce the high dropout rate (De La Rosa, 1998). Over the course of time, alternative education and its definition has evolved with little agreement (Lehr, Tan, & Yseldyke, 2009). Although a clear definition of alternative education does not exist, alternative schools include continuation high schools and typically include a broad range of educational learning options for students, such as independent study programs, charter schools, or schools within schools (Reimer & Cash, 2003).

Other research has defined alternative education programs as individualized opportunities created to meet the diverse educational needs of specific students (Foley & Pang, 2006). Alternative schools are categorized as those that provide alternative methods to learning beyond what is provided in traditional school settings (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010). Within their own structures, these schools may have different philosophies, purposes, and methods (Gold & Mann, 1984). These alternative schools serve to meet the needs of a variety of students that are not always troubled or

problematic as a majority of the research assumes (Gold & Mann, 1984). However, the majority of Students of Color who are transferred into the alternative education system are Black and Latinx students (Foley & Pang, 2006).

Reputation

One of the biggest obstacles of the alternative education system and the students they serve is the negative stigma associated with alternative education programs (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Since the beginning of their establishment, alternative schools have gained the reputation of serving as “warehouses for at-risk students who are falling behind, have behavioral problems, or are juvenile delinquents” (Kim & Taylor, 2008, p. 207).

Throughout the United States, alternative schools have the reputation of only serving students who are unable to succeed academically in regular, traditional school settings (Brown & Beckett, 2007). These schools are categorized as “dumping grounds,” “juvenile detention centers” or “idealistic heavens” that do not meet the needs of the students attending (Kim, 2011).

Most programs in alternative education are identified in the literature as schools for the disruptive students referred by high schools (Foley & Pang, 2006). These students are typically considered unsuccessful in traditional high schools (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Most research in alternative education focuses on the characteristics (Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr, et al., 2009) of the schools and the students who attend from a deficit perspective and does not address how students end up in alternative education.

Recent research on alternative education has made attempts to reevaluate how alternative schools should be perceived. Rather than being seen as “dumping grounds,”

new research has reframed alternative schools as offering second opportunities to students who are not successful in traditional high schools. The concept behind the theory of second chance in alternative schools stresses the “basic belief that everyone has the right to attempt success and mobility, the right to try again, to choose a different way, and that failures should not be regarded as final” (Inbar, 1995, p. 26). Through this lens, alternative schools are seen as offering other learning opportunities that traditional schools may not have available for students. The theory of second chance focuses on equity, equality, and opportunities in education (Inbar, 1995). Through a second chance framework, students have the opportunity to correct any mistakes or failures made by the individual or the educational system (Inbar, 1995). Although this theory attempts to reframe the misconception of the schools and the students who attend them, it does not hold larger institutional structures accountable for the academic failure of students. The second chance theory assumes Students of Color had a first chance to begin with, and ultimately blames students for not succeeding during that first chance at schooling. This accountability of blame has been placed on the individual students without considering racial, cultural, social and economic factors that prevent them from succeeding in traditional schools.

Successful Alternative Schools

One study used a critical perspective to determine how successful alternative high schools were in breaking the cycle of educational inequality (Kim & Taylor, 2008). This study found that alternative high schools can provide a caring and trusting environment for students (Kim & Taylor, 2008). However, not all programs can offer a meaningful

and equitable education that benefits all students (Kim & Taylor, 2008). This is an area in the research of alternative education that tends to be contradictory. While some research describes alternative schools as dumping grounds for troubled students (Kim, 2011), other research finds alternative schools to be successful in providing equal educational opportunities.

Research comparing traditional schools to alternative schools has found that, for Students of Color, the disappearance of behavioral problems was an essential characteristic of the support provided by alternative schools that was not provided at their traditional high school (Watson, 2011). Students have reported that, compared to alternative schools, traditional schools feel impersonal and unnecessarily stressful (Watson, 2011). For this reason, many Students of Color resist authority and teachers in traditional school settings (Watson, 2011). Students characterize teachers in traditional school settings as inflexible and not understanding to their learning needs (Watson, 2011). Students of Color who experience marginalization in traditional schools describe alternative schools as more successful in supporting their needs through much smaller, safer, and personalized learning environments (Watson, 2011). This research has also reported that students attending alternative schools have “higher self-esteem, more positive attitudes toward school, improved school attendance, higher academic performance, and decreased delinquent behaviors than when they attended traditional schools” (De La Ossa, 2005, p.65; Cox, 1999).

Studies have also found that alternative schools are more likely than mainstream traditional high schools to differentiate pedagogical styles with small group instruction,

computerized instruction, career counseling, and academic counseling (Lange, 1998).

Teachers in alternative education settings make it their priority to create a communal atmosphere in the classroom through the personal bonds they create with students (Brown & Beckett, 2007). These bonds based on shared personal experiences between teachers and students are what differentiated the success of alternative schools. The extent that alternative schools succeed in helping students who are not successful in traditional high school settings varies by individual and institution.

The success of one particular school in one study was determined by overall graduation rates. Research has already stressed that national high school graduation rates have reached an estimate of 68 to 71 percent (Watson, 2011), and alternative schools represent the stereotype of serving as the nation's last hope to successfully guide students toward high school completion. Concerned with the high dropout rate of American Indian students, one alternative school in Wisconsin was founded with the principles of combatting the high dropout rates of American Indian students (Jeffries, Hollowel, & Powell, 2004). Even when students were on track to not completing high school in mainstream settings, this study of a non-punitive alternative school demonstrated how successful the school was in graduating 80 percent of the students each year (Jeffries, Hollowel, & Powell, 2004).

What some research has argued is that alternative schools can effectively help students graduate high school and succeed when they create a safe learning environment for disadvantaged students (Watson, 2011). Oftentimes, this means ensuring that alternative education programs are located in smaller community-based schools.

Alternative schools that are much smaller than traditional schools tend to center on building community for students within the school (De La Ossa, 2005). This approach seems to be effective at teaching students valuable lessons not available in larger schools (De La Ossa, 2005). For example, alternative programs located in much smaller schools tend to be more effective at accepting all students for whom they really are (De La Ossa, 2005), making the schooling environment a much safer space for students to learn. Allowing students to feel accepted and safe is a priority for many successful alternative schools (De La Ossa, 2005). Due to the community approach of smaller alternative schools, issues of school violence are diminished and rarely a problem (De La Ossa, 2005); instead, students are learning to get along with their peers and everyone in the community. Since students in alternative education settings are likely to have been excluded by virtue of either ethnic or class background (Kelly, 1993), building strong relationships becomes a necessity for their success in alternative schools. In comparison to their previous K-12 schooling experiences, students discover that they are more comfortable interacting and working with their peers who are much more like themselves in the alternative school setting (Kelly, 1993).

For students who have been suspended, expelled, or pushed out of traditional school settings, alternative schools often become the only option available to help them succeed. Rather than keeping students suspended or expelled, alternative schools that are supported by school districts help reduce the amount of time students actually spend out of school (Gut & McLaughlin, 2012). Alternative schools have done this by not resorting to harsh discipline policies that further exclude students from schooling. A common

successful approach to school discipline found in many alternative schools stems from a humanistic approach (De La Ossa, 2005). This approach towards students emphasizes the possibilities for positive growth (De La Ossa, 2005) and not punishment for behavior. This is an approach that students who are not successful in traditional schools are missing.

Many traditional mainstream schools tend to be more punitive towards students labeled “at-risk.” Oftentimes, these punitive schools tend to resemble “soft jails” in where students are forced to complete busy work and are taught to respect the adults before anything (Jeffries, Hollowel, & Powell, 2004, p. 66). Punitive practices such as suspension and expulsion have been proven to be ineffective in altering student behavior (Jeffries, Hollowel, & Powell, 2004). A research study found at one successful alternative school that the use of cameras, metal detectors, guards, and hand-held scanning equipment as punitive measures had been intentionally avoided (Jeffries, Hollowel, & Powell, 2004). Rather than punishing students for tardiness, this school also welcomed students by having teachers and staff escort them to class (Jeffries, Hollowel, & Powell, 2004). These non-punitive practices found in alternative schools demonstrate the extent that they can help students succeed despite what other research has stated.

Alternative schools have also demonstrated success in developing positive student identity formation. Rather than being perceived as dumping grounds for at-risk of failure students, successful alternative schools need to be understood as part of a systematic intervention (Kim, 2011). These schools support students by recovering “lost hope; self-esteem; and faith in themselves, the school, and the society while developing their

academic skills, knowledge, and talents” (Kim, 2011, p. 91). Students can also develop a positive image of themselves through their academic progress. The results of one study at one alternative high school found that when reading skills were improved, students demonstrated a significant improvement in their confidence in capacity to learn (Gold & Mann, 1984). Another study found that previously labeled “at-risk students” were able to engage in schooling practices through an active and reflective process of setting learning goals (Watson, 2011), which helped build student confidence levels. Though this process, students were able to set goals that would target their desired credits needed to successfully graduate high school (Watson, 2011). These types of alternative education programs seem to be most successful when they are able to teach students to set goals and meet deadlines on their own (Watson, 2011). The study clearly found that when student input was appreciated, students seemed to be more actively engaged with the school, which ultimately helps them finish high school (Watson, 2011).

Alternative schools work in ways to increase high school graduation rates but have the difficult task of welcoming students that come from mainstream traditional schools with the lowest learning levels (Watson, 2011). When successful programs are implemented, these schools can succeed by rapidly demonstrating student progress in higher levels of learning (Watson, 2011). Schools can effectively improve learning levels that allow students to successfully pass graduation qualifying exams by their senior year (Watson, 2011). One study found that an alternative school was able help an average of 15 students per year graduate high school when they had previously been identified as potential dropouts by the school district (Watson, 2011). Placement at an alternative

school is supposed to remediate prior years of ineffective and unsuccessful practices on marginalized students, but current research argues that such remediation efforts are not possible unless alternative schools have high quality teachers, positive student-teacher classroom interaction, and high-quality instruction (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009).

For example, a study of a successful non-punitive alternative school found that the curriculum has the power to transform students who were once considered at-risk youth. The school centers the curriculum based on the cultural needs of its students who, in this study, were mostly Native American (Jeffries, Hollowell, & Powell, 2004).

Although the school also serves Latinx and Black students, all students take Native studies regardless of their race (Jeffries, Hollowell, & Powell, 2004). The use of American Indian literature allows students to make connections and reflect on their own personal lived experiences (Jeffries, Hollowell, & Powell, 2004). This is often a curricular component that many students in traditional school settings may not have access, which can then limit their engagement to curriculum and ultimately push them out of traditional schools.

Research has argued that some of the most successful alternative education programs are those that allow for flexibility in school schedules and student attendance. Continuation high schools are often seen as the forerunner of the alternative education movement for this reason (Kelly, 1993; Watson, 2011). Successful continuation schools are able to support student success through a flexible and reduced school schedule that includes individualized instruction, additional counseling services, and small class sizes (Kelly, 1993). Continuation schools also have open-entry/open-exit policies as part of

their schedule regulations that permits students to graduate from the alternative program at any point during the academic year (Kelly, 1993). This flexibility in schedule allows students to catch up on missing credits and graduation requirements at their own pace.

To support student success, many alternative schools have shorter school days, allowing students to work at their own pace without comparing their progress to other students (Gut & McLaughlin, 2012). Students do not feel the academic pressure to compete with others when all students are working on different assignments and subjects (Gut & McLaughlin, 2012). Shortened school days also allow students to earn credits based on skill mastery rather than actual time spent in a classroom (Gut & McLaughlin, 2012). This practice of credit-recovery supports students who are behind grade level in credits. Moreover, this practice specifically supports students without transportation to school; students with various learning abilities; teen parents without childcare and students who need to work during regular school hours (Rhodes, Hill, Vadodaria, Carter, & Gold, 2011).

At an independent school district in Texas, a school operates under a waiver from the state that allows for unique flexibility in student attendance (De La Rosa, 1998). With this flexibility of attendance, students can attend school for a minimum of two hours a day with two or three hours of supplemented independent studies at home or school (De La Rosa, 1998). Most importantly, the two-hour sessions are extended beyond regular school hours. Students can choose to attend school anytime from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. all year round (De La Rosa, 1998). This flexibility in schedule is not one that is common in traditional school settings. The limitations in available times for students to

attend school are often contributors to the dropout dilemma. Students often give up on traditional school systems due to the excessive regulations and rigid structure (De La Rosa, 1998). Students who dropout of traditional school systems report that the strict regulations and structure does not allow them to make up credits (De La Rosa, 1998). At this school, however, the waiver also grants students a one-week window to make up any missed absences (De La Rosa, 1998). According to the literature, these types of policies are most successful in supporting students and preventing them from falling behind in credits.

Lower student enrollment is another characteristic of a successful alternative school found in the literature (Lange, 1998). On average, most alternative schools have less than 200 students enrolling in alternative programs throughout the year (Lange, 1998). A smaller teacher-to-student ratio enables alternative schools to give their student population the individualized attention students require to succeed (De La Rosa, 1998). A study found that students at an alternative high school did not want to return to their assigned traditional high school when they recognized how much teachers and staff cared about helping them succeed (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Effective teacher behavior is grounded in warm student-teacher relationships that have an increased ratio of success to failure experiences for students (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009).

Overrepresentation

Although many recent studies have made efforts to reframe how alternative schools are perceived, few studies in the field of alternative education have been able to

center the voices of Students of Color throughout their educational trajectories despite overrepresentation. In a study of one continuation high school that focused on the voices of five Chicana students, the authors reconceptualized the way educational scholarship defines high achievement in students (Malagón & Alvarez, 2010). The authors highlighted how through the resistance strategies of five Chicana female students, they were able to defy the social expectations of an alternative school setting (Malagón & Alvarez, 2010). These five Chicanas in the study proved that they were able to graduate from an alternative school, attend community college, transfer to a four-year university, and continue on to graduate school despite the expectations of the continuation high school (Malagón & Alvarez, 2010). Although this study specifically highlighted the experiences of Chicana students, it also made note of the other students most likely to be enrolled in continuation high schools throughout the state of California.

This study analyzed 2007-2008 California high school enrollment compared to continuation high school enrollment by race and ethnicity, stating that 45 percent of students enrolled in a traditional high school are Latinx and 8 percent of them are African American, compared to the 56 percent of Latinx and 11 percent of African American students enrolled in a continuation high school (Malagón & Alvarez, 2010). White students, however, represent 32 percent of the total high school student population and only 24 percent of the total population enrolled in continuation schools (Malagón & Alvarez, 2010). This study clearly identified that Black and Latinx students represent the majority of students in alternative education settings. This becomes an increasing concern for all Students of Color who are marginalized in traditional school settings and pushed

into the alternative education system. When the increasing number of Black and Latinx students in alternative education schools are ignored, they become normalized in the education system, and it becomes easy for school officials, administrators, politicians, and researchers to forget to question why they are being over enrolled in the alternative education system.

In another study by Malagón (2010), she continued her focus on Chicanos in continuation schools to address the increase enrollment of Chicano male students that is correlated with the drastic increase of continuation schools. Malagón (2010) argues that the increasing number of Chicano students enrolled in alternative education programs are often ignored and unaddressed. The focus of this study, however, was in the disengagement of schooling as a form of resistance from students. This study also used oral history methods to reclaim the narrative of students and their educational life history through oppressive educational structures. Similarly, Loutzenheiser's (2002) study also discussed young female students' experiences in alternative high schools as they described their alienation and disconnection from traditional schooling. This study focused on how alternative schools were effective at reengaging nine female students back into schooling and how larger traditional high schools can be more responsive to the needs of students (Loutzenheiser, 2002).

One recent case study of a single continuation high school in California focused on the referral of students from traditional high schools. This study found that the referral and removal processes to push students out of a traditional local high school supported an institutional investment in whiteness (Dunning-Lozano, 2016). The hidden investment in

preserving whiteness as property was demonstrated by the removal of mostly non-white and low-income students from mainstream schooling and into alternative schools (Dunning-Lozano, 2016). That is, traditional high schools are more likely to protect institutional whiteness than to invest in the academic, emotional, cultural, and social support of Black and Latinx students who are struggling in traditional schooling. Preserving the whiteness of an institution and, therefore, the threat of having Students of Color, comes at the expense of removing Black and Latinx students from traditional high schools.

This study at Sunnydale Continuation High School found that students who are sent to the district's continuation high school came to the alternative school setting with limited access to curriculum that would have prepared them to attend college or be prepared for the workforce (Dunning-Lozano, 2016). For example, students who were referred to the continuation school did not take elective courses or foreign language courses at the previous traditional school to help them meet the entrance requirements for eligibility at the California State University and University of California systems (Dunning-Lozano, 2016). When traditional schools do not send students who are on track to graduating high school or attend college, alternative schools are pressured to support the challenges these students, who are mostly Students of Color, require but were never given.

Scholars have argued that the institutional investment in whiteness as property is even more apparent and accomplished when alternative schools in a district composed of predominately white students continued to pushout mostly Students of Color (Dunning-

Lozano, 2016). In this study, the results showed that, at the mainstream traditional high school, whites represented 40 percent, and Blacks and Latinx only represented a combined percentage of 18 percent; while at the alternative high school serving the same student demographics in the district, whites represented only 22 percent, and Black and Latinx students made up 55 percent (Dunning-Lozano, 2016). The data in demographics reveals that the removal practices and enrollment for the alternative school were significantly stratified by race. This means that even when traditional schools may be praised for their success, it is necessary to evaluate which students are benefiting from this support in success, and whether or not all students have access to the same support.

As research has pointed out, in public alternative schools, not only are predominantly Black and Latinx students overrepresented, but it is also students of low socioeconomic backgrounds (Foley & Pang, 2006). In the alternative education system of California, continuation high schools are more ethnically and racially overrepresented than the state's traditional high schools (Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). Unfortunately, there is a gap in the literature that goes beyond providing statistical data about the overrepresentation of Students of Color in the alternative education system. Although the literature points to the overrepresentation of Black and Latinx students, research in the field has not been able to tell about their pushout experiences.

However, research on alternative education has found that many Students of Color have had positive and negative experiences alike in alternative schools. For this reason, the literature tends to be contradictory. Since not all students are successful in traditional school settings, it is especially necessary that alternative education programs

support the needs of marginalized students (Kim, 2011). The factors that support the success of students in alternative education settings may be unique, but are not necessarily exclusive to alternative schools. More importantly, research has not been able to identify the ways in which traditional high schools participate in racialized practices and policies aimed at the pushout of Black and Latinx students.

School-to-Prison Pipeline

What is known from the literature on student pushout is that, with limited options, Black and Latinx students on the path of not graduating high school are pushed out of traditional high schools and sometimes, but not always, sent to alternative schools that are supposed to offer them a better opportunity. Students who are not transferred into the alternative education system may end up on the path of juvenile delinquency and enter the criminal justice system (Annamma, 2015). If they are fortunate enough, some students will find alternative school systems and community organizations that are willing to offer them an opportunity they deserve to complete a high school diploma. Continuation high schools are recognized as institutions available in school districts for those students in need of an opportunity to receive a high school diploma (Kelly, 1993). Yet, rarely are these schooling options made available for Black and Latinx students when they are being pushed out of traditional high schools. Whether traditional high schools push students out into the streets or transfer them to an alternative school, research in alternative education has not been able to explain how these decisions are made for students. The racialized processes schools undergo to decide the fate of a student is unknown. These important decisions that traditional schools are responsible for

perpetuate cycles that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, particularly for Black and Latinx students.

As the literature has defined, the school-to-prison pipeline refers to the consequences of harsh school discipline policies that permanently remove many “at-risk” labeled students from the school system (Annamma, 2015). These practices and policies specifically target and push youth out of the classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice system (Annamma, 2015). In traditional school settings, “students from communities of color experience the school system as a funnel where they are outed from the schoolhouse doors to the doors of a prison” (Annamma, 2015, p. 192). The pipeline reflects how school systems prioritize the incarceration of students over their education (Annamma, 215). Rather than offering alternative measures to support their educational achievement, discipline policies continue to use suspension and expulsion as the only solution

The educational policies and practices that push students out of traditional schools undermine the life chances for Students of Color and denies them the equality of being (Robbins, 2005). In many cases, students have no choice or influence on the decisions schools make for their future. It may even be possible that traditional high schools do not always find the need to explain decisions of removal and transfer to students and their families. It is for this reason that Black and Latinx students can show up to a continuation high school without prior knowledge about why they are no longer enrolled at their previous school. Research has not addressed whether it is possible to notify students regarding these important decisions.

What recent research has been able to point to is that, as schools continue to embrace zero tolerance policies, Students of Color are at high risk of being expelled from traditional schools and more likely to be arrested and processed into the criminal justice system (Thomson, 2011), or transferred into the alternative education system. Zero-tolerance practices operate in direct opposition of correcting student behavior, making communities and schools supposedly safer by opting for quick pushout methods such as suspensions or expulsions (Nelson, Jolivette, Leone, & Mathur, 2010). These pushout methods deprive students a chance to receive the support they need to succeed academically. Zero-tolerance practices make it more likely for students to drop out of school and enter the criminal justice system (Nelson, Jolivette, Leone, & Mathur, 2010), and these practices are part of the racialized processes that can determine who can remain at the school and who must be removed. The state of California is recognized for having some of the most strict and harsh school-based discipline policies targeting Black and Latinx students. Zero-tolerance policies form part of the racialized processes that allow traditional high schools to remove Black and Latinx students into alternative schools, but recent research has not examined how they actually occur.

Gap in the Literature

Furthermore, the gap in the literature in the limited existing research in alternative education does not address how Students of Color, specifically Black and Latinx youth are removed from traditional high schools and referred to alternative schools (De La Rosa, 1998; Kim, 2011). Although some of the literature addresses the problem in the overrepresentation of Students of Color from low socioeconomic backgrounds enrolled in

continuation high schools (De La Rosa, 1998; Dunning-Lozano, 2016; Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr, et al., 2009; Malagón, 2010; Munoz, 2004) the process of how schools actually transfer students has not been studied. Most importantly, the gap in the literature has not included the pushout experiences as it is understood and told from Black and Latinx voices (De La Rosa, 1998; Kim, 2011).

Theoretical Framework and Concepts

Based on a review of the limited literature available, a study that uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) will further our understanding of institutional responsibility in the process of Black and Latinx students who are removed from traditional schools and pushed into the alternative education system. For this reason, this study will draw on CRT and the concept of student pushout to make sense of the racialized experiences of Black and Latinx youth.

Critical Race Theory

The purpose of CRT in education is to examine the connection between race and educational inequity. Twenty-three legal scholars of color developed CRT as an intellectual movement that flourished out of the need to respond to the historical developments of the times (Crenshaw, 2011). The interdisciplinary nature of this theoretical framework began from the related fields of legal studies, ethnic studies, and women's studies (Yosso, 2005). These scholars were all amongst the first professors of color to be hired at a predominantly white law school, and many of them also participated

in various Critical Legal Studies (CLS) conferences (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Their involvement in CLS is what led to the development of what we now know as CRT. Although CLS had provided critical insight about how the legal process worked, it did not address the struggles of people of color (Brown & Jackson, 2013). CRT emerged out of a desire to understand “how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color had been created and maintained in America” (Brown & Jackson, 2013, p. 37). Dissatisfied with the traditional civil rights discourse, what these legal scholars ultimately wanted was a movement that would create change (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Through CRT, these legal scholars hoped to expose how racism and subordination are in the everyday lives of people of color (Brown & Jackson, 2013).

Therefore, through a CRT lens grounded in pushout as a conceptual framework, student voice can be used to study the racialized experiences of students. For the purpose of this study and in the broader field of education, CRT is a theoretical framework that is used as a tool to examine how race and racism impact a range of educational issues affecting people of color (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). The contributions of various CRT scholars have uncovered “the ways that race manifests itself to create oppressive educational experiences for students of color and their families, in seemingly race neutral contexts relative to pedagogy, policy, and curriculum” (Lynn & Dixson, 2013, p. 3). For the purpose of my study, CRT illuminates how traditional high schools and alternative schools alike are believed to be race-neutral places. Through CRT, scholars are able to challenge what were previously considered commonsense beliefs about people of color

and the cultural practices that lead them to poverty and educational disparities (Lynn & Dixson, 2013).

Through much scholarship, CRT became an explanatory framework to account for the role of race and racism in education (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2014). Specifically, five tenets of CRT were developed to identify and challenge racism and subordination in education (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2014). The five tenets of CRT include: (1) centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; (2) challenge to dominant ideologies and deficit perspectives; (3) centrality of experiential knowledge; (4) interdisciplinary analyses; and (5) explicit commitment to social justice (Solórzano, 1998). A main goal of CRT in education is to explain how race operates in the structural, cultural, and local everyday levels of society and education (Brown, 2014). The CRT lens is used in the field of education to explain the permanence and influences of race, racism, and white supremacy in the classroom (Matias & Liou, 2015). The five tenets of CRT allow for a deeper understanding of race that has the potential to disrupt normative speech by validating experiential knowledge of people of color (Matias & Liou, 2015).

Therefore, this study will specifically use student voice to value the experiential knowledge Black and Latinx students have about their own pushout from school.

Ladson-Billings (2013) argues that it becomes the obligation of CRT to not only address endemic racism in schools and public spaces, but to deconstruct the laws and policies that continue to re-inscribe racism and deny students their full rights. Therefore, for this study, CRT is used as an analytical tool to reframe discussions about the role of racism in educational inequity and to understand the racialized processes Black and Latinx

experience in their pushout from traditional schools and into the alternative education system.

Race, Racism, and Race Evasiveness

Although there is little disagreement on the concept of race as a social construct (Bonilla-Silva, 2013), the same cannot be said about the concept of racism. In today's society, racial groups have different interpretation of racism. For whites, racism is simply understood as a form of prejudice; for people of color, racism is systemic (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). Bonilla-Silva (2013) argues that it is a new form of racism that reproduces racial inequality through subtle institutional practices. Even when whites claim that race and racism are no longer a problem, Blacks and racial minorities continue to fall behind whites in every aspect of social life (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). People of color are three times more likely than whites to be poor and earn 40 percent less than whites (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). People of color are overrepresented in police arrests, incarceration, and the overall criminal justice system (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). Despite integration efforts, not surprisingly, students of color also receive an inferior education when compared to the education of whites (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). The persistence of this racial inequality has been long understood as a result of what has been theorized as colorblind racism. Bonilla-Silva (2013) argues that colorblind racism exists through justifications from whites that exculpate them from taking responsibility for racial inequality or the status of people of color. It is when whites assert that they do not see color (Bonilla-Silva, 2013) that racism further prevails.

To expand on the framework of colorblindness, race evasiveness has been used to challenge the inherently problematic term “color-blind” as it maintains a deficit notion of people with disabilities (Annamma, Jackson & Morrison, 2017; Watts & Erevelles, 2004). Recent research has argued that colorblindness limits the ways racial ideology can be dismantled through this ableist language (Annamma, Jackson & Morrison, 2017). Therefore, I use race evasiveness throughout my work instead. Through the presence and practices of race evasive ideologies in schools, this becomes a critical conceptual framework to keep in mind when conducting research on the pushout of Black and Latinx students.

Institutional Racism

Under CRT, institutional racism is another important concept tied to racial ideologies. Without an understanding of structural racism, it can be difficult for people to understand everyday forms of racism experienced by people of color (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2014). Institutional racism then becomes a key concept in uncovering the function and permanence of racism (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2014). Through the lens of CRT, institutional racism is defined as “formal or informal structural mechanisms, such as policies and processes that systematically subordinate, marginalize, and exclude non-dominant groups and mediates their experiences with racial microaggressions” (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2014, p. 7). The concept of institutional racism provides explanations for the larger structural conditions that influence the occurrences of racial microaggressions (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2014). For my research, institutional racism is a useful framework under CRT to conceptualize the racialized practices and policies

that traditional high schools engage in to remove Black and Latinx students from their institutions.

Deficit Thinking and Meritocracy

Deficit thinking is an ideology that influences racism in school policy and practice. The deficit thinking model argues that students who fail in school do so because of their own internal deficits or deficiencies (Valencia, 2010). Deficit perspectives argue that failing students have limited intellectual abilities, lack motivation to learn, and have linguistic shortcomings (Valencia, 2010); thus, this framework blames student failure on Students of Color. From a critical race perspective, deficit thinking ignores “the role of systemic factors in creating school failure, lacks empirical verification, relies more on ideology than science, grounds itself in classism, sexism, and racism, and offers counter-productive educational prescriptions for school success” (Valencia, 2010, p. 7). CRT allows for an understanding of how deficit perspectives of Students of Color blames them for school failure without acknowledging how systematic schooling structures have failed them by not providing them with equal educational opportunities as their counterparts.

Similarly, the concept of meritocracy grounds student success based on their own merit. In our current education system there is much fluidity about what counts as merit (Park & Liu, 2014). Conceptions of merit can drastically vary by institution (Park & Liu, 2014). Research has found that “merit is actually a highly flexible, subjective, and dynamic concept tied to the interests of various stakeholders” (Park & Liu, 2014, p. 47). What counts as something worthy of merit at one institution might not be of much value at another institution. For example, standardized test scores might be of more value

at one institution, while a more holistic approach of achievement might be considered of greater merit at a similar institution. The concept of merit suggests that students who are able to succeed in school are able to because of their own accomplishments (Park & Liu, 2014). This theory of meritocracy is solely based on power, capital, and opportunity, and merit becomes a measurement of individual intellectual talent and achievement (Park & Liu, 2014). Thus, I use CRT to help acknowledge the role of racism in the theory of meritocracy and deficit thinking. When not all students are given the same opportunities for achievement, their perceived merit may not be recognized. Marginalized Students of Color can be easily overlooked based on deficit thinking or meritocratic beliefs of achievement. Both deficit thinking and meritocracy are concepts that can influence the pushout of Black and Latinx students.

Resistance

Following the work of CRT, studies have shown how students themselves have also been able to challenge educational inequity on their own. In the pursuit of a quality education, Students of Color have shown different forms of resistance (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Through the principles of CRT, resistance to racial oppression and educational inequity amongst Students of Color is understood as “political, collective, conscious, and motivated by a sense that individual and social change is possible” (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 320). Students who demonstrate this transformational resistance do so by simply having a critical awareness and critiquing oppressive conditions and structures (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001) that are meant to keep them at the bottom of the racial hierarchy.

Transformational resistance allows students to fight against institutional racism and the everyday forms of racism that have kept them from opportunities that lead to achievement. Students of Color who engage in this work must be recognized for being motivated by a sense of social justice (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Through a CRT approach, transformational resistance has the power to challenge race neutral curriculum, standardized testing, meritocracy (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001), deficit thinking and racial microaggressions. For this study, CRT is used to understand the racialized policies and practices responsible for the pushout of Black and Latinx students while also acknowledging the resistance students have shown.

Shifting from Transfer to Pushout

CRT calls for a shift from individual to institutional analysis of racial inequity, and one such shift exists in the framing of dropout or transfer and pushout in K-12 schools. The official term used by some school boards to describe students who are no longer in attendance at a designated school is “discharge” (Fine, 1991). Much of the existing research on students who stop going to school refers to them as “dropouts” (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006), a label that individualizes the process, despite consistent patterns of high dropout rates amongst low-income children and adolescent Students of Color (Fine, 1991; Lee & Burkham, 2003). This framing tends to focus on students’ socioeconomic background and academic behaviors using deficit explanations for their lack of success in traditional schooling (Lee & Burkham, 2003). “Transfer” is the official term used by state and district policies to

describe students who are leaving the traditional school system and entering alternative education (California Department of Education, 2019).

Critical scholars have challenged the use of the term “dropout,” arguing that it is blaming students and normalizing the permanence of schooling structures; the same can be said about the use of the term “transfer.” To shift from the framing of dropout, Fine (1991) introduced the term “push-out” to acknowledge the bureaucratic regulations governing schools that pressure large number of students to drop-out of school (Cassidy & Bates, 2005). The term “pushout” opposes the concept of the dropout drawing attention to systemic processes (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Luna & Revilla, 2013) and illustrating how state and school policies prevent routes to graduation (Tuck, 2011). For example, federal policies that promote high stakes standardized testing, like No Child Left Behind (2002), create a culture of steep consequences or merit-based rewards for schools based on high-achieving students and testing scores that stand as a barrier to the academic success of many students of Color (Tuck, 2011).

What is rarely used as explanations for student pushout is the way traditional high schools are organized to support pushout practices. Elements of school organization, including size, sector, curriculum, and character of student-teacher relationships (Lee & Burkham, 2003), play a significant role in influencing students to stay or leave school. Research on pushout supports the understanding of how Students of Color are still being referred to and how institutional structures either accept or deny responsibility. This study uses “pushout” as a conceptual framework to acknowledge the bureaucratic

policies and practices governing schools (Fine, 1991) that pressure Black and Latinx students to leave school.

It is Students of Color with the greatest economic disadvantages that receive the least enriching education with fewer and less valuable opportunities for earning a diploma (Fine, 1991). Patterns in pushout from U.S. public schools are further visible when they are stratified by race, ethnicity, social class, gender, and disability (Fine, 1991). The concept of pushout helps understand how students' decision to leave school are not based on individual choice but based on institutional policies and practices and social forces that push students out of school (Luna & Revilla, 2013; Fine, 1991). Some of these factors include disrespectful treatment from school officials, violence in schools amongst students, strict classroom/school rules, and the pressures of high-stakes testing (Tuck, 2011).

The pushout framework acknowledges that the lack of support from the school and community leads to poor academic performance which influences students' decisions to leave school (Berlowitz & Durand, 1976). In many cases, students are counseled out of school in order to meet academic goals or because they present discipline problems that the school may not want to deal with (Luna & Revilla, 2013). It is these reasons that push students out of traditional schools into alternative schools. The framing of the student pushout attempts to hold school systems accountable for placing blame on students without taking responsibility and liability for excluding them from school and depriving them of equal educational opportunities (Berlowitz & Durand, 1976). Encouragement to leave traditional high school to pursue a GED or to permanently leave

school due to behavioral problems, lack of credits, pregnancy or age is also a practice rooted in school pushout (Lukes, 2014). Pushout acknowledges the systemic factors that prevent students from completing high school through zero-tolerance practices and other punitive measures that suspend and expel students (George, 2015). For example, students can be excluded from school through discriminatory treatment or from alienation by the hostility of the environment of the institution that forces them to leave school (Berlowitz & Durand, 1976). The rising number of pushed out students enrolling in adult education suggest that the increased accountability pressures from traditional high schools to improve graduation rates or be forced into closure is what is sending more and more students out of mainstream schooling (Lukes, 2014).

In other instances, students are pushed out of mainstream schools because they are considered too old, do not have enough credits, or are not on track to graduate and receive a diploma in four years (National Clearinghouse for Legal Services, 2005). These pushout practices are forms of illegal expulsions that occur constantly in mainstream schooling (National Clearinghouse for Legal Services, 2005). These policies and practices violate students' rights under the clause of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution that requires students to remain in school until the year they turn 17 and have the right to stay in school and earn a diploma until they turn 21 years of age (National Clearinghouse for Legal Services, 2005). A strong indicator of a possible pushout from schools include low academic expectations and a lack of culturally relevant pedagogy that poor, working-class, immigrant, Students of Color are exposed to (Luna & Revilla, 2013).

In the national context, continuation high schools form part of the alternative education system in California and represent some of the institutions who serve the students who have been pushed out of schools (Gillespie, 1982; Kelly, 1993). These students may be transferred out of traditional schools due to attendance or discipline problems, or students behind on credits needed for graduation (Gillespie, 1982; Kelly, 1993). By serving students after they have been removed from traditional high schools, continuation schools are supposed to be committed to helping students find some measure of educational success (Gillespie, 1982). The removal of students from traditional high schools becomes a racializing⁶ process where Black, Latinx, and other Students of Color become the target of dismissal and become the most overrepresented groups of students in the alternative education system. The pushout framework is a critical concept for this study as it acknowledges the history of systematic racism and inequality that push students out of institutions (George, 2015). The pushout framework is useful in dismantling deficit perspectives found not only in the research but in everyday interactions in alternative schools between students, teachers, and administrators. The pushout framework is indeed necessary for understanding the racialized processes that traditional schools participate in to push students out of their institutions.

⁶ Racializing refers to the practices, institutional cultures, and structures that lead to racial inequality (Lewis, 2004; Omi & Winant, 2014).

Research Questions

Racialization in this context implies that race is a social construct that sustains a social order of power amongst races (Omi & Winant, 2014) in which whites are the top of the hierarchy, and People of Color are at the bottom. Racialization then refers to an ideological process that affects social, racial, and cultural relationships that lead to racial inequality (Omi & Winant, 2014). For this dissertation, I study this topic with the following research questions: (1) What is the transfer process that schools engage in as they place Black and Latinx students in alternative schools?; (2) How are the schools, teachers, and administrations making sense of these processes?; (3) How are students making sense of their pushout from traditional high school?; and (4) Once students are in alternative school settings, what are their experiences?

Chapter 3: Methods

This study utilized qualitative methods to explain how traditional schools transfer students into the alternative education system. Using traditional social science methods of observations, document analysis, and interviews, the analysis and presentation of my data are guided counter-narratives. For the purposes of this study, interviews, observations, and document analysis were the most appropriate methods to answer my research questions and formulate a counter-narrative to the experiences of Black and Latinx youth. Using CRT, the incorporation of counter-narratives allows for the voices of participants to be heard, and in doing so, the counter-narrative is my main method for interpreting and transmitting data through the writing of this research.

Qualitative Research

As part of qualitative work, my research questions describe specific instances of social reality (Becker, 1996). The purpose of qualitative research is to provide “rich, descriptive data about the contexts, activities, and beliefs of participants in educational settings” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 8). Data results from qualitative work represent educational processes as they naturally occur (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Qualitative research involves close investigations in the most fulfilling and exciting ways to study people in their natural settings (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Thus, the goal of my research is to describe a system of relationships (Becker, 1996) between traditional schools and alternative schools. According to Brinkman and Kvale (2015), qualitative research can offer powerful descriptions of the human world.

Study Site

For this study, the human world that I describe is that of one continuation high school with an overrepresentation of Black and Latinx students. I returned to the continuation high school where I taught for four years as an English teacher. My familiarity with the school granted me knowledge needed to select a school site. Rise Continuation High School, located in the greater Los Angeles area in the city of Los Pinos, matches the population of students I wanted to focus on: Black and Latinx youth.

Participants

This study is comprised of 10 total participants. To select six student participants for this study, I used a criterion-based sampling (Creswell, 2007). My criteria for selecting participants was based on the following: (1) enrollment at Rise; (2) transfer from the same traditional high school; (3) race/ethnicity; (4) grade; and (5) English low-track class placement. The six students identified were new transfers at Rise from the same traditional school site, Los Pinos High School. I specifically selected three Black students and three Latinx students, as this study centers on the pushout experiences of the two most marginalized and overrepresented groups of students in the alternative education system.

Four of the selected student participants are new 11th grade transfers. I focus on 11th grade students because they represent a group of students who are the most far behind in credit recovery needed for high school completion. Two of these students are 12th graders, which did not meet the grade criterion but were selected because their participation provided a unique understanding to the study that was not anticipated. All of

the students were placed in the same English low-track, English 2A, class. The 11th grade students were also placed in a class called the Empowerment class for newly transferred students. Their placement in the same classes allowed me to become familiar with the teachers as well, which is why I also selected three teachers to be a part of this study.

All three teachers identified as teachers of Color who were able to talk about their experiences with the selected students and discuss the institutional policies and practices that contributed to their transfer. These teachers were able to provide specific data about each student's academic progress, including their attendance record, missing credits, and grades. The principal at Rise was also one of the participants that took part of this study. His contributions provided a critical understanding into the policies and practices that govern school pushout.

Documents

Another layer used to address my research questions in included document analysis. In qualitative research, official documents have often been viewed by researchers as extremely subjective forms of data that may produce unrealistic portrayals of how institutions and organizations function (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). Some do not believe words and text can express all of the elements of a phenomenon (Mason, 2002). However, Mason (2002) argues that document analysis is a major method of qualitative research that should be understood as a meaningful and appropriate strategy. Using document analysis as a method suggests that written words, texts, records, and documents shape and form meaningful explanations of the social world (Mason, 2002). The method of document analysis is also interested in how the documents were produced and for who

they were produced (Mason, 2002). A qualitative researcher can use school documents as sources of rich description of how the people who produced the documents think about their world (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997).

Although documents may already exist prior to the beginning of the research study, some documents can also be generated through the research process (Mason, 2002). Documents, such as attendance records, report cards, referrals, and expulsion reports provide realistic explanations for how schools choose to push students out of schooling. The process of document analysis involves, “reading, understanding, translating and interpreting documents, selecting them, comparing them” (Mason, 2002, p. 110) in order to add another layer of data construction.

By engaging in a process of reading, understanding, translating, and interpreting documents (Mason, 2002), I was able to answer my research questions. Through active reflexive reading (Mason, 2002) of documents, I was able to understand state and district policies about the transfer of students into alternative high school. I also had access to Rise’s documentation records of new students that had recently transferred; these documents were valuable in allowing me to select student participants for this study. Document analysis was an important method applied to this study because the data needed to answer my research questions was not always available in other forms (Mason, 2002).

To continue triangulation of data collected, documents are an essential component for verifying what is being said during interviews and what is being seen during observations. Document analysis requires not just the collection of files but the accurate

interpretation of every document (Mitra, 2003). Therefore, to ensure I did not misinterpret documents I verified information presented in documents with participants (Mitra, 2003). This method of member checking was useful in reviewing my analysis of documents. Memo writing was also applied as a process of document analysis. I wrote memos for each document that I collected to remind me of what the document represents and how I was able to attain it. These memos elaborate on themes and categories that help specify their purpose and relationship to the students (Malagón, Pérez Huber, & Velez, 2009).

Observations

I began the collection of data with observations at Rise. The method of observations is a valid and major source of data collection in field research (Bailey, 2007). Conducting observations requires researchers to completely immerse in the setting in order to experience and observe a range of dimensions in the study of choice (Mason, 2002). The observations in this study were structured, meaning the observations and targets are predetermined for a specific time and place (Bailey, 2007). My observations started in the main office at Rise for a period of time. I was then referred to the Empowerment class, where I spent the rest of the year observing. Concurrently, I also observed an English classroom, Ms. Piper's classroom, where most of the student participants were placed. Access into these settings is not a straightforward process (Mulhall, 2003). However, my positionality as a former teacher at Rise Continuation High School granted me access into this particular school site. Many district personnel knew who I was and were very helpful in granting me approval to conduct a research

study in the district. I also knew the current principal at Rise because he used to be the assistant principal during my appointment as a teacher. He remembered me and was very excited to have me back to conduct research. Although my positionality granted me access into the school site, I was still required to spend considerable time and effort (Mulhall, 2003) to situate myself as a researcher, especially with the participants who did not know me.

At Rise, I observed student-teacher interactions, as well as peer-to-peer interactions, during classroom instruction and classroom breaks. I selected to observe low-track classes (Oakes, 2005), as that is where I expected to find the most recently transferred students; however, I ended up finding most of my student participants in the Empowerment class. Prior to the start of this project, I was not aware of the existence of that class. My research strategy for observations was to shadow students concurrently in these classroom spaces where I expected to find them grouped together. During these classroom shadowing observations, I specifically focused on the institutional dynamics, the content of the class, how students respond to the curriculum, and the overall discourse of the class. These observations guided the interviews conducted with student participants and teachers themselves.

Observations also included various type of meetings. I was invited to join staff meetings, parent-teacher meetings, student-teacher meetings, and official transfer meetings. I was interested in observing any formal type of meeting that might reveal details about students' experiences at Rise or about their removal from traditional school site. For this project, it was important to be present and observe any formal or informal

transfer meetings. During these observations, I was specifically paying attention for racialized interactions that might result in the pushout of Black and Latinx students. For example, using CRT and pushout as conceptual frameworks, I kept in mind race evasive, deficit, and meritocratic ideologies used to describe student's academic potential, as well as any forms of obvious, direct racist practices limiting the opportunities students receive.

I preferred to be a non-participant observer to simply focus on the act of observing (Bailey, 2007). The role of a complete observer required that I do not participate in any activities at the setting that I am observing (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). Observations were conducted every school day for the first three months since the first day of the academic year. Once my six student participants were selected, I continued to observe and shadow them throughout their transitioning process, going from classroom to classroom. Each day of the week, I took turns shadowing a different student. For the purpose of this study, it was critical that observations were conducted during complete and full school days to ensure I am there when students first arrive to school and until the school day is over for them. This observation strategy allowed me access to needed knowledge to answer my research questions.

Part of any good qualitative study involves self-identifying ourselves as researchers (Mason, 2002). Therefore, I detailed data that was generated by my own positionality, including my physical presence during the observations. The observation protocol that I created was based on Bailey's (2007) observation processes, which includes taking notes on place, spaces, objects, actors, act, activity, event, time, goals, and feelings. In my field notes, I noted the structural and organizational features of the

actual environments of the classrooms (Mulhall, 2003). My field notes detailed to how people interact, behave, and move in the daily process of activities (Mulhall, 2003). Dialogue between the participants observed was also included in field notes (Mulhall, 2003). I also kept a personal reflective journal that included my own personal thoughts, reflections, and life experiences that filtered what I observed throughout a day (Mulhall, 2003).

As part of the observation protocol, I included guiding questions to help me focus on my observations (Bailey, 2007). Amended field-notes were also part of the observation method needed for analysis. The amended field-notes included coding as a form of intensive reflection and careful reading of the notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Coding is used in qualitative research to categorize small segments of field-notes that were recorded and allows for a careful reading of field-notes to identify themes, patterns, or variations (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). The practice of open coding allows researchers to generate as many codes as possible (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). These codes, for example, can identify common patterns in the removal of students from the traditional high school.

Interviews

This study primarily relied on interviews to collect data that addressed the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Stake, 2005). Interviews were used in my research project to clarify and expand on a theme or issue that was noted during observations or document analysis. Stake (2005) argues that selecting themes or issues prior to an interview can help the organization of the interview. This method of

interviewing can particularize an experience that has not yet been explained (Stake, 2005). Therefore, I developed different themes for the various interview protocols that were used throughout data collection. For example, some themes for interviewing that emerged after informal observations and document analysis included: school policies, discipline, transfer referrals, transition, attendance, and grades.

Interviews were selected as a method for this study in order to understand the world from the interviewees' points of view and understand the meaning of their lived experiences (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Interviewing is an active process that involves the interviewer and the interviewee producing knowledge through their relationship (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Before conducting interviews, I spent time in the classrooms building rapport for approximately three months. Interview knowledge can be produced in a conversational relation that is contextual, linguistic, narrative, and pragmatic (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). The main task of the interviewer is to build upon and explore the participants' responses to the questions asked (Seidman, 2013). The goal was to have participants reconstruct their experiences within the topic of study (Seidman, 2013). Through these types of conversations, knowledge was produced to allow others to get to know people and their experiences, feelings, attitudes, and the world they live in (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). The data collected from these interviews inform my findings to answer my research questions, which provide an understanding of how Black and Latinx students make sense of their racialized pushout from school.

I conducted four interviews for each of the six student participants that were one to two hours long. After the three-month observation period, students were interviewed

once during each of the four quarters at Rise. The initial interview with each student interview focused on learning about their educational history and understanding their transition process. I specifically asked students to reflect on the transfer process and their current context. The questions probed students to identify specific practices that they believe are the reasons for their removal from the traditional high school. The interview topics were guided by events in the observations that were documented. The final interview was closer to the end of the academic year, where I asked students about their overall experience at the continuation high school. Interviews were scheduled before and after school hours to avoid taking up instruction time away from the students. On some occasions, when students preferred, lunch time was also used to conduct interviews with participants.

Teachers were interviewed once for a duration of approximately two hours. Teachers and I met during after-school hours in their respective classrooms. Although I formally interviewed teachers towards the end of the school year, I relied on informal conversations with the teachers throughout the year to either clarify observations or ask about particular students. The principal at Rise was formally interviewed a total of three times throughout the academic year. Each of the interviews were approximately 45 minutes long. As a researcher, I prefer flexibility in regard to how interviews are administered (Bailey, 2007); therefore, for this research study, I conducted semi-structured interviews, where I developed an interview guide for the different types of participants I interviewed but did not necessarily always follow the order of the guide. I asked and skipped questions depending on the flow of the interview (Bailey, 2007). I

engaged in dialogue with the participant before asking any of the questions and often continued random conversations as they emerged.

To ensure the accuracy of the interviews conducted, all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Following the transcriptions from the interviews, I carefully read through the transcriptions to search for codes, which were placed on the margins of the transcriptions to allow me to find specific themes (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Harding, 2013). Codes that emerged included, but were not limited to, racialization, transfer, racism, deficit thinking, pushout, school policies, curriculum, and attendance. These codes were useful for analyzing findings under each category (Harding, 2013).

To facilitate the validation of all data collected from interviews, observations, and documents, a triangulation (Stake, 2005) analysis approach was applied. The cross verification of these methods ensured the data collection was accurately represented (Stake, 2005) in the lived experiences of Black and Latinx youth. Triangulation was applied to ensure the pushout experiences of students were properly interpreted and presented (Mitra, 2006). Through member checking, I asked the participants of this study to review and edit triangulation analysis to further reinforce the trustworthiness and accuracy (Stake, 1995) in the analysis. Participants were sent a copy of the transcription to review and provide feedback on the coding or interpretation of the interview (Malagón, Pérez Huber, & Velez, 2009).

Presentation of Data

When we consider the dire overrepresentation of Black and Latinx students in schools that underserve them as well as patterns of pushout into alternative schools, it is important to consider how systems and issues of race contribute to this context. Students of Color are rarely given a voice in academic literature to explain for themselves how the continuous attempts of removal and pushout from school have impacted their educational trajectories. In fact, very limited research focusing on the experiences of Black and Latinx students in continuation high schools exists.

Rooted in a strong social justice framework, student voice is used in educational research to provide a unique understanding on learning, teaching, and schooling that is often not included in research (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). The principles of rights, respect, and listening become a central focus to the use of student voice in educational research (Cook-Sather, 2006), often used to “transform traditional power hierarchies and afford K-12 students more influence” (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009, p.87) over what research says about their experiences. In the case of my study, as most research has framed students in alternative education as pushouts with a history of violence, truancy, or academic failure, student voice allows for the reframing of how institutions contribute to the pushout of students.

Rather than simply defining their educational experiences for them, through the use of student voice, my research allows for Black and Latinx students to make sense of their school pushout and removal from traditional schools. Through student voice, the purpose of this research was to reframe how students’ pushout has labeled them as

academic failures. Black and Latinx student insights warrant not only attention (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009) and inclusion in the limited alternative education literature, but also demands response and action from the adults, educators, and communities who work directly with them throughout their educational trajectory. Thus, I use student voice because their voices have the power to influence analyses, decisions, policies, and practices that affect them in schools (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Counter-Narratives of Students of Color

I specifically use the method of counter-narratives (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004) to represent the voices of marginalized Black and Latinx students. Since CRT centers the experiential knowledge of Students of Color, it is only appropriate for a qualitative study to use counter-narratives to incorporate student voice. This study captured student voice in the form of counter-narratives to reveal what their experiences were truly like as they transitioned from a traditional high school and entered the alternative education system. Part of the work of critical race theorists is to use the voice of people of color in “naming one’s own reality” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p.42). Chronicles, storytelling, and counter-narratives are used to expose the reality that racial biases are deeply embedded in American law and culture (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Counterstorytelling, for example, is not only used as method to heal from racial oppression, but it allows for the realization of how minority groups came to be oppressed and subjugated, leading them to perhaps internalize the stereotypical images that have been constructed to maintain white power (Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995). The point of counterstorytelling is not to vent about racial struggle, but to illustrate legal principles regarding race and social justice (Ladson-

Billings, 2013). Counterstories, or counter-narratives, are a method for telling the experiences of students that are often not included in dominant narratives (Delgado, 1989). Counter-narratives arise out of individual or group experiences that run opposite of dominant narratives (Stanley, 2007). These counter-narratives can also be used as a tool for analyzing and challenging dominant narratives (Delgado, 1989) from the perspective of Students of Color. For this research study, I used counter-narratives as a tool to present the data. By deconstructing dominant narratives, counter-narratives can offer alternative discourses in educational research (Stanley, 2007). Rather than accepting the normalization of dominant narratives that often dehumanize racial minority groups, counter-narratives reveal the real lived experiences of students.

Counter-narratives were used in my study to raise awareness on racial and social injustices (Yosso, 2006). It is important to recognize these stories as valuable knowledge that can offer new insight. For example, the counter-narrative to the labeling of Students of Color as being “at-risk” is that students do not lack the skills to succeed, but rather struggle through deficit models in schools that do not acknowledge their cultural legacies (Valenzuela, 2004; Stanley, 2007). Rather than accepting dominant narratives, counter-narratives in this research relied on the educational histories and realities of oppressed communities (Yosso, 2006). Attention must be given to those who continuously and courageously resist racism and struggle to create a more racially and socially just world (Yosso, 2006). Counter-narratives in this dissertation were constructed from observations, document analysis, and interviews. In the following chapters, I use counter-narratives to present my examination of the lives of Black and Latinx students as

they are removed from traditional high schools and experience daily interactions of racism, sexism, or classism (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

Chapter 4: The Institutional Transfer Process

Students in alternative education are there for varied reasons, but most students begin their secondary education at a traditional comprehensive high school. Since Black and Latinx students account for the majority of students attending alternative high schools, it is necessary to understand aspects of the transfer process that drive inequitable overrepresentation. This chapter focuses on critically analyzing state and district transfer policies and understanding how they are actually followed in practice. Through observations, document analysis of state and district policy, interviews with teachers, counselors and school leaders, and in-depth interviews with students, I answer the following research questions: (1) What is the transfer process that schools engage in as they place Black and Latinx students in alternative schools?; and (2) How are the schools, teachers, and administrations making sense of these processes? I found that each stakeholder had a different perception of the transfer process: some viewed the transfer process as punitive; others described the process as fair; and others believed students were advised to leave for their presumed best interest.

I begin with an examination of state and district transfer policy, followed by an extension of how various stakeholders across the Los Pinos Unified School District understand and apply this policy. I then provide an interpretation for how students end up in the alternative education system according to the principal and teachers, followed by an examination of students' transition once they arrive at Rise Continuation High School. I conclude this chapter by arguing that transfer into alternative high schools is framed as a fixed and neutral entity by the school district and its stakeholders. I argue that

race evasive justifications (Annamma, Jackson & Morrison, 2017) are used to ignore the racialized pushout of Black and Latinx students.

District Transfer Policy

Continuation schools were developed as a response to the national pushout crisis that was first recognized in the 1960s (Kelly, 1993). California legislation allows school districts to establish alternative schools and programs of choice as long as they meet the following requirements (California Department of Education, 2020):

- Both the teachers and the students must be volunteers.
- Alternative schools of choice must be maintained and funded at the same level of support as other educational programs.
- Alternative schools and programs of choice must meet the same standards for curriculum, instruction, and student performance as traditional schools.
- The school district must annually evaluate such schools and programs.

The premise behind this policy acknowledges that not every student can thrive in a traditional comprehensive school context, and therefore, alternative schools and programs can provide flexible scheduling structures, instructional strategies, and varying learning styles to accommodate the needs of diverse learners (California Department of Education, 2020). Most importantly, per California legislation, alternative schools must be voluntary institutions for districts, teachers, students, and their families (California Department of Education, 2020). Although school districts are supposed to have available alternative schools and programs for students not considered successful in traditional school settings, the process of how it happens is unclear. This is a significant current gap in the literature on alternative education (Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012) that warrants a detailed explanation of how schools actually transfer students.

In California, the explicit policy governing continuation education states that students must be between the ages of 16 and 18 years to attend these schools (California Department of Education, 2020). However, it is also permitted under California law that students can voluntarily or involuntarily be transferred from traditional schools under the age of 16 if they find it necessary (California Department of Education, 2020). Together, the policies include contradictory guidelines: on the one hand, it states that alternative schools must be voluntary spaces, but on the other hand, it also states that school districts can involuntarily transfer students into the alternative education system. These competing policies allow for misinterpretation and gives school districts power to control how this policy is followed. Ultimately, the unclear guidelines, including the required age limit, leave more room for unjust approaches regarding the removal of students. Due to these unclear guidelines, neighboring school districts often follow their own interpretation of these guidelines as they see fit in the transfer of students.

In the case of Los Pinos Unified School District, the transfer policy states that it cannot grant mid-year transfers between schools under their district (Los Pinos Unified School District, 2020), but this policy is not specific enough to identify if this excludes alternative schools. There are four traditional high schools, and when students are transferred out, they can either be sent to the independent study high school or Rise Continuation High School (Los Pinos Unified School District, 2020). The district's attendance and punctuality policy by the Board of Education states that students may be transferred into alternative schools or referred to the District Attorney's office if they are frequently absent from school without sufficient cause (Los Pinos Unified School

District, 2020). Students' parents or guardians have up to five days to clear up any unexcused absences with proper documentation. This policy also refers to excessive tardies, stating that they can lead to school detention, suspension, and/or transfer into Rise (Los Pinos Unified School District, 2020). Under this tardy policy, students are expected to be in class by the time the tardy bell rings. The district's policy on attendance and punctuality does not clearly provide a number of unexcused absences or tardies before students are transferred into one of the alternative schools. The district, however, may recommend students for transfer if they fall behind on at least 30 credits towards graduation requirements (Los Pinos Unified School District, 2020). Prior to any transfer into any of the alternative high schools, students must meet with their current school counselor to review their records, complete a graduation check, and clarify any requirements (Los Pinos Unified School District, 2020).

At Rise, this policy allows students classified as "voluntary transfers" to be able to return to their previous traditional high schools only after completing at least one semester. This policy is not true for students classified as "involuntary transfers;" these students have to successfully complete at least two semesters in which they are able to prove that they have caught up on credits and can manage the demands of a traditional school system. Prior to enrolling new students at Rise, administration must ensure that all students meet with counselors at both institutions to get a more accurate review of students' academic trajectory (Los Pinos Unified School District, 2020). Through this categorization, transfer policies are positioned as being neutral and with the possibility of choice for any student who wants to enter the alternative education system.

As part of district-wide policy, traditional high schools that have student transfer recommendations must first individually meet with the two alternative high schools and the Child Welfare, Attendance, and Safety office (CWAS). These meetings are referred to as the “transfer meetings.” Per policy, the transfer meetings are to happen four times during the academic year; once before the start of each quarter under the alternative education academic calendar (Los Pinos Unified School District, 2020). The principal at Rise, however, confirmed during one of the interviews that these transfer meetings are more likely to happen just twice a year; usually before the start of the semester at the traditional high schools.

At the transfer meetings, representatives from each of the high schools may include principals, assistant principals, acting administrators, counselors, and must include representatives from the CWAS office (Los Pinos Unified School District, 2020). To maintain a more neutral environment, these meetings do not happen at any of the respective high schools; transfer meetings are always hosted at the Los Pinos Unified CWAS office. The purpose of the meetings is to provide recommendations about where to place students who have been identified by counselors at each of the traditional high schools as unsuccessful in the traditional school system. Success in this context is defined as students who are missing at least 30 credits, which is equivalent to 6 classes that students either failed, never passed, or never attended despite being enrolled (Los Pinos Unified School District, 2020). At this meeting, traditional high schools are expected to bring a list with student names for the various stakeholders present to review (Los Pinos

Unified School District, 2020). Collectively, they must make a school recommendation for each of the students on the list.

Educator's Understanding of Transfer Policy

To understand how these district-wide transfer policies actually operate, I interviewed the school leader of Rise, Principal Stevens, and several teachers at the school. Principal Stevens identifies as a white, middle-aged, man and a resident of Los Angeles County. He has worked at Rise for the past eight academic years, but he officially became principal during the 2016 academic year. Before working at Rise, he was a dean at an elementary school in the same school district. When asked what brought him to work at a continuation high school, he explained that he always felt a need to work with “at-risk” high school students. As I had unpacked earlier, “at-risk” is a deficit term that positions students as failures, usually referring to marginalized Black and Latinx students. This term on its own is a problematic deficit label that places blame on the individual students, while not acknowledging institutional factors (Bonilla-Silva, 2013) that contributes to their perceived failure. This is precisely the type of language that becomes race evasive (Annamma, Jackson & Morrison, 2017) when describing the educational experiences of Black and Latinx students. During one of our interviews, he shared what he knew and understood about the transfer process for students. He explained that there used to be a time when continuation schools were only sent students with behavioral issues without much explanation, which then caused a negative stigma (Kelly, 1993; Kim, 2011) in the local community about continuation schools only serving problematic youth (Brown & Beckett, 2007).

To avoid alternative school being a “dumping ground” for students traditional schools just do not want, he confirms that the transfer process was developed and is overseen by the district’s CWAS office to ensure that “schools don’t send students for behavioral issues, and to ensure that there are actually reasons outside of behavior as to why they are being sent out, which is usually credit deficiency” (Principal Stevens, personal communication, April 5, 2019). His interpretation of the transfer process is as follows:

We meet before the beginning of each quarter, we set up meetings at the district office with each traditional high school, either the counselors come or the administrators come and we sit down. A list is generated strictly based on students who are 30 or more credits behind and we go through each one of those kids and we look at some of the criteria, if they are special ed then we say we need to set up an IEP for this kid and look at their possibilities of transferring. If they are low EL level then they remain at their high school and we just kind of go down the list and if the school does not have a viable plan for the student to get caught up and graduate on time then they are involuntarily transferred here. And so what is supposed to happen at that point is that the schools go back and there’s a letter that they send home to the family that states that a meeting has been held and that they have been identified as being too far behind and that they need to schedule and appointment with their counselor at the high school and transfer over to Rise High School. There is always a concern about Rise being a bad school for bad kids and they try to put the parents at ease saying it’s a good school, and that it is an ideal school really for kids that are behind. After that then the families meet with the counselors at the high schools, they disenroll and then come here and enroll. (Principal Stevens, personal communication, April 5, 2019)

When asked to describe the transfer meetings, he explained that the length of these meetings varies; some lasting as long as two hours, and others lasting as short as 30 minutes. He has been through several of these meetings throughout the years, and he can almost surely estimate how long each meeting will last based on the principal and school he meets. Principal Stevens explains that during these meetings some principals are more open to a discussion for each of the mentioned students, and other principals are simply

going very quickly down a list of names. Consequently, it is the top feeding school, Los Pinos High School—the traditional high school with the most names—that requires the most time to due to the list of students and that decision that must be made for each. He believes that Los Pinos sends the most students every year into Rise because they are a much larger school and do not have adequate resources to support every student. From his perspective, this is a fair justification for the overrepresentation of students transferring from Los Pinos High School. Principal Stevens did acknowledge however that:

The process is not always followed. Oftentimes, it seems like families seem to be told at the last minute that a student is being transferred out of their high school, sometimes students are just withdrawn and told to come here, without any room for questioning. Obviously, that's not how it's supposed to happen, that's not the policy, but I think that's just how it happens. I don't know how often it happens, but it is something that we have tried to correct, and I think it's gotten better. (Principal Stevens, personal communication, April 5, 2019)

Like Principal Stevens, teachers at Rise also believed the process was fair and about helping or saving those students that have fallen behind on credits. One of the teachers I interviewed is Ms. Lucas, one of the only science teachers at Rise. She is a Latina educator originally from the Inland Empire. She has been a science teacher at Rise for the past seven years and had previously taught at another district for 12 years. She was interested in teaching at Rise because it was closer to her home, and this new position would allow her to pursue an administrative credential. When asked about the transfer process for students, Ms. Lucas explained:

I used to question, 'why do we end up with the students who never show up to class' and I learned when I was working towards my admin credential and I filled in at a meeting. The way it's done Child Welfare, Attendance and Safety Department meet up with the principals of every school and they have a list of

names of students they are recommending to be transferred out, they put the list up on a projector and they go through each student and I think they analyze by going through the students who are credit deficient. I don't think they really use behavior really too much, I think the way they do it is fair, because they are supposed to try to help them out as much as they can at their school. It's mainly credit deficiency and attendance. So what they do is, students who are not an attendance or truancy problem, they sent them to IS, the Independent Studies High School in the district because they are more responsible I guess and the students that are sent to Rise are the ones that are truant all the time, the ones that never show up. So we basically end up with the students with attendance problems. (Ms. Lucas, personal communication, March 23, 2019)

Ms. Lucas believes that a fair transfer process is one connected to students' lack of credits and that attendance and credit deficiency are considered reasonable explanations for the transfer of students from traditional schools. However, she does problematize why Rise ends up with truant students. Ms. Lucas, like most teachers at Rise, struggles with supporting students who do not show up to class, a challenge that traditional schools do not have to worry about as they pass on these students into the alternative education system.

Another teacher at Rise, Ms. Piper who is one of two English Language Arts educators at Rise, echoed this belief. She identifies as a Chicana from Boyle Heights and has been teaching at Rise for 2 years with expectations to move on to a different position in the district by the following year. She hopes to work as the English Language Arts coach for the district. Ms. Piper believes that:

From my understanding there really shouldn't be anything else besides credits considered when making decisions about a student's transfer, it's supposed to be a fair process based on whoever is falling behind on credits. Continuation schools exist because school districts need to provide students with an alternative option to help them recover credits, that's why we are known as credit recovery schools, although we end up doing way more than that. I do not believe students get kicked out for no reason, it's always about grades. I believe that is fair. (Ms. Piper, personal communication, May 6, 2019)

At Rise, educators' beliefs about why students transfer into continuation high school is centered around what is stated in policy. They believe students enter the alternative education setting because they need to make up missing credits. They understand the purpose of a continuation school to be one that is meant to be an alternative to traditional schooling (Kelly, 1993). They do not believe the transfer process could be unfair, and their understanding about the transfer process makes no connection to the identities of students and the overrepresentation (Malagón & Alvarez, 2010) of Black and Latinx students. Their silence about this injustice is a practice rooted in race evasive ideologies (Bonilla-Silva, 2013) that exist in schools. Not acknowledging that there is an overrepresentation of Students of Color transferred into the alternative high school ignores any possible culpability contributing to school pushout.

Policy in Practice

To further investigate how these race evasive ideologies are present in decision making meetings about student transfer, I sat through “transfer meetings” with Rise, the CWAS office, and several of the traditional high schools in the Los Pinos District. I was invited to the transfer meetings by Principal Stevens, and my role there was just to observe the meetings. I shared genuine interest in wanting to understand how these meetings were conducted, and he agreed that it would be a great idea for me to join. I attended the meetings that happened toward the end of the last quarter at Rise in the month of April. Principal Stevens explained that he tried to schedule these meetings within the same day or two, since he has to meet with all of the traditional high schools separately. The meetings are usually structured around lunch time or after school to allow

school representatives more time to drive to the district offices. This works conveniently more so for Rise, since the school is located directly behind the main district building.

The meetings I observed were scheduled after school hours, and all meetings were hosted and overseen by the CWAS office. I was able to see what the transfer meetings are like with three of the traditional schools, including Los Pinos High School, Bayside High School, and Maywood High School. Representatives from Independent Studies High School, the only other alternative high school in the district, were also present at these meetings. Upon arriving at the meeting, everyone greeted each other in a friendly and joking manner to show camaraderie, which conveyed that they were comfortable going through this process again. They acknowledged my presence but did not engage in conversation with me as they understood I was there to observe and take notes. At the start of the meetings, the CWAS representative reminded everyone of the overall goal of the meeting, which was to decide the transfer destination for students. The options included: (1) transfer students to Rise Continuation High School; (2) transfer students to the Independent Studies High School; or (3) keep students at their current traditional high school.

Decisions were supposed to be made based on the amount of credits that students were missing; however, after each school read their list of students who they were recommending for transfer out of traditional schooling, other patterns emerged. For example, if students were new to the district, they were allowed to stay at least one additional semester at whatever traditional school they were enrolled in, unless the student volunteered to transfer into the alternative education system by their own choice.

The rationale for allowing students to stay was that new students needed more time to adjust to a new environment; therefore, all traditional schools with new students on their list kept them at their institutions. Attendance was also a significant factor in determining transfers, and in most cases, for listed students without an attendance problem, traditional schools seemed to be more invested in wanting to keep those students at their school, because the school's ADA (Average Daily Attendance) was not affected by these students. Students who did struggle with attendance were never recommended to transfer into Independent Studies High School. The rationale behind this decision was framed as protecting students from falling more deeply behind on credits. Since Independent Studies High School does not require students to meet daily, they felt students with attendance problems were more likely to become disengaged from school if they were expected to work independently. The belief was that students might find this option much more difficult to work responsibly. As a result, students on those lists with inconsistent attendance were always transferred into Rise.

Decisions were also made with regard to student's language proficiencies. Students on a list who were classified as "low English Language Learners" were to remain at their traditional high school, even if they were 30 or more credits behind, since traditional schools have more bilingual educators and support staff to meet their linguistic needs than there are at any of the alternative high schools. Surprisingly, students on the list who were classified as special needs were eligible to be transferred into any of the alternative high schools. The existing policy states that students in special education are eligible for transfer as long as there is an IEP (Individualized Education Program)

meeting held prior to the formal recommendation in order to collectively assess if an alternative school is a better fit to meet the student's needs (Los Pinos Unified School District, 2020). During the transfer meetings I attended, a recommendation was made for students with special needs with an agreement that there would be an IEP to follow. Yet, students with special needs who would transfer to Rise would only have access to one resource teacher and no instructional aides. Therefore, there was no adequate support available for special needs students at Rise. This same policy was followed for anyone classified as foster youth on the list. Foster students were generally allowed to remain at a traditional high school, unless they requested to transfer out by choice.

During these meetings, common remarks made by counselors and principals in attendance suggested that if a student was recommended for transfer, they would not be happy upon notification. Thus, they expected students to be upset about a recommendation to transfer out. Clearly, these consequences were understood as they were making choices about students' educational trajectories that students would not have otherwise made for themselves. Other opinions shared by principals and counselors during these meetings included comments like, "if they don't start showing up to school on time, they are going to be sent to Rise next semester" or "if they don't pick up their grades, they will end up in alternative education where they belong." (Principal Smith, personal communication, May 11, 2019). These comments serve as punitive warnings that are meant to threaten students' educational trajectories with the threat being that they will be transferred out of their home traditional school and into an alternative high school. In doing so, administrators and counselors that make these remarks to students

and staff are reinforcing beliefs that alternative schools are hierarchically worse places to be. While traditional school leaders engaged in this deficit language by using Rise as a threat to encourage better attendance, grades, and positive student behavior, Principal Stevens found himself constantly reiterating that alternative education was a refuge for many students and that it needed to stop being framed as a punitive option. As a response to the deficit language (Valencia, 2010) that was used throughout the meeting, Principal Stevens reminded stakeholders that many students attend alternative high schools by choice. According to him, students sometimes enroll at Rise because they decide it could be a better educational option for them.

Soon after attending the transfer meeting I learned about the option to appeal a transfer recommendation. After stakeholders have collectively decided the educational fate of students, those that were recommended to be transferred out of traditional high schools must be notified of the decision. At this point, traditional high schools are to send home a letter explaining that students are being recommended to transfer into an alternative high school. In this letter, Principal Stevens explains that students and families are also notified of the appeal process:

The letter explains the appeal process, if they are not in agreement with the decision to be transferred out, they can appeal this decision at Child Welfare, Attendance, and Safety office and set up a meeting with the coordinator up there and then have an appeal. For the most part, even during appeals the counselors will say it is for the benefit of the kid to transfer into continuation high school if they are too far behind. (Principal Stevens, personal communication, April 5, 2019)

However, few teachers at Rise were aware that there was an option to appeal transfer decisions. Ms. Olvera, a math teacher at Rise who has been working in

alternative education for the majority of her teaching career, was not aware that an appeal was an option for students. Ms. Olvera identifies as a first-generation Colombian who grew up in the same community that students reside in. As a student herself, she attended schools from K-12 in the Los Pinos Unified School District, and for this reason, sees herself in her own students. She is regarded as most students' favorite teacher at Rise.

After a classroom observation during a casual conversation, Ms. Olvera explains, "I really did not know that students had the option to appeal, and I'm not too sure if students are even aware of that possibility" (Ms. Olvera, personal communication, March 23, 2019). Ms. Lucas was a teacher that was aware of the appeal process because she is currently working on her administrative credential and this was knowledge she had access to. According to Ms. Lucas, the purpose of this appeal was to allow students to have a final say on what they believe is a better educational option for them. Although appeals are an option provided in a letter for students, in the time Ms. Lucas has been a teacher in the district, she has never seen an appeal approved by the CWAS office. Ms. Lucas explains that it is also likely that these letters never make it home to students. Without the letters, students and their families do not become aware of the option to appeal their transfer. Those that are informed about the option to appeal, however, must be able to contact CWAS, schedule a meeting, and advocate against their transfer from their traditional high school. The process to win an appeal is challenging enough that students and families might not be willing to pursue. Despite the option to appeal, whether classified as "voluntary" or "involuntary" transfers, students must follow specific protocols to transition into any alternative high school.

Transfer Receptive Culture at Rise

The success of student transfer into Rise is dependent on the transfer receptive culture (Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Solórzano, 2011). This type of culture is defined as an institutional commitment by a college or university but could still be applied in the alternative school context to provide the necessary support for a successful transfer (Jain et al., 2011). The institutional commitment at Rise begins when students first withdraw from their high school and enroll at Rise (Los Pinos Unified School District, 2020).

Once at Rise, Principal Stevens explains:

There's a meeting with the counselor, everyone new that comes here meets with the counselor, just to get a basic overview of the school and where they are at in terms of graduating with their credits, as well as to review reasons why they came here. For students that have attendance issues, they meet with the child advocate at the office who can make direct referrals to resources that the families need. It's been a little tricky here this year because we had our Healthy Start program closed down but when we had Healthy Start, that was a very effective process in helping students transition. (Principal Stevens, personal communication, April 5, 2019)

Despite some of the resource cuts, the transfer receptive culture (Jain et al., 2011) upon arriving at Rise involves getting new students acquainted with all of their new counselors and resources available for them. Everyone at Rise does their best at ensuring new students are welcomed properly to ensure an easier transition. As explained by Ms.

Piper:

We try to establish a connection right away with the student advocate on campus so that they can talk with the student and get to know what the issues that brought them here are and get them into counselling if they need counselling, or whether they are homeless give them homeless resources right away or whatever it is we try really hard to connect them right away. (Ms. Piper, personal communication, May 6, 2019)

Before the first day of classes, students must also participate in the new student orientation. This orientation takes place by appointment and, if possible, before the quarter starts. As part of transfer receptive culture (Jain et al., 2011), families and guardians are encouraged to attend the orientation where students learn about the mandatory empowerment class that they have to enroll in during their first quarter at Rise. During orientation, Principal Stevens explains that this is when students first learn that they can return to a traditional high school after completing two semesters at Rise without attendance problems, catching up on missed credits, and writing an exit essay. Teachers, counselors, and staff must also sign off an exit signature form confirming that the student has passed all classes and met all requirements needed to return.

According to Principal Stevens, many students do not choose to return to their old traditional high schools even if they have met all requirements. He explains that a probable reason why students might prefer to stay at Rise is because:

I try my hardest at getting to know every single student. I make a daily effort to be out there every passing period, every lunch, being visible to students. I think that's important because they want to know you care, I think that's number one, they want to know that we care for them. So that's what they like about the school because they see that we do for them and that we are interested and we like them. You know there's a lot of love on this campus and I think kids feel that and prefer to stay enrolled at Rise. (Principal Stevens, personal communication, October 9, 2018)

Out of the 200 to 400 students that enroll at various times throughout an academic year, on average, only about 20 percent of students choose to return to their previously enrolled traditional high schools (Los Pinos Unified School District, 2020). Students who meet the requirements are usually allowed to return to traditional schools during winter and summer breaks, and during the 2018-2019, only 10 students returned during the winter

break while most students chose to stay and graduate from Rise (Los Pinos Unified School District, 2020). As explained by Ms. Piper:

Most people, especially traditional high schools in the district, think that every single student wants to return and graduate from a traditional high school, and although that might be true for some, many of our students fall in love with our school and hate the thought of returning. I know that always seems to shock people, and honestly, that's just because they don't know enough about what we are doing for students here. (Ms. Piper, personal communication, May 6, 2019)

Ms. Piper believes that the reason why many might be shocked to learn about students' decisions to stay at Rise when they are able to return to their previous high school is because most people continue to have a negative perception about continuation schools. Principal Stevens asserts that after spending a few weeks at Rise, most students, even those that did not want to be transferred, realize that continuation school is not as bad as they were told. Principal Stevens believes that:

Most students find Rise to be a comfortable place to be at, although for some, it's just not for them and want to return, especially the athletes. Usually, the ones that return do so because they miss playing sports. But for the most part students also have a negative opinion about the school until they get here. (Principal Stevens, personal communication, October 9, 2018)

According to Principal Stevens, the success of a student's transition is in large part the responsibility of various stakeholders across the district, but especially the responsibility of teachers and staff at Rise who have a direct influence on students perception about the school, and can build strong connections with students despite the negative stigma that is associated with continuations schools. Transfer receptive culture (Jain et al., 2011) at Rise includes enrolling newly transferred students in a course they must participate in during their first quarter, referred to as the Empowerment class, to

alleviate some of these concerns, which earns students elective credits. Ms. Olvera

expands on how this class began at Rise:

So, I think 4 years ago, our principal decided that we needed some type of additional support for new students, something that teachers can provide at Rise for all students, but especially for our incoming students because here at Rise, we get new students four times a year and they can easily get lost in transition. We get new students during the beginning of quarter one, quarter two, quarter three, and again for quarter four, so our idea was to create a space during each quarter that would put all new students in one class. We wanted to offer a class that could serve as a ten week orientation class, a class that could provide not just academic support but also emotional and mental health support. (Ms. Olvera, personal communication, March 23, 2019)

Principal Stevens explains that he got the idea for the Empowerment class after visiting other continuation schools in the region, which is a common practice among principals to visit schools in and out of the district to get a deeper understanding of practices that could be useful and applicable for their own students. Principal Stevens states:

I got the idea for the Empowerment Class when I went to visit another continuation school outside of the district. At that school, the transfer process consists of students attending 3 weeks of orientation before they even go into a classroom. As a part of that orientation, there is mandatory group counseling and if they don't complete the orientation then they don't get to start classes and then they have to do another 3 weeks of orientation. That visit got me thinking, because I did dropout prevention research, one of the surprising risk factors of a student dropping out is switching schools, and the more times a student switches schools the more likely that they will drop out, which makes sense because they lose the connections that they built, they lose their friends and they are forced to start all over again. Kids who have emotional issues or anxiety and things like that, it makes it really difficult for them. So that's what got me thinking about the need for the class, it is really about helping them with the transition when they are coming to this school and building those connections right away. I also thought the class would help increase attendance, that it would help increase graduation and that it would help with some of the behavioral issues that we are seeing as well because I think that the more kids are connected to the school the most likely that they will be successful and not misbehave. (Principal Stevens, personal communication, October 9, 2018)

Typically, the Empowerment class has anywhere between 15 to 30 students on any given quarter. The number of enrolled students depends on the number of students that are transferred into the school each quarter. Usually, there are more students during the first and last quarter of each academic year, because those are the quarters that match the start time of the semesters in the traditional school system, resulting in more students transferred out. According to Principal Stevens, traditional high schools in Los Pinos are more likely to send students during the first and last quarter, because that is when counselors are more likely to review the academic progress of students and realize that some students are missing too many credits.

Ms. Olvera is the lead teacher for the Empowerment class. Even though Ms. Olvera is a math teacher at Rise, she was asked to teach the Empowerment class by Principal Stevens, because students to arriving at Rise to interact with a caring, supportive, and compassionate teacher. She has taught the class since it started four years ago, with new teachers rotating to help her co-teach every quarter.

To support their transition into continuation school, from my observations in this class, the Empowerment class is meant to build on students' social capital (Yosso, 2005) by placing them in classes with newly transferred students. In efforts to better acquaint students to Rise, only recently transferred students are allowed in the class. Evidently, this decision allows for the classroom to become a space where students feel more comfortable with one another. Students quickly understand that their situation is not unique and that many other students from across the district are sent to Rise for similar reasons. The purpose of the class is not just to establish new friendships and relationships

amongst new students, but to provide them with additional support systems, which is a part of transfer receptive culture (Jain et al., 2011). Some of the supports that were offered included resources for foster youth as well as socio-emotional counselling.

Each day that I visited the Empowerment class, instruction was led differently. Sometimes the class was facilitated by different therapists and counselors that spoke to students' socio-emotional needs, and academic counselors facilitated class by providing them with college-going opportunities on other days. The class also built upon students' financial literacy by helping them plan for their future. Ultimately, because all staff members at Rise have been trained with Trauma-Informed Care (Los Pinos Unified School District, 2019), the Empowerment class is meant to re-engage students back into their academics by acknowledging the challenges they live with everyday. Ms. Olvera believes that the class can serve as a caring environment that provides daily encouragement needed to re-focus in school, support their social-emotional needs, and remind students of the resiliency they carry with them.

Ms. Olvera believes that being a local of the community helps her build stronger connections with her new students in the Empowerment class. For example, as one of her assignments, students create an “All About Me Slideshow” to present to the class and introduces this assignment by sharing her own presentation. In this slideshow, Ms. Olvera does not shy away from including pictures of her upbringing, her family, and her community. She tells students that she also went to one of the local traditional high schools in Los Pinos Unified School District, and shares that she used to teach at one of these high schools for several years prior to her assignment at Rise, emphasizing she

prefers to work with students at Rise. Ms. Olvera shares pictures of her two young sons and tells students that they also attend an elementary school in the district. By sharing her obstacles, challenges, and accomplishments, Ms. Olvera hopes this will allow students to get to know more about her, but also encourage students to create a powerful slideshow.

The biggest challenge for students in this particular assignment is not the development of the actual slideshow; students come into the classroom with a wealth of technological knowledge that surpasses anyone's expectations, but they struggle with courage and confidence to stand in front of the classroom and present their work to their peers. As new students at Rise, there is constant fear of humiliation as they are not used to being in a new environment with a reputation for serving problematic youth, and all of those emotions can cause students to not want to participate in presentations. I noticed Ms. Olvera never forced students to participate, but they did know that they earn a grade for the actual participation that is meant to prepare them for their Final Senior Defense. Students are also responsible for assessing their peers using a peer-assessment rubric, which is the same rubric used by the district for the Final Senior Defense requirement needed to graduate. This rubric assesses students based on several criteria including content, grammar, professional outfit, voice, and eye-contact. Overall, the ten-week class is meant to guide students as they transition into continuation school while catching up on their credits and aiming to graduate as many students as possible.

Discussion

Administrators and teachers at Rise, for the most part, believe that the transfer process out of traditional school and into alternative education is meant to be a fair and neutral process for students. They believe that the official transfer meeting between traditional and alternative schools at the CWAS office is a measure put in place to keep the transfer process fair for all. At the same time, after attending official transfer meetings involving both traditional and alternative schools, it became evident that alternative schools were still framed as punitive by the administration working in traditional high schools.

There are also inconsistent deficit labels that are placed on students to justify their transfer out of the traditional school system, including labels such as “voluntary transfer” and “involuntary transfer.” These labels are constructed under deficit ideologies (Valencia, 2010) that frame students as failures, and at the same time, make them believe they have choice in transfer. The principal himself confirmed these discrepancies in the transfer process that are not always followed as expected. Against transfer policy, the interviews inform that there are occasions when traditional schools transfer students out without notifying them or their families first.

At the transfer meetings, students that are labeled as “involuntary transfers” were recommended for transfer into alternative education as a result of their perceived academic deficiencies, which were regularly about their lack of credits or inconsistent attendance. Through this labeling, there was no acknowledgement of any institutional accountability (Valencia, 2010) in the reasons why students fall behind in the first place

or choose not to attend school. These decisions are perceived to be about merit (Park & Liu, 2014). In the context of alternative education, merit suggests that students who are successful in traditional high school, deserve to remain in these institutions, and those deemed unsuccessful must be removed based on their own performance (Park & Liu, 2014).

Additionally, left out of these decision meetings is an examination of racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 2013) that is perpetuated through the disproportionate transfers of Black and Latinx students. Although the school district is comprised of a diverse student demographic including many white and Asian American students, it is Black and Latinx students who are overrepresented across transfer recommendations (California Department of Education, 2020). Black and Latinx students are the most likely to be pushed out of school, to not graduate, to end up incarcerated, and schools are not reflecting on their contributions to this problem (Fine, 1991; Lee & Burkham, 2003). When district leadership is race evasive about a clearly racialized issue, such as the large push of Black and Latinx students out of the district, they are contributing to this pushout. The persistence of this racial inequality is a direct result of race evasiveness that is perpetuated through the avoidance of discussing these racial disparities.

Chapter 5: Racialized Pushout

In Chapter 4, I unpacked the contradictions in transfer policy and how these contradictions shape the transfer process in ways that are punitive and, in fact, out of many students' control. While the institutional process that governs students' transferring out from traditional high school is believed to be neutral and fair by teachers and administrators, students have a different narrative of this process. In this chapter, I revisit the research question I answered in Chapter 4, but through the lens of the students: (1) What are the transition processes traditional high schools engage in as they place Black and Latinx students in alternative schools?; and (2) How are students making sense of this process?

Guided by a CRT lens, I center the voices of Black and Latinx students and analyze the experiences that have led to their removal from traditional schooling. What emerged is that students are not actually voluntarily transitioning into alternative schools, but that there are broader racialized policies and practices that make school challenging for them and result in their pushout. Here, I share multiple student narratives that demonstrate the racism implicit in students' forced attrition from traditional schooling in three distinct ways: internalized racism, anti-Black racism, and linguistic racism.

Internalized Racism

Many students in alternative schools attribute their lack of success in traditional schools due to their own inferior intellectual ability without realizing that there are structural injustices within the traditional school system that have contributed to their academic sufferings (Pérez Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006). Although internalized

racism has been mostly conceptualized in the field of psychology as an internal and psychological phenomenon (Pérez Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006), it is important to apply a CRT lens to this conceptualization. I use internalized racism, a concept to explain why students of color consciously or unconsciously accept a racial hierarchy (Kohli, 2014; Pérez Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006), to understand how this has led to what I am referring to as racialized pushout in the schooling experiences of Black and Latinx students. Racism must be acknowledged as an outside contributing factor (Pérez Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006) to internalized ideologies that Black and Latinx students might have, especially in connection to their own self-esteem (Cokley 2002; Cross 1971, 1995).

Through a CRT framework, internalized racism is then defined as “the conscious and unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy in which whites are consistently ranked above People of Color” (Pérez Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006, p. 184). It is the internalization of beliefs, values, and worldviews that are ingrained in white supremacy and are supported in systemic and institutionalized ways in schools that can result in students’ negative perceptions about themselves and their racial groups (Pérez Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006). I use the application of these frameworks because together they can help in understanding the lasting impact of racism for students of color (Kohli, 2014).

For some students, it is possibly easier to say or believe that they are “choosing” to leave, as opposed to believing they are being “kicked out” of school. This is precisely how internalized racism works where students absorb negative perceptions about themselves, their families or their communities (Pyke & Dang, 2003), including negative ideologies about their academic abilities or native language, which can develop in

themselves a sense of inferiority (Baker-Bell, 2020). These ideologies enable students to lose confidence in themselves and their own individual learning process in the same way that they lose trust in the schools and educators that serve them (Baker-Bell, 2020; Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2014).

“Choosing” to Leave

Lisa was one of the only seniors who participated in this research study. As a 17-year young Black student at Rise, she was interested in the extra-credit that one of her teachers offered in exchange for her participation in this study. She was struggling in one of her math classes and believed she could benefit from the extra-credit opportunity. As it turned out, Lisa was also interested in working with me because she said she knew who I was; she explained that one of her stepbrothers told her I used to be his teacher a few years back. Her brother had also attended Rise. Lisa was expecting to graduate at the end of the academic year from Rise and had spent almost two years at Rise by the time the study concluded. When I asked about how she ended up at Rise, she stated, “I came here by choice. For me, it was between the independent high school or Rise, and I chose Rise because I knew I couldn’t focus at an independent school and my stepbrother recommended this school” (Lisa, personal communication, September 12, 2018). Lisa links her decision to leave her traditional high school to her attendance, which was affected by a physical illness that kept her hospitalized for months and unable to attend school. She explains:

I got really sick, I developed a boil on my lower back and I couldn’t walk. I was in so much pain when I walked or stood up for too long, I couldn’t go to school. My mom allowed me to stay home when I felt sick, but because I missed so much school we had to get proof of my health problems. I gave the school hospital and

doctor's notes but they still marked me truant. One day, the school just called my mom and said, 'Oh your daughter never completed any work while she was sick, she needs to be pulled out of this school in order to be put in another school as soon as possible.' During the time that I was sick, the teachers never even sent work for me to complete, and I just didn't even want to deal with going back to them, that's why I just wanted to leave before they kicked me out. (Lisa, personal communication, September 12, 2018)

Although Lisa attributes her enrollment at Rise as voluntary, Los Pinos High is still implicated in this decision and responsible for her pushout into alternative education. Los Pinos High failed to accommodate and support her through her medical needs. They did not allow her to recover any credits missed during her sick leave, and they failed to provide her with an extension of time to complete any missed work at a later time. Teachers were supposed to send her homework while she was on leave, and although she should still not have been expected to complete any work while she was sick, according to Lisa, they never sent her any work. Her absence due to her illness should have been properly communicated to all counselors and teachers to avoid her absence from affecting her grades. Lisa explains that she brought this issue to the attention of her counselor only to be told by the counselor, "Well, you were supposed to come to pick up your homework, that's not my problem" (Lisa, personal communication, September 12, 2018).

Lisa felt that once she returned to Los Pinos High, there was no way for her to make up all the work in addition to feeling overwhelmed with no one on campus to really help her (Lisa, personal communication, September 7, 2018). The pressure to complete past work made her feel stressed and disconnected from Los Pinos High; she felt like she "did not belong and stopped going to school again" (Lisa, personal communication, September 7, 2018). Lisa believes that it was her decision to leave because if she wanted

to stay at Los Pinos High, she could have stayed, but in reality, the school was trying to transfer her out. She explains:

Los Pinos High was trying to kick me out, but when they called my parents they made it seem like it was just a suggestion for me to disenroll and not like an obligation. I think parents have the right to choose where their kids go to school and whether they take you out or not. I made it easier for them because I chose to leave, I didn't want to be there anyways. Like why would I want to stay at a school that doesn't care or try to help students when they are sick. (Lisa, personal communication, September 12, 2018)

Lisa's narrative is an example of how even transfers that are classified as "voluntary" by both traditional and alternative education systems is a method of pushout from schooling.

The lack of understanding, empathy, and support to meet the needs of students going through health problems highlights the prioritization of meeting attendance goals rather than an investment in supporting student's health and wellness. This negligence on behalf of the traditional school system is one that is often enacted on Black girls in schools (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). Ignoring their health and wellness, even when they are calling out for help, is one way that schools continue to unprotect them (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). Lisa comes from a household with a single working parent that works multiple jobs to make ends meet. Her mother's need to work multiple jobs does not give her the flexibility that many white, two-income families in the district have to advocate for their child's health concerns, absences, or education.

Blaming Themselves

Alex, a 17-year-old Latino junior at Rise is another student who experienced the consequences of internalized racism at a traditional high school. Alex had just been

transferred to Rise from Los Pinos High when this study began and was also interested in telling his story. He was categorized as a “voluntary transfer” after attempting to return to Los Pinos High after leaving the country for several months while staying with his father in Mexico. Alex explains why he left to Mexico during his sophomore year of high school:

I was about 15 years old and I got caught with the wrong crowd. I was getting in a lot of trouble and I was in and out of camp and my Mom was just tired of all the problems I kept causing. My dad was deported to Mexico when I was 10, he lives out there, and she basically sent me to live with him because she did not know what else to do with me. While I was in Mexico for like a semester, I was basically just getting home schooled by my Dad. Then, I got really lonely living in Mexico without my friends or family and I missed my Mom so I came back to Cali. When I attempted to enroll again, they told me and my mom that they recommend I go to another school, like Rise, to help me catch up on credits. When I was going to school at [Los Pinos], I mean I’m not going to say I was a little angel, but I could have tried better to stay out of trouble and do my work. So I deserved to come to Rise, it was all my fault so I agreed to go to Rise instead. At first, you know I was mad at myself for not trying harder at Los Pinos when I had the chance, I should have known that what I was doing back then, even leaving to Mexico for a long time was gonna affect me. I was also mad because I had only heard bad things about Rise, and here I was having no option but to go here. But you know, I have no one else to blame but myself. (Alex, personal communication, September 11, 2018)

After homeschooling in Mexico for a full semester, Alex was not able to return to his previously enrolled high school. He was labeled as a “volunteer transfer” because technically he agreed to enroll at Rise instead of a traditional high school. However, as Alex explains, the principal and counselor at Rise convinced him that it would be a much better idea for him to return to the district while at Rise.

He remembers:

We had a meeting, my mom and I and the principal and counselor. They looked over my transcripts and they were like ‘the best choice for you is to go to an alternative school to help you catch up faster blah blah blah’ They were like, ‘we

recommend Rise' and I was like 'alright you right I don't need to be here.' So I chose Rise because they convinced me that I would get that one-on-one attention from the teachers because it's a smaller school. And I thought that would help me improve, because you know at the end of the day it's all up to me, I have to go ahead and go get it. (Alex, personal communication, September 11, 2018)

These meetings between students, families, and school administration framed as “transfer meetings” are actually “pushout meetings,” serving to counsel students out of their traditional high schools.

Despite students being classified as “voluntary transfers,” they are subjected to biased discussions that convince them that it is their “best choice” to enroll in a continuation school. It is hard to ignore that this process is racialized when Black and Latinx students become the majority of whom are counseled out of their home schools into alternative high schools. The meetings with students and their families further support a form of internalized racism that allows for students to believe that they have to transfer out due to their own academic deficiencies. Students like Alex internalize the belief that they do not belong in a traditional high school setting with their best or only option is to enroll in an alternative school. This shift in blame and lack of accountability by the traditional school system is easily masked through volunteer transfers.

Pressured into Leaving

The same is the case for Jimmy, a 17-year-old Black junior, who also describes his pushout into Rise as “by choice.” Jimmy also attended Los Pinos High for his first two years of high school where he played football for the Los Pinos High varsity team during his freshman year and had a very active social life while attending school there. Jimmy describes himself as a very friendly student and explains, “I was the type of guy

that everyone knew at Los Pinos, the type of guy everyone wants to be cool with. I would say, I was one of the most popular guys on campus” (Jimmy, personal communication, September 26, 2018). His popularity and need to keep up with his social life eventually led Jimmy down a different path. He states, “I started making friends with the wrong people and we just started ditching school all the time. I would show up to a class or two but then I would get so bored, I would just leave campus” (Jimmy, personal communication, September 26, 2018). Jimmy explains he felt racially disconnected to his teachers which led to his overall disengagement from the classroom, he explains:

Almost all my teachers were white, and I could tell they didn't want me there because teachers always pick on students like me, they know we are trouble so like they provoke us so that we ditch, I know they have a better day when we don't show up. So I ditch because it's not like I'm learning anything in a classroom like that anyway. (Jimmy, personal communication, September 26, 2018)

In this narrative, Jimmy is commenting on the disengagement from schooling that occurs as a consequence of majority white educators who represent a cultural mismatch in the lives of Black students. The constant bullying that is perpetuated by white teachers who have made comments to Jimmy, such as “Why do you even show up to my class, it's not like you're gonna do any work” (Jimmy, personal communication, September 26, 2018), serves as a daily reminder of the beliefs that Black students already feel: they do not belong in that institutional space. As a result, Black students like Jimmy leave school or ditch because they understand that their physical presence is not wanted in the classroom.

However, Jimmy's experience is also informed by his categorization of “voluntary transfer.” Like other students in this study, Jimmy was also asked to attend a meeting at

the school with the principal, counselor, and grandmother. At this meeting, the counselor from the Independent Studies High School explained to Jimmy that he was not on track to graduate and needed to transfer into an alternative high school. Jimmy recalls the meeting with the counselor:

Los Pinos asked to meet with my Grandma one day. They told her that I was too far behind on credits because I ditched too much. They told us that it would be best if I go to the Independent Study High School behind the main campus at Los Pinos. They were like ‘Oh its just behind the school so it’s not going to feel like a new school to you’ I could tell the counselor was really trying to sell my Grandma on the idea to go there. But I told my grandma like, ‘I feel like Rise, is best because like you can catch up more faster and stuff,’ I knew that because my older brother went to Rise a few years back. So, I told my Grandma like, ‘Forget what the counselor is trying to tell you.’ She was trying to tell my Grandma, ‘I think Jimmy would be good here (Independent Studies High School) like we just have to put him there.’ I don’t know, I felt like they were trying to do some weird stuff to like really convince her to put me there. But I was like ‘Nah, kick it, I’m not having it, I want to go to Rise.’ My Grandma was like, ‘Alright.’ And my Grandma had to tell her, ‘Yeah, he wants to go to Rise and his mind is made up.’ The counselor couldn’t do nothing when my grandma told her that. So, she was like, ‘Oh, alright, let me send him to Rise then.’ So that’s what they did. They sent me to Rise. (Jimmy, personal communication, September 26, 2018)

Jimmy describes this meeting with various stakeholders across institutions as them “trying to do some weird stuff to like really convince” them to enroll in a different school (Jimmy, personal communication, September 26, 2018). This “weird stuff” that he is referring to is the racist and manipulative manner in which schools send implicit and explicit messages to Students of Color that a traditional high school is not the right space for them. At these meetings, different stakeholders are pressuring students to leave Los Pinos traditional high school without explaining that they have the right to appeal and stay there if they want to. Instead, they make students believe that the transfer is done by

their own choice. In turn, the students have internalized the racialized practice and believe that they are unworthy of the space and that they should transfer out.

For example, Jimmy explains his “decision” as:

I transferred myself to Rise because like I really like Los Pinos High, it was a fun school but for me, it wasn't doing me no good or my education. It was like I was there, but I wasn't doing nothing, that's why I got kicked out the football varsity team too. I mean for me I wanted to stay there because all my friends go there and I was well known around there. But education wise, I wasn't on my stuff and so I decided I wanted to do better so I transferred myself out. (Jimmy, personal communication, September 26, 2018)

Although Jimmy states it was his own choice to leave Los Pinos, would he have come to these conclusions had there not been a meeting to begin with? It is possible that students like Jimmy are “deciding” to transfer out only because they have internalized deficit beliefs that they do not fit in traditional school models, and it is because of their actions, merit, and will that they have to leave.

Internalized Racism Discussion

“Voluntary” and “involuntary” are the official language terms used by different stakeholders in the school district to describe how students are pushed out of traditional schooling. The use of this framing individualizes blame and does not hold any institutional accountability (Valencia, 2010). Calling students “voluntary” or “involuntary” transfers ignores the institutional and social factors that contribute to students' racialized pushout from schooling. For many of the Black and Latinx students being pushed out of traditional schools, the lack of institutional reflection and acknowledgement of racism within policies and practices result in students feeling low self-esteem, a lack of belonging (Cokley 2002; Cross 1971, 1995), limited confidence in

their academic abilities (Baker-Bell, 2020; Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2014), and a sense of inferiority (Baker-Bell, 2020). This is reflected in each student's narrative as they talk about the reasons why they were classified as voluntary transfers into alternative education. Their experiences depict their struggles with internalized racism in a school system that continues to prioritize the well-being of white students (Dunning-Lozano, 2016) while they push higher percentages of Black and Latinx students into continuation school.

When describing voluntary transfers, administration, staff, and even students themselves do not recognize "voluntary" choices as a form of pushout that is a direct result from institutional factors that pressure students to seek other alternative supports to meet their educational needs. If traditional high schools were spaces that were fulfilling every student's academic, mental, physical, and socio-emotional needs, students would not need to "volunteer" to go into another educational pathway. Therefore, even when students believe they are volunteering to go into the alternative education system, they are still being subjected to a form of school pushout.

What these experiences tell us is that traditional schools have little regard for students whose lives exist outside of typical norms. Be it for their health or their transnational families, students in this chapter depict the ways traditional high schools fail to make accommodations for them. Without the cultural and social care and support from teachers and staff, students find themselves forced into pushout by "choosing" to leave the traditional education system to attend continuation school.

Anti-Black Racism

Within the context of alternative education, there has been little theorizing on the specificity of the ways anti-Black racism (Dumas, 2016) is enacted. Anti-Blackness emerged from the theorization of Afro-pessimism, which theorized that Black people merely exist in a structurally antagonistic relationship with humanity (Dumas, 2016). Through this theoretical lens, Blackness is then positioned in opposition to social constructs of what it means to be human (Mayorga & Picower, 2018). It asserts that Black people are systematically excluded from their own humanness, and in order to come to a deeper understanding of the Black condition, acceptance of continued violence against Black bodies must be recognized (Dumas, 2016). It is a type of systematic violence that has become synonymous to a culture of anti-Blackness in our society (Mayorga & Picower, 2018).

Within the context of education, this violence includes the institutional structures and social processes in traditional school systems that maintain Black subjugation; it refers to the everyday forms of suffering experienced by Black students (Dumas, 2016). Although Black students enter traditional schooling in the same manner as their non-Black peers, research over the past three decades continues to show that they do not have the same schooling experiences and have contrasting outcomes (Howard, 2016; Milner, 2015). Anti-Blackness is evident in data that suggests that Black students, more than any other group of students, deal with challenges in schools that continuously interrupt their learning opportunities and hinder their educational outcomes (Carter & Welner, 2013).

For Black students in alternative education, this is evident in their overrepresentation in these spaces. At Los Pinos High School, Black students account for only seven percent of the total student body demographic; yet, a total of 11 percent of Black students are slightly overrepresented at Rise Continuation High School (California Department of Education, 2020). These numbers are a lot more alarming when compared to their white counterparts at these same institutional spaces. At Los Pinos High, white students represent over 20 percent of the total student population, while at Rise Continuation High School, white students account for only 1.5 percent of enrolled students (California Department of Education, 2020). This significant difference in representation correlates with suspension and expulsion rates that are much higher for Black students, not only within the school district but across the county and state of California. In LPUSD, Black students account for 11 percent of suspended students, a number significantly higher than any other racial group (California Department of Education, 2020). Expulsion rates across Los Angeles county, including those at Los Pinos Unified, are also higher for Black students (California Department of Education, 2020).

The disparities of these numbers reveal the signification of students' blackness in that they are treated as a threat posed to the educational well-being of other non-Black students (Dumas, 2016). For this reason, educational policies that work to suspend, expel and allow the removal of Black students from their traditional high schools, become a site of anti-Blackness when they uphold "anti-Black ideologies, discourses, representations, (mal) distribution of material resources, and physical and psychic

assaults on Black bodies in schools” (Dumas, 2016, p. 16). The theorization of anti-Blackness allows both individuals and institutions to collectively identify and respond to racism in the education of Black students that is implemented through the formation of educational policy (Dumas, 2016). It is important for traditional and alternative school systems to consider what an awareness of anti-Blackness could mean for educational policy and practice (Dumas, 2016) that works to remove Black students out of schooling.

Blackness as Invisibility

All three of the Black students in this study reflected on the anti-Black racism rooted in the decisions that led to their pushout from traditional schooling. Derek, a 16-year-old junior at Rise, loved the time he spent at Los Pinos High School, mostly because he was a starting player in the football team. He loved being a student at Los Pinos that he was very much shocked to learn that he was being sent out of the school without warning. Derek found out during the summer that he was not expected to return. Derek recalls the moment he found out:

I was going to football practice over the summer pretty much daily. We train really hard over the break so that we are ready when football season starts. So like I was going to practice with the team I was working out with them, going to the hill with them and going to the weight room and all that and one day I saw people getting their registration papers. My Dad told me to go get mine and when I went to the office, they were like “oh you’re no longer a student here, you need to register at Rise Continuation High School.’ And I just remember thinking ‘Wowww for what reason, what did I do!’ Like no wonder people been acting weird around me, you know like my football coach, people been knowing I wasn’t gonna come here next year. I know my coach knew and I can’t believe he didn’t even tell me. Man I felt all stupid and mad. (Derek, personal communication, September 4, 2018)

The school failed to inform Derek that he was being sent to another school. There was no meeting between him, his family, counselors, or administration as expected per

official institutional transfer process. Since there was no official meeting to discuss the transfer, Derek explains how he felt:

I was really shocked, like mad shocked because I swear on God I was a good kid. All my teachers can tell you I was no problem I didn't cause no trouble. I don't even know why they kicking me out, but if I had to guess I think it was cus I failed math. But other than my grades was solid. I was good just mad I was messing up real bad. But I didn't know that was enough to get me kicked out. Like I know some friends who are white and Mexican they been failing all their classes and I'm talking all their classes and they still at Los Pinos so I don't know why they had to kick me out. It don't seem right to me you know to not even give me a heads up, like dang ain't I suppose to get a warning about this, they just gonna send me to a whole another school just like that. It's like did they forget to tell me or something, did they forget about me, or what? (Derek, personal communication, September 4, 2018)

Black students are often so ignored, that they become invisible to the system that is supposed to help and support them. Their presence at these traditional institutions are deemed so irrelevant and undervalued that they do not warrant following the policies that exist when recommending students for transfer, and that in itself is a form of anti-Black racism: not valuing students enough to even explain why they are being sent to another school. Derek only had a couple weeks to prepare for his transition into continuation school, which included returning his football gear and informing the teachers and friends who did not already know. Derek remembers:

I was only given like a couple of weeks to get prepared and change school. I wasn't ready like that. Didn't really get a chance to say bye to anybody or return some books I owed and football gear. The only reason I found out is because I saw people were starting to register, but dang I don't think they were ever planning on telling me. I guess they were just gonna let me keep practicing with their football team even though they knew I wasn't going back. Because honestly its no secret that they like to have all the Black kids play for their team so I think they probably wanted to keep me practicing for as long as they could, you know using my talent. But then I guess they had no interest in really keeping me as a student. What's crazy is that I know other students who get kicked out that aren't

Black and I heard there's like a whole meeting with the parents. But me, nah, they just gonna forget me and I really don't even want to think it's because I'm Black, cus that's the part that gets me the most mad so I just try not to even think about that cus I get mad for reals. (Derek, personal communication, September 4, 2018)

Students like Derek can offer a deep account of the anti-Blackness that is embedded in the racialized pushout of Black students. Derek, in this example, clearly critiques the inequitable practices that are happening amongst white, Black, and other Students of Color that are also reported in state data. Derek believes it is due to his Blackness that Los Pinos is forgetting to inform him or “warn him” about his transfer into continuation school while white and Latinx students are, at the very, least informed of their recommendation for transfer during a formal meeting. Freire (1970) describes dehumanization as “any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects” (p. 24). Black students like Derek are dehumanized when schools suppress their agency in their own learning and academic trajectory. In this example, Derrick is systematically excluded from his own humanness (Dumas, 2016): he is invisible to the institution.

Students like Derek are left to wonder in what ways their Blackness has contributed to their removal from schooling. Derek explains that he was a good student that kept out of trouble, yet he was never granted an explanation by Los Pinos for his pushout from school. Derek believes the only probable reason why he may have been transferred into Rise is due to two failed math classes. Derek explains:

I only failed those two math classes, and I just thought that to get sent to Rise you had to be failing every class. I didn't know like if you just had one or two F's that

you could be transferred down here. And I only failed those classes because I took them with the same white teacher who was very rude to me. I was a good kid in all my classes, but for some reason that one teacher used to be like 'you get on my last nerve' and 'if you paid attention you wouldn't be asking your friends for help.' Like I could not even ask for help in that class with her attitude. I don't know, all my Black friends she does that to all the Black kids in her classes, cus we be talking so we know. (Derek, personal communication, November 11, 2018)

Derek's narrative does not support the claim that all students who are involuntarily transferred into alternative school must at least be missing 30 credits by grade level. Derek was only missing 10 credits when he was sent out of Los Pinos. Without a meeting, counselors were never able to verify this information prior to disenrolling him from the school. These unjust practices further sustain the anti-Black racism that Derek is experiencing. These anti-Black experiences were also evident in Derek's math classes, where he was also made invisible by the teacher who failed to support his academic needs in ways that were culturally sustaining.

Lisa was another student that felt the invisibility that Derek describes while attending Los Pinos. Although Lisa did get notified of her transfer over an official meeting, she was still made to feel invisible while in the classroom. She explains:

When I was at Los Pinos, I had no friends because I was absent a lot and I just never really made friends. So I would always sit by myself during lunch and in the class. I think because I was so quiet teachers never even noticed me, I mean I'm sure my attendance did not help me at all. But teachers just never knew my name or nothing. They never tried to help me catch up with work. They never asked if I understood, they all just avoided me. They never asked how I was doing since they must have known I was absent because I was sick. As teachers isn't that your job? Dude you got to at least know all your students' names. (Lisa, personal communication, January 13, 2018)

Lisa was absent a lot from the classroom, which contributed to her feelings of invisibility.

However, this invisibility correlates with anti-Blackness perpetuated by teachers who

would rather invest their time on students who they believe deserve it, which are usually students who are physically present in the classroom. This invisibility is not always the experience of every Black student, but rather the opposite, and one of hypervisibility.

Blackness as Hypervisible

In U.S schools, Black students have become targets of scrutiny and criminalization, more so than any other student from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Howard, 2016). The hypervisibility of Black students in traditional school settings is another example of how anti-Blackness affects the racialized pushout of students into alternative schools. Contrary to the experiences of students who feel invisible by the school system, Black students who feel hypervisible in the school system are those that feel easily seen or noticed. This hypervisibility often leads to the hypercriminalization of Black students that includes suspensions and expulsions that are perpetuated by teachers, staff, and administrators. Jimmy describes his experiences of hypervisibility while at Los Pinos:

When I was at Los Pinos, man they stayed pressing me for nothing. I couldn't do anything cus they would call me out real quick. Like if I was late oh they would make a big deal every time. I was sometimes late to first period because I take the bus to school and the bus be late all the time so that's why I'm late and even if it was just a few minutes my teachers would notice as soon as I walk in and first thing they do is kick me out. Even if other students arrived late other days they could stay in class, but never me. I would always yell at my teacher 'oh is it because I'm Black' and I thought it was funny how mad she would get. I don't know the school just don't make no exceptions for Black people, we always get in trouble for the smallest thing. Like another thing I used to hate is the whole no eating in class rules, like c'mon we get hungry in class so I be you know eating my snacks sometimes and again just for that my teachers would kick me out of class for not putting my food away. Like really? I don't need you telling I can't eat if I'm hungry or if I'm in the restroom without a pass or if I'm wearing a hat like they can't be calling security for any little thing, they be doing the most on me. (Jimmy, personal communication, November 15, 2018)

Jimmy's tardiness was always acknowledged by teachers and administrators with consequences: if he was late, he was not allowed to stay in the classroom, and if he refused to leave, security was called to get him and physically remove him from the classroom, usually followed by a detention slip or suspension for the day. This hypervisibility is caused by anti-Black manifestations that work to punish students rather than finding ways to support them. Students are first punished for what are perceived as daily disruptions, which are daily forms of punishment that eventually criminalize students to the point that they recommend their transfer out of the school and into the alternative education system. Calling security on students to physically remove them from the classroom for wearing hats or not putting their phones away is an example of the criminalization that Black students, like Jimmy, experience daily. However, calling security on Black students is not where the criminalization of students ends. Jimmy explains the time one of the administrators threatened to call the police on him:

Since Rise ends school way earlier than Los Pinos, like we get out at 1pm or sometimes noon, so a bunch of us like to go to Los Pinos and wait for them to get out, they're out at 3pm. So like I just try and go and hangout out there you know the football field or weight room or whatever you know just kicking it cus I mean aint nothing much to do. But the minute we go around the block if they see us they start yelling at us to get out of the property that we can't be on school grounds. What's crazy is that the assistant principal knows me, I know he remembers me and he still wont let me near the school. One time he threatened to call the cops, he be saying its illegal, which I don't know if its true but man we just need a place to hang out, I mean Rise is so small its just one bungalow there's no where for us to just sit and kick it you know so we try to go to Los Pinos. But nah they don't be letting the Black kids nowhere near the school. (Jimmy, personal communication, November 15, 2018)

Jimmy again is speaking on the anti-Black hypervisibility that is used to protect the property of the school, that is, to preserve the institutional investment in whiteness

(Dunning-Lozano, 2016). The hypervisibility of Black student presence on campus is enough to warrant a threat to call the police.

The presence of police or security personnel in schools is part of the national trend that works to criminalize Black young students (Howard, 2016). These tactics and measures adopted by schools are in direct association with the criminal justice system that infiltrates schools to impede students from receiving a traditional education (Howard, 2016). Calling the police or threatening to call the police on its own is an act based on anti-Black racism. To call the police on Black students is to force fear on students knowing very well that the police often resort to acts of violence against Black bodies (Dumas, 2016). To threaten a call to the police toward Black students is to dehumanize them and treat them like criminals, simply for returning to their school grounds. To call the police on Black students is to assert power and remind students of both systemic and institutional racism that works to oppress them. Yet, the need to preserve and protect the property of the institution seems to have more value for teachers, staff, and administrators as they continue to hypercriminalize Black students by pushing them out of the classroom, pushing them out of the property, and pushing them out of the school.

Anti-Black Racism Discussion

Anti-Black racism is deeply rooted in the pushout of Black students into continuation high school. Black and Latinx students overwhelmingly represent a majority of the student population at Rise; however, it is Black students who experience both the hypervisibility and invisibility of their blackness as they navigate across a traditional school system and into the alternative education system. Their Blackness becomes either

hypervisible or invisible by the various institutional agents that are supposed to be there to support their social, cultural, emotional, and academic needs. Although an awareness of anti-Black policies and practices can help in identifying and responding to racism (Dumas, 2016), it is not enough if there is no institutional accountability or means to rectify the pushout students have experienced.

Reform in policies and practices need to go beyond understanding and acknowledging the roots of anti-Blackness and admit the existence of white privilege (Dumas, 2016). For the survival and well-being of Black students and the communities they are a part of, stakeholders across districts must create opportunities at both traditional and alternative schools that engage schools with the community in specific and real conversations about Black students, Blackness, and Black historical memories (Dumas, 2016). This is especially important because, anti-Blackness is so deeply invested in everyday struggles of Black students and the communities they live in, that they too can begin to internalize it. As a result, they can develop negative feelings about their linguistic, racial, cultural, and intellectual identities about themselves and about other Black students (Baker-Bell, 2020).

Linguistic Racism

The three Latinx students in this study are all classified by LPUSD as “English Language Learners,” a common but problematic terminology used across most school districts to refer to students who speak a language other than English (García, 2009). Labels such as “English Language Learners,” “Limited English Proficient” or “English Language Development,” ignores bilingualism in students and perpetuates

inequities in the education of students (García, 2009). Instead of using this deficit framework (Valencia, 2010) to refer to the Latinx students in this study, I use the term “emergent bilingual” to describe them through an asset-based framing (García & Kleifgen, 2010). Rather than focusing on a students’ linguistic shortcomings (Valencia, 2010), the term “emergent bilingual” acknowledges student potential and recognizes bilingualism as a cognitive, social, and an educational resource (García & Kleifgen, 2010). Identifying students as emergent bilinguals also centers the bilingualism that students bring into the classroom that makes reference to a positive characteristic and not one of being limited or being learners (García & Kleifgen, 2010).

In California, state definitions of emergent bilinguals vary due to inconsistent data in Census data vs. state-reported data (García & Kleifgen, 2010). However, in the state alone, 19.3 percent of the total student population are classified as emergent bilinguals with Latinx students accounting for 77 percent of all emergent bilingual students in California (California Department of Education, 2020). Out of these 77 percent, 59 percent of Latinx emergent bilingual students are pushed out of graduation, and do not earn a high school diploma (California Department of Education, 2020). The numbers become staggering when compared to LA county data and schools in PLUSD.

Specifically, in LA county, emergent bilingual students account for 18.6 of the student population, which is just slightly less than the overall state data (California Department of Education, 2020). The biggest difference is noted when comparing the representation of emergent bilingual students within the same district across traditional and alternative systems. At Rise Continuation High School, emergent bilingual students represent 25.4 of

the total student population, while at Los Pinos High school, emergent bilingual students only represent 4.1 of the overall student population (California Department of Education, 2020). These numbers become central in discussing why there are more emergent bilingual students in the alternative education system than there are in traditional schools in the same district.

When describing how they ended up in alternative education, their narratives speak to the role of linguistic racism in the racialized pushout of emergent bilingual students. Their experiences of pushout begin when they were first labeled as “English Language Learners” and are targeted and placed in low-track classes for their perceived inability to fluently speak the dominant language, English. In their narratives, students speak to their disengagement as a result of being placed in these low-track English development classes that do not support or reinforce their cultural and linguistic capital (Yosso, 2004). These experiences of pushout become racialized because race and language are intertwined and cannot be separated in the educational experiences of emergent bilingual Latinx students. To theorize the role of race and language together, I use a raciolinguistic approach (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Raciolinguistics calls attention to the relations between language, race, and power (Alim, Rickford, & Ball, 2016) that can help in understanding how these dynamics result in their pushout from traditional schooling. This approach allows for the examination of the role of language in maintaining and challenging racism (Flores & Rosa, 2015). These experiences demonstrate the connection between race, language, and power.

Graduation Requirements

All three emergent bilingual Latinx students arrived to Rise with few, if any, credits completed in English Language Arts. Cruz, for example, only had 5 credits in English, while Esmeralda and Alex had zero credits in English. Cruz tells a powerful narrative of migration and explains that after a long and life-changing journey from Guatemala to the U.S alone at the age of 12, school officials did not allow him to start at a grade-appropriate level, which shaped his educational trajectory. He explains:

When I first got to the U.S, I was supposed to go to seventh grade, but they put me in sixth because I didn't know English. They said it was going to be easier since I come from another country. When I went to register, I was with my Mom and she also did not know English so she really wasn't able to speak up for me. The translator just said that it would be better for me so that I wouldn't fall too far behind, even though that's actually what they were doing to me, putting me one whole year behind. (Cruz, personal communication, January 15, 2019)

In this narrative, Cruz is describing the policies that force emergent bilingual students to stay in school for longer periods of time, making it harder for them to graduate. which ultimately results in their raciolinguistic pushout from school. It begins by first literally putting them a year behind where they are supposed to be with the assumption that they will not be able to keep up with the work without mastery of a language. Rather than placing students in classrooms with bilingual educators who can provide them with the necessary language and academic resources, school's resort to pushing students one year behind. This encounter highlights deficit ideologies that assume he has linguistic shortcomings that will impede him from succeeding. Alex also explains why he believes his lack of credits in English is what led to the decisions that were made to push him into continuation school:

So I know you probably heard some things about me, they might be true, but I wanna say I'm a good student. I mean I do get myself into trouble here and there but I try to be good. The only subject I just sucked at was English. To be honest with you, I hate writing essays. To me that's just the hardest part about English classes, you know the essays, cus you know you have to write them on your own and the teachers don't really be helping you in those type of special English classes (ELD). But you know I try, I'm missing mostly English credits, pretty sure that's why they sent me here. After I came back from Mexico, they were like, 'oh how is your English' and all this and that like if I didn't speak English. I asked my Mom like 'why do they think I don't know English, just cus I lived out there for a bit, did they forget or something?' But I mean I maybe I do suck at English since I can't pass those classes and that's why I gotta come here to try and makeup those credits. (Alex, personal communication, September 12, 2018)

As Alex explains, many students find writing essays one of the most challenging parts of English Language Arts and “English Language Development (ELD)” courses.

For students who are labeled as emergent bilinguals, these difficulties become amplified if they are not comfortable with the language that they are being asked to write the essays in. Aside from being placed in “special English classes” as Alex calls them in the narrative above, neither of the three Latinx students recall receiving external support whether outside or inside of the classroom to help them develop their English proficiencies, yet are expected to make up to two years worth of missed English credits, on top of the “ELD” courses they needed to pass as well. To attain a high school diploma in California, students need a total of 40 credits in English Language Arts, making it one of the biggest educational roadblocks for emergent bilingual students, and it is a prime example of the type of linguistic racism that emergent bilingual students are exposed to. This policy on its own serves to push emergent bilingual students out of the school system.

A major reason why emergent bilingual students do not succeed in English courses is due to the lack of support and empathy from the teachers who are teaching in those departments. As one of the only seniors in this study, Esmeralda describes how close she came to not graduating from high school:

When I got to Rise, I was like a sophomore and I was missing a lot of credits obviously that's why I'm here. I was behind on credits because I missed so much school; my attendance was just horrible! So with zero credits in English, I was not on track to graduating on time. I basically had to make-up like 2 years worth of coursework in the time I spent here, so like in 2 years I did it all. We have a quarter system here so I was able to catch up quick, but mostly because I loved the teachers here who actually help. At Los Pinos, oh I just hated how stuck up the teachers were, they never paid attention to me, always ignored me probably because I never showed up to their classes, but still their job is to try and help up and not keep us from graduating. One of my English teachers at Los Pinos oh God I didn't like her at all because I wasn't doing bad that was at the beginning of the year, but I guess I was failing one of her classes and she treated like nothing. She treated me like I was a nobody and I never felt comfortable to go to her if I needed help academically or anything. I just never felt like I could go to her, she just never gave me that comfort, you know? I'm just glad that I was sent here because had it not been for the teachers here and the schedule here, I would not have been able to not only catch up on credits but now also on track to going to a four year college. But yeah, English class was literally the reason why I almost not graduated. (Esmeralda, personal communication, September 3, 2018)

Esmeralda was able to make up the missing English credits she had during her last 2 years at Rise. If this was possible while attending Rise, this could have also been attainable while attending school at Los Pinos. Esmeralda gives credit to the flexibility of the structure of the academic year at Rise: one that is not available at Los Pinos, and one that many other students could also benefit from.

The schedule structure that exists at Rise is one that almost all students prefer because it gives them more time to catch up or advance on credits and still have time during the day to work a job after school or take care of familial obligations. This is the

type of schedule that should not be exclusive to the alternative education system, but one that should be available in traditional high schools as well. Therefore, enforcing four years of English as a requirement to graduate from high school is an act of linguistic racism. This state-mandated institutional policy works to reassure the belief that English is and should be the dominant language spoken in schools even for students who do not have English as their first language. This policy is one that nearly prevents Latinx students and other non-native English speakers from graduating high school, especially if they are labeled as emergent bilinguals, since it requires them to master a language well enough to pass four years of.

Racist Nativist Microaggressions

Graduation requirement policies enable the linguist racism that emergent bilingual students deal with on a daily basis and that essentially pushes them out of school. Cruz describes those daily manifestations of linguistic racism and describes a time he went to visit the nurses office during his freshmen year and says:

One time I went to the nurse's office, I had like a stomach ache and I didn't speak much English but I had been understanding English. I went with my friend to help me translate but the nurse, she was like, 'Why isn't he talking?' My friend said, 'Oh, he doesn't speak English' and she said, 'Oh well tell him to come back when he learns to speak to English' so then yeah I never went back to the nurse's office no matter how sick I ever felt. (Cruz, personal communication, January 15, 2019)

This encounter with the school's nurse is an example of a racist nativist microaggression that demonstrates the institutionalized ways people perpetuate their understanding of contemporary U.S. immigration and justify native dominance of the English language

(Pérez Huber, 2011). This experience at Los Pinos had such long-term traumatic effects on Cruz that it ruined Cruz's trust for school staff and highlights how these daily racist nativist microaggressions (Pérez Huber, 2011) perpetuated amongst school staff influence how emergent bilingual students will engage in schooling.

For the most part, students do not want to be exposed to this type of treatment by school staff, and they will do anything in their capacity to avoid all interactions with them, even if they feel like they need them. From this interaction with the school nurse, it is clear that school staff participate and perpetuate linguistic racist ideologies that are often expressed in society and make their way into the institutions that were designed to support the academic and socio-emotional development of all students with absolutely no accountability. These types of interactions with school staff are racial microaggressions that are often amongst the first encounters emergent bilingual students have when first arriving at a new school.

Disengagement from Schooling

Cruz dreamed of playing professional soccer one day, and therefore, playing for the varsity team at Los Pinos during his freshmen year was of utmost importance. Cruz's athletic talent placed him in the varsity team during his freshman year, which he was very proud of. He looked forward to going to school when he felt he was part of a team. Yet, Cruz's narrative further explains some of the barriers he was challenged with that resulted in his pushout from soccer and schooling. He describes:

Freshman year I only played like ten games because, at the beginning of the season, I didn't do my physical check, and well my Mom would not take me to the doctor because she was always scared of getting deported, and so without the

physical check, I couldn't play soccer so then after that, I didn't care for school and all my grades dropped. (Cruz, personal communication, January 15, 2019)

By denying Cruz the opportunity to play soccer, the policies upheld by the institution participate in racist nativism (Pérez Huber, 2011) by reinforcing hegemonic power and failing to understand that his legal status prevented him from getting a physical check at the doctors. His narrative highlights the injustices experienced by undocumented emergent bilingual students navigating the education system with constant fear of deportation and without citizenship. For Cruz, this was another step toward his racialized pushout from schooling by first targeting something he loved at school, soccer. Like many of the students in this study, sports remains one of the only elements keeping them engaged in school. Without the ability to play on these sports teams due to lack of credits, students find themselves disengaged from even attending school. Schools must recognize how race, language, and power are all related and play a role in the racialized pushout experiences of students.

Linguistic Racism Discussion

Through a raciolinguistic analysis of the educational experiences of Latinx students, race, language, and power are intertwined (Alim, Rickford, & Ball, 2016) to aid in examining the institutional policies and practices that have led to the pushout of students into alternative education. Rather than supporting the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2004) that emergent bilingual students bring into the classroom, many of the policies and practices in the traditional school system work to systematically oppress students' linguistic capital. Graduation requirements that force students to take and pass

four year's worth of English Language Arts, without acknowledging student's bilingualism (García & Kleifgen, 2010), prevent Latinx students from staying in traditional high schools, and ultimately hurt their chances of graduating high school even at an alternative high school.

These practices become racialized when they target non-native English speakers in traditional school systems. These pushout experiences become racialized when teachers, counselors, administrators, and staff uphold racist nativist (Pérez Huber, 2011) ideologies and participate in daily forms of racial microaggressions towards Latinx students. In particular, racist nativist microaggressions are subtle and cumulative, systematic assaults directed at Students of Color, that are used to justify native white dominance (Pérez Huber, 2011). These racialized experiences are enough to completely disengage Latinx emergent bilingual students in traditional high schools, so much that they would rather not show up to school. In combination with their lack of credits and poor attendance, Latinx students find themselves racially pushed out into the alternative educational system.

Chapter 6: Black and Latinx Student Counter-Narratives

In Chapter 5, I highlighted the perspective of Black and Latinx student voices to focus on their racialized experiences that lead to their overrepresentation in alternative high school. I described their racialized pushout from school more specifically as nuances of racism, specifically, internalized racism, anti-Black racism, and linguistic racism. Building on Chapter 5, this chapter focuses on three of the students once they have been transferred into continuation high school. In the broader goal of this study, this chapter provides an examination of what students have to say about their overall experience, beyond pushout, after attending continuation high school for a year. This chapter seeks to unpack the resistance students demonstrate as they navigate a new schooling system in spite of the unjust and inequitable educational opportunities provided to them.

Scholars of CRT have built on a method of presenting data and counterstorytelling (Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 2013) to heal from racial oppression in highlighting student resistance. To challenge dominant narratives (Delgado, 1989) that exist in mainstream schooling systems about continuation schools and the students that attend them, this chapter highlights the voices of three of the focal students that took part in this study: Esmeralda, Derek, and Alex; their voices tell stories of resistance. Using counterstorytelling as a method of presenting student voice, this chapter will compose the counter-narratives of Black and Latinx students who were pushed out of the same traditional high school in the Los Pinos Unified School District, Los Pinos High School.

The counter-narratives presented in this chapter seek to clarify the intersections of oppression and the role of institutional injustice that systematically place non-dominant Students of Color at a disadvantage, while highlighting their efforts of resistance. Their collective and individual experiences run opposite of dominant narratives and challenge common racist, sexist, and classist ideologies about their pushout into the alternative education system. The counter-narratives presented in this section will answer the following research questions: (1) How are students making sense of their pushout from traditional high school?; and (2) Once students are in alternative school settings, what are their experiences? With most counter-narratives, the aim is to raise awareness on racial and social injustices (Yosso, 2006); I lean on that tradition in this study to display the inequitable experiences across both traditional and alternative school systems.

Unlike Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, this chapter extends beyond pushout policies and practices to include longer, detailed, full excerpts from the perspective of the students to describe what happens after transfer. I first start off by introducing a student, followed by their counter-narrative, and end with a brief analysis of the implications of the counter-narrative. I repeat this structure with each of the focal students in this chapter. The counter-narratives were constructed based on a series of interviews with each of the focal students throughout one academic year. The questions that were asked to students in the interviews are removed from the counter-narratives to simply highlight their own voice. Counter-narratives were compiled together from all of their individual interviews to tell their experience in continuation school.

In the discussion at the end, I argue that by constructing counter-narratives of students that have been pushed out of traditional comprehensive high school, their experiences reveal that these students are capable of having successful, meaningful, and caring experiences in a continuation setting. However, these experiences came with constant doubt, fear, and stress as they try to decide what would be a better school system for them. Their experiences illustrate their resistance capital, which is comprised of the knowledge and skills developed through oppositional behavior that disrupts inequality (Yosso, 2004). Their resistance capital forms part of the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2004) that they bring into the schools to challenge misconceptions that are often heard about continuation schools, while also bringing into awareness their experiences of racial battle fatigue and continued pushout even in a continuation school setting.

I first begin with the counter-narrative of Esmeralda, a first-generation Chicana who ended up graduating from Rise Continuation High School and is on her way to a four-year university. Her counter-narrative demonstrates the resistance capital (Yosso, 2004) that she carries with her as she refuses to fall victim to the expectations imposed on students stuck in alternative education. Her experiences challenge common misconceptions about the alternative education system.

Derek, a Black, student-athlete's counter-narrative also challenges negative stereotypes that portray continuation schools as only serving as "dumping grounds" (Kim, 2011). In his narrative, Derek talks about his disappointment and frustration when he was first transferred to Rise, and as his narrative goes on, he describes Rise as the best decision that could have happened to him academically. Throughout his narrative, we see

the resistance capital he carries through his struggle with racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2008) as he is forced into deciding whether to return to graduate from Los Pinos High School or stay at Rise Continuation High School. His resistance forces us to consider racial climate and limiting educational opportunities that exist across both school systems that cause Black and Latinx students to feel racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2008).

Lastly, Alex, a Latino junior, also struggles with wanting to return to his traditional high school to honor the legacy of past family members who graduated from that same school and at the same time wanting to stay at Rise but is caught up in the juvenile justice system instead. His narrative demonstrates his efforts in resisting a path to criminalization. All three counter-narratives presented in this chapter tell different experiences of the opportunities that Black and Latinx students have been afforded or deprived of while attending both traditional and alternative school systems. These are counter-narratives of student resistance—resisting expectations, resisting school systems, and resisting criminalization.

Resisting Continuation High School Expectations

One of the first students I met during my first few visits at Rise was Esmeralda, a vibrant, energetic, and joyful 17-year-old Chicana. At the time, I was learning to re-familiarize myself with the campus, the staff, and the students. Principal Stevens suggested that I get a tour of the school from one of the students from the Student Leadership Board; Esmeralda volunteered to take on this task.

The last time I had visited the school was five years before the start of data collection for this study. In some ways, the school itself had not changed at all; the

school's two bungalow buildings were still directly adjacent to the main district offices, and one small quad area at the center of all buildings is all students had. Rise is structured between two huge parking lots for district personnel who work in the main offices, and there are no recreational areas for sports or activities to take place. The small campus is made up of pure concrete pavement, without any trees, flowers, or grass area. The campus has open entries and access to the school from either of the two parking lots, making it very accessible for anyone to walk into Rise. The main office is still the middle classroom inside one of the bungalows. From the outside, it looks like a classroom door, and unless someone has visited Rise before, it is difficult to find the office.

The classrooms inside the bungalows, however, looked very different than what I remember. Each classroom had been remodeled since I last worked at that school. They were now equipped with new desks, smart boards, computers, and a new bright and vibrant paint job. With so many teacher cuts made during the recent years, some of those classrooms were repurposed into a gym, library, dance studio and a cafeteria. On every corner of the bungalow buildings, there were now new cameras installed for security and monitoring purposes. In part with keeping the campus safer, Principal Stevens also informed me that there would be new fences placed around the perimeters of the campus in the following year. The quad area, where students usually gather during their brief 30 minutes of lunch time, had benches placed in shaded areas for students to enjoy their meal if they did not want to eat it in the repurposed-classroom cafeteria. I also noticed large banners recognized Rise as a model continuation high school at both entrances to

the school. Esmeralda explained that those banners were placed there when they had first won the title of “model continuation school” two years before.

During our campus walks, I quickly learned that Esmeralda was a senior and had attended Rise for the past two years. Although Esmeralda was not a junior as I had initially planned to focus on, she was one of the first and few Latinas that submitted a permission slip to participate in this study. I believe she took interest in this study after our first encounters during the tour of the school, where we both got to learn a little about each other. She learned that I was a former English teacher at Rise Continuation High School many years before, and she had many questions about what I do now since she hopes to become a classroom teacher one day. Although Esmeralda did not meet the initial proposed participant selection criterion because she was not in the high school junior, she did meet other criteria: she was a self-identified Latina/Chicana; she transferred from Los Pinos High School; and she was enrolled in a low-track English classroom at the time of the start of the study.

Before formally interviewing Esmeralda, I observed her in all of her classes, before school, after school, and during lunch time for about three months. Since the beginning of the school year and during the time she was observed in her classes, it was evident how very involved she was with several in and out of campus clubs and organizations. Principal Stevens often relied on Esmeralda to be the student representative at various cross institutional meetings and gatherings. Therefore, it was often difficult to get a hold of Esmeralda since she was always in and out of the classroom at meetings and field trips. Out of the 50 expected graduating seniors at Rise,

Esmeralda was one of two students that was on the path toward a four-year university, a phenomenon that is often unheard of within the alternative education system since most students barely have enough time to recover missing credits to graduate and not enough time to fulfill the requirements needed to be accepted at a four-year university or college. In between her participation in the Student Leadership Board and college applications, we managed to meet and she was able to provide a counter-narrative unique to the experiences of other Students of Color in the alternative education system:

When I first found out that I was coming to Rise, it was like two weeks before the school year started. I couldn't believe it. I did not want to come; I did not want to be here at all. All I remember hearing from Los Pinos was 'you should know why you're getting kicked out, you should know, we warned you.' But I don't remember what those warnings were, was I kicked out because of my grades or was I kicked out because I was absent all the time? I'm not too sure, but I can tell you that they never ever said I could return and graduate from Los Pinos. I learned that I could go back if I got my grades together when I first got here, which really gave me hope, but Los Pinos, they didn't even bother explaining that I could go back and graduate with all my friends. It was wrong what they did, to just kick students out like that. Like I get that they are a big school and all, obviously way bigger than Rise with a lot more students, but still that don't mean they can just do that.

What's crazy is that after spending one year at Rise, I knew there was no way I wanted to return to Los Pinos. I wanted to go back to Los Pinos and graduate from Los Pinos at first, but I really fell in love with the school here, well mostly the teachers. So I just decided to stay by the end of my junior year. I really liked it here, I just like the type of support they have here. I never in a million years imagined that I would actually want to stay at a continuation high school. Because actually, I'm not the only one that wants to stay at Rise, I think the majority of students here want to stay. When we first get here we all hate it because you know it's like this tiny school, not even a real school because we don't really have a campus, we are just a bunch a bungalows behind the main district offices. And when we first get here the only thing you have on your mind is what people say about the school, like how everyone here is a bad student, that everyone is in a gang, or pregnant. Like I felt embarrassed to say I go to Rise Continuation High School, because all people hear is those bad things so it makes us not want to be here. But then you realize it's not like that at all. First of all there's never no fights

here, there used to be way more fights at Los Pinos, here people mind their own business and stay out of trouble.

What most people don't know is that students here, like myself, are all just going through things in life, and then we stop being motivated to go to school and do our work, I know I was not motivated to even go to school, and then we end up getting kicked out. Most of the kids here, they're not even bad they are just here because they got lazy or they're going through things. I was suffering from depression because basically my father left our family and I just had a bad relationship with him. So all of my freshmen and sophomore year I was just sick and in a really bad place in life. At that time like no one really supported me at Los Pinos, they were just mad that I wasn't going to school because attendance affects their money; students are literally their paychecks and they lose money when we don't go to school but they don't care about why we are not going to school, if they did care about us and what goes on in our life, they would find ways to support us. It's also very obvious who they are willing to fight for and who they are willing to kick out. It's very obvious in how they treat white students at Los Pinos, that they don't end up here even though they also have bad grades or get in fights, but you just don't see them getting sent to Rise. I feel white students get better options.

At Rise, I feel everyone gets treated the same. I can only speak for what I see, but what I see is everyone treated equally and supported by all the teachers. My favorite thing about Rise is the staff, they are all just so caring and invested in our education. If it wasn't for teaching holding high expectations for myself, I would have stopped coming to Rise as well when I started feeling depressed again. But I had teachers like Ms. O, who literally called my home to check why I wasn't going to school. Here, they really don't let you slip up, they will notice right away, and that's what I love about Rise. I feel like I am a completely new student now, getting A's, taking college classes, and being involved on campus. I can't believe, me, the person who used to fail all of my English classes is now taking a college class while still in high school. That's crazy! Mr. Stevens, convinced me to enroll in this speech class at the local community college for dual credit. The class is taught here and we meet just twice a week. It's a really tough class because the professor doesn't play games, but I like being challenged. Actually I sometimes feel like they challenge me too much here, like I can't catch a break. Everytime someone from the district is coming to see our school or like when the WASC team came, I had to be the student they and talked to. I don't know it's kinda touch being a school leader because it comes with so much more responsibility.

I am also a mentor in this mentoring program in the district; on Fridays after school we go to the elementary school nearby and we mentor the kids there. This is what made me realize that one day I want to be a teacher and make an impact

on students' lives. I am also so grateful for being a part of the College Access Plan, it's basically like a club where people come and help us apply to college and stuff. If it wasn't for them I wouldn't have known how to apply for college or how to appeal a college decision. I applied to a couple of schools but I got rejected from my top choice, Cal Poly. So they told me that I could write a letter and appeal that decision since I did meet the minimum requirements. To my surprise, it worked! Starting in the fall I will be going to Cal Poly. I think this year it's just me and another student who are going to straight to a four-year college from here. I am so excited, I plan on majoring in Chicana Studies or something like that and become a teacher! (Esmeralda, personal communication, April 30, 2019)

Esmeralda's counter-narrative helps demystify perceptions about continuation high schools and the students that attend them. The misconceptions are often that continuation schools only serve problematic youth, who are there for behavioral issues (Kim & Taylor, 2008); yet, through Esmeralda's resistance capital (Yosso, 2004), she refutes this false narrative and explains that many students end up in continuation schools because traditional high schools fail to acknowledge student's personal struggles that have a direct impact on their academic potential. While enrolled at Los Pinos High, Esmeralda was missing a lot of school days because she was dealing with the separation of her father from her family, which caused her anxiety and depression. In many ways, the lack of Esmeralda's presence and that of other students in schools is an act of resistance to the attendance policies that force them to attend school regardless of their life circumstances. Yet, Los Pinos High failed to respond in culturally responsive ways (Alim & Paris, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014) to help Esmeralda stay in school, and this response led to her racialized pushout from school.

Esmeralda uses her resistance capital (Yosso, 2004) to criticize the lack of effort in traditional schools in creating spaces that care about Students of Color and not just

their attendance. In her counter-narrative, she offers a critique of the oppressive injustices that marginalize and exclude Students of Color when they need support the most, while also noting that white students are not subjected to these racialized pushout practices. Esmeralda's counter-narrative supports the accuracy of the racial disparities reported in district-wide data that reveal Black and Latinx students have a higher chance of being pushed out of school than their white counterparts (California Department of Education, 2020).

These practices of exclusion by various members of the traditional school often position and situate blame on the individual students, rather than assuming any accountability for the lack of student success. These deficit comments are evident in Esmeralda's counter-narrative as she recalls being told that she "should know why she is getting kicked out" when in actuality many students in the alternative education system have never been given an explanation. Pushout practices are also about not allowing students to return back to the school, despite there being a policy that states students can return to their home traditional high school after making up missed credits. Yet, Esmeralda explains she was never even informed about that option until she arrived at Rise. As a result, students like Esmeralda internalize (Pérez Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006) the belief that they do not belong in spaces that make every effort to exclude them from traditional schooling, and they place the blame on themselves by saying comments like, "I was not motivated to go to school." Therefore, alternative high schools may feel like a saving grace for students who have been used to oppressive conditions in traditional high schools.

Esmeralda's counter-narrative teaches us that continuation high schools are capable of creating supportive, engaging, and culturally sustaining (Alim & Paris, 2017) spaces for Students of Color, at least this is how it worked out for her. With less students to worry about, teachers and staff have the opportunity to invest more of their time in the academic progress of all of the students they interact with and makes this space possible for students. With a smaller learning environment, continuation schools are able to provide opportunities for students to participate in leadership roles and prepare for life after high school. At Rise, Esmeralda was able to form part of the mentoring program at the elementary school across the street that helped her visualize a future as a teacher after completing her high school diploma; this leadership opportunity was not available for Esmeralda while she was enrolled at Los Pinos.

In a matter of two years at Rise, Esmeralda was not only able to recover missing credits needed to graduate, but has been preparing for her future higher education pathway: she enrolled in a dual credit course at a local community college granting her dual credits for high school and college. This opportunity allowed her to identify herself as a scholar and envision her future as a college student. This is a type of resistance capital that allows Esmeralda to "prove others wrong" (Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001) by not choosing to return to graduate from her traditional high school. Her counter-narrative is a rarity in alternative education, as most alternative high schools prioritize credit recovery and high school graduation, but do not prioritize college preparation with either advanced placement courses or A-G college requirements, which makes it near impossible for students attending any alternative high school to get

accepted into any four-year college. Yet, Esmeralda offers a clear counter-narrative of varying layers of resistance to the dominant narrative about alternative education.

Through her resistance, she defies the social expectations of an alternative school setting (Malagón & Alvarez, 2010) that is designed for her academic failure. While common institutional practices for students who manage to recover credits expected her to return to her old school, she did not. Based on the number of students who go to a four-year university straight from alternative high school, she was also not expected to defy these limitations (Malagón & Alvarez, 2010), but she did. Her involvement in the College Access Plan Club further supported her dreams of going to college by not only helping her to apply, but encouraging her to appeal a decision that had denied her acceptance at a university. This is the type of academic support that Black and Latinx students are often excluded from in traditional education, and unfortunately, sometimes the only way they get this much needed support is through the alternative education system. Although Esmeralda only offers praise for her positive experience in a continuation high school, it is dangerous to glorify these spaces as idealistic heavens (Kim, 2011), second chance (Inbar, 1995) schools, or accepting them as a saving grace for marginalized youth. It is ultimately through her resistance capital that Esmeralda was able to transcend all expectations.

Choosing Between School Systems as Racial Battle Fatigue

I first met Derek, a Black 16-year-old junior, in the Empowerment class at Rise Continuation High School. It was the beginning of the new academic year, and this was the mandatory class all new recently transferred students had to be placed in. New

students like Derek are expected to enroll in this class for at least one quarter, although I later learned that they are allowed to stay in the class for the next quarter if they like the class or feel they need it to continue supporting their transition. During this ten-week class, guided by Ms. Olvera, who is actually a math teacher, students familiarize themselves with the school, the staff, and other students. This class is meant to ease their transition as they navigate a new non-traditional schooling environment.

Derek had just been transferred from Los Pinos High School, along with 30 other students, some of which he already knew as he sat with the same group of students for the remainder of the quarter. He was a social student that knew when it was time to pay attention to the teacher or presenters. If no one was speaking and students were expected to work on assignments independently, he often took out his headphones and bopped his head as he listened to music. This was one of the most unique rules in the Empowerment class: Ms. Olvera allowed students to put on their headphones and listen to music when it was time to work independently. This was not a typical rule across the school with other teachers, but I could tell Derek appreciated this class rule.

After many attempts at trying to get Black and Latinx students to submit a signed consent form, Derek approached me on a Friday at the end of an Empowerment class and apologized for not submitting it earlier and explained that he meant to submit it sooner, but kept forgetting it at home. I told him he had nothing to apologize for as this was not a required project that he needed to participate in. He then replied that he hoped I chose him to participate and said he also had friends who might be interested in joining the project. This interaction struck me because I could tell he felt like he needed to help me

find participants for my project. Nonetheless, after cross referencing the criteria for this project, Derek did meet those guidelines, and he was very excited when I told him I was ready to begin interviewing him. At this point, I was not sure if students were interested in participating because they thought it would keep them from going to class, but I soon realized that they genuinely wanted a space to share their stories of school pushout and what their experiences have been like at Rise. For many students, interviewing serves as an opportunity to be heard without interruptions, a practice that many Black and Latinx students deserve, but are not given by the institutions that serve them.

Derek and I usually met during lunch time or after school depending on the day and depending on his preference. Since Derek was a member of the Student Leadership Board at Rise, lunch time was usually reserved for club activities, but if he was not busy, we met during lunch time in the school's library. To honor the linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) that Derek brings, and to challenge the dominant usage of standard American English (Bonfiglio, 2010) in academia, I kept his use of Ebonics in his counter-narrative to capture his most authentic student voice and to transform traditional power hierarchies (Rodríguez & Brown, 2009; Knaus, 2009). The following counter-narrative was constructed after meeting several times throughout the academic year:

If somebody was to ask me how I feel about Rise, I feel like I have a good word for Rise. I been here for a good minute now, it's about to be a full year for me and it's gone pretty fast. But then it's like, people put a bad name on this school, like, make it seem like, like you're stupid or something if you come down here. People used to tell me I'm gonna end up at Rise. I used to say, 'Kill it, I'm not going to Rise.' That's how I felt at first, I was mad that Los Pinos sent me here when I was supposed to be playing football right now. I really loved playing football so it was nice while it lasted. I kinda wanna go back and play again but it's kinda like I like it down here and it's like I don't know if I wanna go back. I mean, for now I'm not even though I'm telling all my friends at Los Pinos that I am going back

soon, but I just be saying that cus people keep asking me ‘when you coming back, are you coming back, are you graduating with us’ and all that, so I just tell them that I am but, low key, I’m not.

Here I’m a better student than I was at my other school because it’s like it’s easier and then it’s faster, so when I get to school I just get to it and just go home. Like I don’t get to ditch or none of that cause it’s just too fast and it’s easy and the teacher is like they work with you one on one. And they help you so it’s like it’s real easy and chill, nobody really wants to ditch no more cus there’s no need. Classes here is like forty, fifty minutes. But it’s like I can deal with it. I actually look forward to coming to class here. At my old school I used to leave in the morning or I come back for a bit and leave again. I just be in class looking at the clock and then I just be in there for too long and I just say I got to go to the bathroom or something and then just leave the school. Or sometimes we would all just be hanging out hiding somewhere on campus cus the classes were too long. Sometimes I could be hanging out, like out the classroom and then I come back and it’s still like thirty, forty minutes of class left! But down here it’s just like I be working and then boom the bell just rang. I don’t know, it just go by fast and it makes you want to stay. That’s probably what I love most about Rise, is the schedule. We start way later than my old school and still get out way earlier than them, it’s real cool. I feel I can actually focus and pay attention that way.

Los Pinos and all them other schools is doing too much, it’s not necessary, we still getting our work in here in less time. And not only that but since I be done with school earlier, I got myself a job. I was talking to this guy that works for the district and he said he could get me a job working in like, after school programs, like parks and recs since he knows me from playing football at Los Pinos. And he was telling me since I get out early, I could probably make it work. He is going to put me at Madison Elementary which is right over next block. I can just walk there after school. For that reason, I probably would recommend it if somebody was saying they didn’t like the school they was at. Or if they didn’t like the rules or something, then I’d say, ‘You should go to Rise.’

What I like most about being here I can say like how the teachers help you and how quickly they is to help you. Like I don’t know but the teachers down here just like love all the students or something. That’s weird to me because I grew up hating all teachers cus they mostly racist teachers all the time, always cracking jokes about Black people like they think it’s funny, but if we say something back they get mad and kick us out. But here even if a student is being disrespectful to the teacher they still going to try to help you like even if you just disrespected them or something. The teachers are just real cool here, they quick to help you and they really patient with all the students because I feel they understand we are here because we struggling and we have a rough past. They just feel like they care about us.

I remember at Los Pinos, teachers would just kick you out the class faster than a teacher down here, like it takes a lot for teacher down here to kick anybody out, and I mean we aint doing nothing different than at Los Pinos, we still talking, we still cracking jokes or on our phones or whatever, but you know they just be cool with it. At Los Pinos they quick to send you out, call security for nothing or send you home. Teachers here just know we got problems so they just try to give us a chance at least that's what I see them doing. A lot of kids down here are in group homes. I think the teachers be knowing they be having problems at home or you can just tell. I think that's why the teachers be giving them chances like that, just cause like they can see, even as a student you can see. I be seeing students like, I can tell something wrong with them or I don't know, I can just tell, and I think the teachers know as well and that's why they be giving them second chances like that.

A cool little moment I can remember since I been here is joining the SLB. The counselor here pulled me out of class one day and said I should join SLB cus she thought I would like it. At first it was like a shock to me cus at my old school its only white students like the real smart students doing that student leadership stuff. But honestly, it's been cool. We fundraise money for the school so we can go on trips or whatever. We just be selling stuff, presenting for the school district about what we do here and stuff. If the school needs something or want something done, like we planted plants all over campus, or like we make the posters you see on the halls. We just try our hardest to bring some school spirit because we all know that don't really exist here without sports teams. One day afterschool we was selling hamburgers and hotdogs, like just making money and I noticed I was out there having fun. I don't know, I was just out there, helping on the grill and all that. It was just a cool moment where I felt like okay I belong here, I got purpose, this is my school, I really like it.

As much as I been enjoying my time here, I still be thinking like man maybe I should go back to Los Pinos, it be nice to have a prom, play football my senior year, graduate with all my friends and all that stuff we don't got here. But here, you know I was on the honor roll and didn't tell nobody. And then like the counselor she called my Dad and told him, she was telling everybody, all my teachers too. My Dad was all excited telling my whole family and he was like, 'Why you didn't say nothing? Why you didn't say you on the honor roll and getting good grades?' But I just felt like it didn't mean nothing, like it don't count because it's just the honor roll here. I know people were trying to make me feel good about it but I just felt like I couldn't feel proud because it's just from Rise. And I feel the same way about a diploma from here. I don't think it'll make me feel too bad if I graduate from here because they said that it's the same diploma as regular high schools, but at the same time the school got a bad reputation that it ruins it for us. (Derek, personal communication, May 15, 2019)

By the time this research project concluded, Derek had finished his first year at Rise. His counter-narrative shows that, just like Esmeralda's racialized pushout experience, he was transferred out of the school without an explanation or without much time to prepare to transition into a new school. His counter-narrative reveals the emotional and physiological stress in trying to decide if he should stay at Rise or return to his former traditional high school for his senior year. For many students who find themselves eligible to return to the traditional schools that first pushed them out or deciding to stay in a campus that appears to be more supportive can cause Black and Latinx students to feel a form of racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2008).

Racial battle fatigue is a theoretical framework that can be used to examine social and psychological stress responses that include but are not limited to frustration, anger, physical avoidance; psychological or emotional withdrawal, and resistance (Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007). These are attributions often associated with being Black in predominantly white institutions (Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007), but can still exist out of these confinements. The stress that often Black students feel or remember about attending traditional schools is evident in Derek's counter-narrative. This type of racial battle fatigue, as he remembers his time at Los Pinos High School, leaves Derek with little to complain about his experience at Rise. Despite the racially hostile environment at Los Pinos Traditional High School, the only reason he is even considering to return is because he would miss out on playing football with his former team and participating in the traditional senior activities that Rise will not be able to offer him.

In Derek's counter-narrative the stress and anxiety caused by racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2008; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011) is present as he tries to rationalize his decision on whether to leave or stay. We see that although he has completely transformed his identity as a student for the better, he hates the influence that the school's reputation (Kim & Taylor, 2008) has on him and the opinions of others. He fears that his diploma will be devalued by mainstream society if he chooses to stay and graduate from Rise Continuation High School. The reputation of attending a continuation school has affected him so much that he feels shame for having made the honor roll, which is an accomplishment he had never achieved while attending traditional schools. This shame that he feels is causing an inability to see himself as an honor student, most likely due to the many years of internalized deficit perceptions (Pérez Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006) about his capabilities that have been instilled in him after years of racialized pushout experiences in the traditional school system. It is unfortunate that even though he was able to recover his missing credits in just one year and made the honor roll, he cannot feel a sense of pride for his scholastic accomplishments.

In part, this is the responsibility of both alternative and traditional high schools to reconsider how they are depicting alternative education for students. In traditional school spaces, teachers, administrators, and staff engage in punitive language that reinforces the idea that alternative schools only serve as "dumping grounds" for problematic youth (Kelly, 1993; Kim, 2011). These deficit ideologies are engraved in students' perceptions about the schools that prevent them from ever feeling proud of any of their accomplishments. At the same time, Derek's counter-narrative asserts that traditional

schools' hostile racial climate (Hurtado, 1992; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) is not conducive for a safe return. These demands include that traditional high schools re-imagine a schedule that is already implemented in alternative education. He asserts that there is no need for traditional high schools to continue using a 7:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. standard day schedule, when so many of the students they have pushed out of school are now thriving in an environment that is accommodating their need for shorter school days, while still recovering credits at a faster pace. Derek highlights the reasons why he personally prefers the bell schedule that Rise has designed for students, which is one that allows them to start at a later time and arrive to school with a mentality that is ready to learn, and one that ends school earlier and giving Black and Latinx students an opportunity to be involved in the community and maintain a job to help meet their family's needs.

Derek's counter-narrative also sheds light on the outcomes that come with a staff that has gone through trauma-informed care training. Derek clearly recognizes the difference in teaching styles by comparing teachers he had previously to those he has now at Rise. One of the major differences that he describes, besides from the racist teachers he has encountered, is that teachers at Rise are patient and caring, which are characteristics that should be true of every teacher, but are especially important in the alternative education system as they are serving mostly Black, Indigenous, Students of Color, many who are classified as foster-home students. At Rise, nearly 30 percent of the student demographic are students who do not live with their families and live in group homes (California Department of Education, 2020). Students like Derek are aware of this

and acknowledge the efforts teachers make to provide opportunities for students. It is evident that through a trauma-informed pedagogy, teachers and staff are better suited to work with students with socio-emotional disadvantages that require teachers to be more understanding (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). However, even with this type of training, it may still not be sufficient to make all educators truly anti-racist. The goal of trauma-informed care is to understand the challenges students deal with in their personal lives, however this must also include a consideration of the racial battle fatigue endured by specifically Black and Latinx students as they are transferred back and forth between traditional and alternative school systems.

Resisting a Path to Criminalization

I met Alex at an intervention meeting during an Empowerment class that brought social workers from the University of Southern California (USC) to talk about self-esteem. The group had already started when I walked into the library, which is where most of these larger meetings take place at Rise, and I needed a chair to join the group that had already formed a circle to face each other. Alex stood up and brought me a chair to join the group. During the meeting, he was quiet but attentive the whole time. He did not share with the group when the social workers asked for volunteers to speak, but he was politely listening to other students when they spoke. After the meeting, Ms. Olvera approached me and said that if I was still looking for students to participate in my study, that I might want to consider Alex since he too had just been transferred to Rise from Los Pinos High School. I had never seen Alex before in the Empowerment class, so I assumed he must have transferred late in the academic year, but Ms. Olvera explained

that he had been enrolled since the start of the year, but that his attendance was “a bit spotty;” on some weeks, he would show up every day, and on other weeks, he could be gone all five days. As I continued observing different classes, I noticed that Alex was showing up to class regularly, at least for that period of time. Within the next couple of weeks, I did talk to Alex about my research project and gave him and his friends a consent form to sign.

Unfortunately, Alex was not as consistent with his attendance, and he was a much harder student to get a hold of. Nonetheless, one day after English class, he approached me and gave me the consent form. He explained that he had it ready for a while, but for reasons he did not explain, he was not able to make it to school. At this point, I had not finalized the list of students who I was considering for this research project, and I hesitated to include a student who may not always be around on campus. Nevertheless, Alex fit the criterion for this study, and he was chosen to take part in the study with the understanding that he may not be fully committed for the duration of the academic year. But as it turned out, although he was harder to find on several days, he was reachable for the majority of the year.

His counter-narrative takes on a different lens that urges us to examine the implications for students who continue to struggle in an alternative education setting. Although transferring into a continuation high school may have positively worked for Esmeralda and Derek, Alex’s counter-narrative suggests that these practices that both Esmeralda and Derek benefited from do not always work for all students. Due to specific

circumstances that will be revealed in Alex's counter-narrative, I was not able to check-in with Alex before the conclusion of this research study.

During the last interview I had with Alex, I learned he was facing two charges in court the following week, and I was not able to meet him again after that. I was later informed by the administration at Rise, that he did have to serve time in camp, otherwise known as a juvenile detention center. No one was able to tell for sure for how long he would be at this detention center, but Alex did expect it would be anywhere from six to nine months meaning he would end up staying there for the majority of his senior year of high school. I was not able to conduct a final interview with him, but his counter-narrative was constructed as follows:

Ever since I can remember, I been what I guess you would call a "trouble-maker" or "hoodlum" all my life. I know I look quiet, but I don't know why trouble just follows me everywhere I go. I mean when you grow up where I grew up it's hard to avoid the trouble. My Dad and my whole family are all gang affiliated since my whole life. Everyone in our block knows that and I think that they expect me to keep the tradition going. Even though my Dad got deported to Mexico, he still checks up on me and tells me not to follow in his footsteps because look where it got him. If he wasn't deported he woulda been locked up for sure. I feel bad mostly for my Mom who I know I cause her headaches, that's why she sent me to Mexico to live with my Dad for a while because she didn't know what else to do with me. I think she had enough when she had to go pick me up at the police station, she was like "you going to live with your Dad because I don't know how to keep you from trouble." It broke my heart to see my Moms cry like that but, I don't know how to stop. After being home-schooled for a while in Mexico, my Dad was I guess you can say the teacher, I decided to come back to Los Pinos because I just missed my life out here. I think I only lasted about 6 or 7 months in Mexico.

Then I got sent here, which I had no one else to blame but myself. It hasn't been too bad though. I think I'm making up credits way faster. I used to make no credits so it used to be zero credits that I had when I arrived. Yeah, I used to be bad because I did not do nothing. So, as soon I started getting back to the school game that's when I started getting my credits back up little by little. The thing that helps is how we have four quarters in one school year and other school have like

just two semesters. So in four quarters if you're passing your classes right you could finish faster. I have a homie who graduated early that way. The online classes is cool too if you like that style. I don't mind it, I like classes with teachers but online stuff is not bad, you get to work on your own pace with nobody really telling you nothing. You just need to be on it and you're straight. Like one quarter ago I finished a history class in like three weeks because I was just doing the assignments fast. Once you finish one class they'll give you another one. I'm stuck with math a little because for that I do feel like I need the help of a teacher more you know to see how they solve the problems.

At first, when I seen the schedule here, I thought it would not even show up to school cus like it's a really short day, and the way I see it is like might as well just stay home. But nah, I know I'm still absent here are there but, not like how I was ditching back at Los Pinos. My Moms was getting court letters because of how bad I was ditching. I think here though it's kinda like they are more strict cus they just be calling your parents right away, they don't play. Mr. Stevens called my Mom the other day cus I guess I left school cus I got hungry so I went to Lucky Boys to get me a burger. I come back with food and Mr. Stevens is waiting right at the door and I'm like "Fuck" can't even hide no more. So I just told him that my Mom dropped it off for me. And this dude goes and calls my Mom on the spot. My Mom told him that's not true. So right there he shoulda suspended me, at least that's what they woulda done at Los Pinos but nah he gave me the option, he was like "Either I suspend you or you write a letter apologizing and telling me how you gonna fix your behavior." So that was easy, I wrote the letter and didn't get suspended. So that's what I do appreciate about the people here at Rise, they just nicer and really give us a chance to fix our ways.

I know is nothing that the school is doing wrong, it's just me. Every other student can tell you they like that we get to leave early, but for me, and I'm being one hundred honest, it's a problem. Why? Because it makes me get in trouble with all the extra hours with nothing to do. Since the day ends early, what do I do? I go with the homies and get into it with them. I'm facing two criminal charges right now. The first one is a misdemeanor but the second one is a bigger case all because I hang out with the wrong crowd. The court date for my first one is in seven days and then the major one is next month. For the first one, it's a misdemeanor charge. I mean they'll probably give me probation but like my first case is going to fuck up the second charge, because that's basically violating my probation and I think I'm looking at 6 to 9 months in camp cus I'm still a minor. So to be honest, I don't even know where I will be in the next few months, if it was up to me, if I got the opportunity I would go back to Los Pinos only because my whole family graduated from that school. Like my Mom and uncle they went there so it be nice to keep the tradition. But here I am fucking it all up. I could've been a bigger person you know, but I was like fuck it. I'm mad at myself like

things could have been different. Like I could've said no I don't want to go or I could've taken a different route you feel me. But it just happened.

I think what would be more helpful for students like me that trouble seems to find, is just giving us something to do once school is over. There's nothing to do, there's no games or club stuff and that's lame. It would be nice to have a job too. So, it's like if they offer sports or I don't know anything I feel like it would be better for students here. Cause if you think about it a lot of kids, that come here, they get in trouble cus some people only got four classes and stuff like that. So I feel like, if they was to make an activity to keep them out of trouble, that'll be nice. For me it might be too late cus I don't know if I will be here in the next few months depending on what the judge decides for me next week. (Alex, personal communication, March 22, 2019)

Alex's counter-narrative provides a deeper understanding of the complexities of the unjust practices that his traditional high school forced him to face as they pushed him into the alternative education system. In the school-to-prison pipeline, alternative schools represent the last schooling stage for students going down on this trajectory before they become part of the juvenile or criminal justice system (Annamma, 2015). In which case, alternative high schools are to protect students from following this pipeline. It is often the assumption that students who are not transferred into the alternative education system may end up on the path to juvenile delinquency and enter the criminal justice system (Annamma, 2015) if they "drop out" of school. Yet, for Alex, this was not true.

The institutional structure of a continuation school failed to keep him out of trouble. With a shorter school day, Alex found himself more vulnerable to the pressures of society and his local community that enabled him to participate in detrimental behaviors. What Alex needed was an individualized plan with opportunities to join extra-curricular activities, such as sports, clubs, tutoring, or any other after-school activities. Rise does not have any of those types of supports to provide students with. Alex also

comments that he would have liked an opportunity for employment, considering he was done with school early in the day. Although parents of Black and Latinx students can still be externally or internally involved in the education of their children (Valencia, 2002), many Black and Latinx students from working class families do not have the convenience of having parents that are available and flexible to pick them up from school at the end of the day; they do not have parents or guardians that can watch them and supervise them whenever needed because they are usually forced to work during typical school hours. This leaves more opportunity for students in continuation schools to be unsupervised when the institutions are failing to plan for their after-school hours.

With Alex's incarceration should come institutional accountability for the factors that contributed to his placement in camp. Although many students benefit from having a shorter school day, Alex was adamant that this type of scheduling was not working for him, and this is a matter that his school counselor should have been able to correct. A shorter school day for him meant he was given more opportunity to get caught in the social pressures of society. Rise Continuation High School did not have an individual plan to support him during after-school hours, and although it is true that not all students may have needed a plan for after-school time, Alex needed it. The same policies and practices that traditional schools participate in that lead to the pushout of Black and Latinx students into continuation high school are the same ones that exist in the alternative education system that push Black and Latinx students into the criminal justice system.

Discussion

In California, continuation high schools serve an alarming overrepresentation of Black and Latinx students (California Department of Education, 2020). This overrepresentation is mirrored at Rise Continuation High School, despite the district serving a highly diverse student demographic. In the last few years, Rise Continuation High School has been recognized and won several consecutive titles as a model continuation high school in the state of California (California Department of Education, 2020). This recognition would imply that the school is doing a spectacular job in the education of the Black and Latinx students they serve. Yet, the counter-narratives of Esmeralda, Derek, and Alex reveal that continuation schools, just like traditional high schools, are not perfectly equipped to provide an education that is grounded in equity and justice.

Their experiences in alternative education are similar and unique at the same time. They each understand and believe their pushout from school is a consequence of their own academic capabilities (Péjohrez Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006), an internalized pushout, and a reflection of a school system that prioritizes the education of white students (Dunning-Lozano, 2016) over their own education. This is evident in their recognition that their former traditional high schools would rather protect institutional whiteness (Dunning-Lozano, 2016) than to invest in the academic, emotional, cultural, and social support of Black and Latinx students who are struggling at their institutional setting. It is evident in the way traditional high schools are racially hostile environments that cause a form of racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2008) for Black and Latinx students.

Students like Derek are critically conscious of the ways in which Students of Color were not able to form part of leadership opportunities while attending Los Pinos Traditional High School because those were roles reserved for white students. They are able to describe how school policies target Black and Brown bodies by physically removing them from the classroom for minor infractions and resorting to the use of school security. These are the beginning attempts to criminalize, exclude, and eventually remove students out of traditional schooling.

At a “model” continuation high school, students use their resistance capital (Yosso, 2004) to defy alternative education expectations and describe their experiences as finally having a sense of belonging at an institution. Whether it is by joining the student leadership board at Rise, or catching up on their credits, they finally feel valued and feel like they belong to the schooling community. Although none of them wanted to be transferred into Rise, they all believe it worked better for them; they now have teachers that they describe as patient, caring, and understanding. What is still missing in these descriptions are teachers who students believe are truly anti-racist.

In their counter-narratives, students describe teachers and the classes they teach as “easier;” however, what they might be trying to articulate in that alternative schools might be “easier” is that they are offering more learning approaches than they had access to before. At Rise, students benefited from having four quarters as opposed to the traditional two semesters offered in traditional schools; this type of structure helped Esmeralda, Derek, and Alex to recover missing credits. The online classes that students are able to take at their own pace were also described by students as useful, but not

preferable. Thus, continuation schools are capable of sustaining a positive learning environment for students who have been pushed out of traditional schools, but there is still no indication that they are committed to anti-racism.

As a “model” continuation high school in the alternative education system, Rise still needs to aspire for more than just the title and recognition of being a “model” or a superior institution. They need to go beyond training their teachers and staff on trauma-informed pedagogies (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014) that seems to be working for students, but prepare and engage in anti-racist policies and practices that disable the racialized pushout of Black and Latinx students. A part of being a culturally relevant school that is informed in student trauma care should also mean that it is also applying a restorative justice approach. What must be considered are the ways in which the last schooling stage in the school-to prison-pipeline, meaning alternative schools, defend, protect, and restore justice for Black and Latinx youth. In what ways are these institutions willing to fight for their students, and in what ways are they giving up on them? Clearly, alternative education systems are not equipped to serve youth who are victims of a criminalized community, if they are not attempting to restore justice. However, this is a responsibility that cannot be passed on from one education system to the next. Both school systems need to be held accountable as they are equally contributing to student pushout from school that can lead them on the path to criminalization as it did for Alex.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Implications

This dissertation began with a memory of one of my former student's, Danny, and his experience of school pushout into Rise Continuation High School. In Chapter 1, Danny's narrative problematizes the transfer process by making us question how it becomes possible for traditional school systems to send students into alternative education without a warning. His story and my own positionality as a former classroom teacher guided this study and my pursuit for understanding how race and racism are implicated in the unjust policies and practices that govern school pushout. With the overrepresentation of Black and Latinx students in alternative education (Malagón & Alvarez, 2010), this work sought to unpack the racializing processes at one particular school district in California that contributed to this inequitable overrepresentation.

To begin this work, Chapter 2 of this dissertation builds on the work of Fine (1991) and many others since (Fooley & Pang, 2006; Kelly, 1993; Lukes, 2014; Luna & Revilla, 2013; Tuck, 2011) to consider a shift from "dropout" to pushout and expand on this reframing to include students being transferred out of traditional schools. This chapter also acknowledges the bureaucratic regulations governing schools that pressure large numbers of students to leave or be removed from the traditional schooling. I argue that pushout becomes racialized when Black, Latinx, and other Students of Color become the target of dismissal and consequently the most overrepresented groups of students in the alternative education system. This dissertation draws on Critical Race Theory (CRT) to challenge the institutional and systemic racism and inequality that push students out of traditional comprehensive high schools (George, 2015). Chapter 3 explains how

qualitative methods were used to collect data from observations, interviews, and document analysis to construct and present counter-narratives of the students in this study.

The findings in this data were presented across three chapters. In Chapter 4, the transfer process and how both traditional and alternative schools engage in it as they place Black and Latinx students in alternative education is understood from the perspective of stakeholders across the district. The focus was to critically analyze state and district transfer policies in the Los Pinos Unified School District and how they are followed in practice at Rise. To understand the transfer process, it was important to know how teachers and administrators at Rise made sense of the process. What this chapter uncovers is that, despite deficit labels placed on Black and Latinx students that frame them as failures (Valencia, 2010), transfer into alternative high schools is considered to be a fixed and neutral entity. Transfer into Rise was positioned as a choice through race evasive ideologies that are used to make students believe they have a choice to transfer into alternative high school, appeal a transfer recommendation, or stay at a traditional high school. Similar to Danny's case, this chapter confirms that against transfer policy, oftentimes, Black and Latinx students are transferred into alternative school without notification. This chapter leads to the next to inform how these experiences are a part of a racialized pushout.

In Chapter 5, we hear about the transfer process to answer the same research question as in Chapter 4 but this time from the perspective of the students attending Rise—a perspective that challenges notions of neutrality and differs from the one

teachers and administrators had to offer. Guided by CRT, this chapter centers the voices of students to prove how their transfer from school is not a fair and neutral process, and it is not a voluntary transfer. Their narratives tell that the transfer process is part of the broader racialized policies and practices that are implicit in their pushout caused by internalized racism, anti-Black racism, and linguistic racism they face. As we hear from students in this chapter, students are subjected to these nuances of racism that cause feelings of limited confidence in their academic abilities and a sense of not belonging and of inferiority (Baker-Bell, 2020; Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2014) from the racist policies and practices that lack institutional reflection and accountability.

Chapter 6 builds on Chapter 5 by incorporating the counter-narratives of three focal students to expand on their racialized pushout experiences and describe their academic journey in continuation school. This chapter leans on the tradition of counterstorytelling to display what happens to Black and Latinx students after transfer. Their counter-narratives reveal that some of these students were capable of having successful, meaningful, and caring experiences in a continuation setting that defy normalized expectations of what an alternative school is supposed to be. Other students still struggled with racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2008) when forced to decide between school systems that can best support their academic, social, and emotional needs. This chapter highlights the resistance capital (Yosso, 2004) students bring into this space to challenge the misconceptions that exist about continuation schools.

Their counter-narratives reveal the struggles that come with resisting continuation high school expectations and resisting a path to criminalization. Ultimately, what we

learn from the counter-narratives of Esmeralda, Derek, and Alex is that continuation schools, just like traditional schools, are not providing students with the equitable opportunities they deserve and require to succeed and transcend in any school setting. This final chapter will provide implications as they relate to the field of alternative education and share limitations that emerged throughout the duration of the research study. This chapter concludes by recommending future directions for policy, practice, and research.

Implications for Alternative Education

Research on alternative education has not been able to agree on whether or not these institutional spaces are “dumping grounds” (Kim, 2011) or “second chance” (Inbar, 1995) schools for students. These conflicting contradictions depend on the context of the specific alternative school. What is clear in the literature on alternative education is that continuation schools were developed as a response to the pushout crisis, which at a time was referred to as the “dropout crisis” (Kelly, 1993). This dissertation adds to the complexities of alternative education in the sense that it argues that continuation schools, like Rise and as explained by the students that attend them, can be supportive, rigorous, and transformative institutions that meet the needs of students when traditional comprehensive schools were unable to.

At the same time, this dissertation provides a deep dive into the process of school transfer to reveal structural flaws and inconsistencies that are often racialized and result in a pushout and overrepresentation of Students of Color in alternative education. The counter-narratives and pushout experiences of Black and Latinx students should be used

to uncover these institutional raciolinguistic policies and practices and how students can be re-engaged in schooling despite their academic pushout with the development of racial literacy, culturally and linguistically relevant pedagogies, and a transfer receptive culture (Jain et al., 2011).

The injustices that Black and Latinx students face as they are pushed into a school system that they did not volunteer to be placed in must be met through a restorative justice approach. A restorative justice lens (Annamma, 2015) would disrupt deficit, traditional, and normalized framings of alternative schools as punitive solutions for problematic youth, and at the same time, challenge existing alternative spaces to foster and address the needs of the marginalized Students of Color they serve. This requires both school systems to repair the harm they have and continue to cause for predominantly Black and Latinx students by privileging the voices (Annamma, 2015) of communities of Color. Through a restorative justice approach, teachers, counselors, and administrators must collaborate with students to find the solutions required to meet their educational needs. To reduce the racial disparities in the overrepresentation of Students of Color in alternative education, individual responsibility must be connected to the systemic and structural inequities in the pushout of students.

My hopes are that through this research and the counter-narratives of Black and Latinx students, institutions, researchers, teachers, school officials, and communities from traditional schools and alternative schools alike, will be able to recognize the responsibility that they owe all students in ensuring they receive equal educational opportunities. What we learn from this dissertation is that student voices are needed to

unpack the complexities of the alternative education system; the perspective of the adults and the written policies that exist are not enough to understand the transfer process. Only students can provide a level of critical consciousness and knowledge about what it is truly like to attend these spaces, which is a perspective that is much needed in the literature. One way of doing this includes listening to student's educational experiences navigating from traditional high schools into alternative high schools, to prevent the systemic institutional racist policies and practices as well as individual actions that contribute to the oppression, marginalization, and pushout of students. What we learn from this dissertation is that through their resistance capital (Yosso, 2004) students can be agents of social change and can help reform the policies and practices that directly affect their educational paths, if given the chance.

Districts like Los Pinos Unified must be fully committed to following state guidelines that define alternative schools as voluntary spaces for not just the students that attend them, but anyone else that works there. This dissertation uncovered the reasons why districts like Los Pinos send students out of traditional schooling: missing credits and poor attendance. Yet, there is no direct policy in the state of California that enforces this practice. By making alternative education truly voluntary spaces, it is more likely for these institutions to become transformative and engaging for the students that need it the most.

Limitations

This study sought to understand the transfer process for students from traditional comprehensive high schools into alternative education. A major limitation in this study

was not having enough time in one academic year to examine the transfer process as it occurs at a traditional high school. Although this study could have been extended, I choose to capture the dynamics of a transfer process that occurred within one academic year. If I had extended the study to include more than one academic year, it is possible that the transfer process may have been experienced differently for students. This dissertation only focuses on the transfer process after it has already happened for students at one continuation school. Understanding the policies and practices that govern the racialized pushout for students in traditional school settings could reveal new contributions to the field of alternative education that could explain how they are being forced to leave their home schools. The transfer process from the perspective of traditional high schools has not been examined through a CRT lens and could further support the findings of this dissertation.

Another minor limitation in this study was the categorization of the school site in this study as a “model continuation high school.” In the Los Pinos Unified School District, Rise has been recognized as a model institution for the past three academic years. This is a recognition awarded to alternative schools who apply for this award and meet the requirements under the California Department of Education criteria (California Department of Education, 2020). This is a minor limitation to the understanding of alternative schools as the findings on the transfer process may not adequately represent or reflect what is happening at other alternative schools that are not defined as “model” institutions.

This dissertation also only examines the experiences of six Black and Latinx students. Their racial, gendered, cultural, and linguistic experiences are not representative of all Students of Color who are pushed into alternative schools. A CRT study that examines the pushout experiences of Indigenous students who are also overrepresented in alternative schools outside of California would also be a major contribution to our understanding of inequality in education. Other minor roadblocks in this study were a result of my positionality as a former teacher at the school site that I selected for this study.

Although it granted me the privilege of quick accessibility and permission to research within the district, my positionality also affected the relationships I needed to maintain to conduct research with the adults I once used to work with. My intent was to interview more than the three teachers and principal who participated in this study; however, because many of those educators remembered me as their former colleague. Thus, they felt they could not be as honest and open with me. For them, it would have been much easier to express and reflect on the transfer process with someone they did not know as there would not be any fear of judgement. Although I tried my best to position myself as a researcher, it was difficult for many to see me in this new role. The assistant principal, counselor, and other teachers at Rise rejected my invitation to participate in this study.

Future Directions in Alternative Education

In practice, this study calls for the institutional accountability of both traditional and alternative school systems in the equitable education of Black and Latinx students. To hold education systems more accountable, a shift in discourse and reform is a first step in acknowledging culpability. This can begin by reframing individual blame towards institutional responsibility in the transfer of students into alternative schools. Schools must look within their practices to see how they are upholding inequitable transfers for majority Black and Latinx students.

Oftentimes, race evasive language (Annamma, Jackson & Morrison, 2017) is used to ignore the overrepresentation of Students of Color who are pushed out of traditional schooling. What we are seeing school faculty and staff do to contribute to the inequitable pushout of students is engaging in race evasive language that frames and labels students through deficit ideologies (Valencia, 2010) as “at-risk,” “English Language Learners,” or “voluntary” and “involuntary” transfers. This is precisely how institutions negate any institutional accountability for the perceived limitations and deficiencies that students are blamed for (Valencia, 2010). Students racial identities are disregarded and unaccounted for in conversations about their recommendations for transfer. Yet, race cannot be ignored, as it is a measure for which school systems continue the oppressive conditions that marginalize Students of Color. Therefore, before students are transferred out of traditional schools, teachers, counselors, and administrators involved in decisions that transfer students out of school must account for the racial demographics of students they are recommending for transfer. What are the percentages of Students of Color that are

being recommended for transfer in comparison to the number of white students recommended for transfer? How many students on the transfer list are classified emergent bilingual students? What is the percentage of students with special needs transferring into alternative education? These are questions that must be examined by practitioners involved in the pushout of students into alternative education.

Traditional school systems need to humanize the students they serve. Rather than ignoring their racial, cultural, and linguistic identities, traditional schools must consider the humanistic approaches and practices that are working for students in alternative spaces. Black and Latinx students in this study spoke to how they felt seen and cared for at Rise, which is an experience they never had while attending Los Pinos. Many of them described the ways they felt supported and valued by the teachers and staff at Rise. These are humanizing accommodations that should also exist in traditional school environments while also supporting extracurricular activities that students are deprived of in alternative school spaces. Thus, a multifaceted lens needs to be placed.

In order for these humanistic approaches to happen, a development of racial literacy will be needed to cultivate socially just educators. Aligned with CRT, racial literacy involves the skill and practice to understand the institutional embeddedness of racism in order to be able to process and respond to these experiences (Guinier, 2004; Sealey-Ruiz, 2013). To develop racial literacy, district-wide professional development should be essential and mandatory for all educators, especially for a district like Los Pinos Unified, which serves a majority of Students of Color consisting of 58 percent Latinx, 12 percent Black, and 7 percent Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI)

(California Department of Education, 2019). This can also be done through the use of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogies that develop strategies to impact public discourse on race, language, and education (Alim, Rickford, & Ball, 2016). Educators need to be provided with access to critical tools, theory, and research that can inform their practice to better serve Students of Color. Culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogies can transform (Richards, Brown & Forde, 2007) the racial climate of schools and the community that directly affects the well-being of Black and Latinx students. To dismantle hierarchies that position alternative schools as “dumping grounds” for “problematic youth” (Kim, 2011), a shift in frameworks and ideologies can begin to position alternative schools as spaces that can be culturally sustaining for Students of Color.

The next step in research should continue to call for institutional social change. This dissertation examines institutional policies and practices regarding the transfer of Black and Latinx students in the context of one continuation high school. Future research should follow what these policies and practices look like in the setting of a traditional comprehensive high school. A study that examines what happens before students are recommended for transfer can further contribute to the understanding of the racialized pushout of Black and Latinx students. Building upon this research study, future research should explore a continuation of this work with possible research questions such as: In what ways do traditional schools participate in the pushout of Students of Color? How are students placed on a transfer recommendation list? Who are the school officials that

develop the transfer list? How are students who remain in traditional school resisting the impacts of racialized pushout?

With the limited research in the field of alternative education, a contribution to the field can explore the role of teachers of Color in alternative education spaces. How do teachers of Color end up teaching here? Are these positions also based on a hierarchical notion? In what ways do teachers of Color challenge the inequitable practices that marginalize Students of Color? The role of teachers of Color is imperative in understanding the dynamics of the experiences of Students of Color in alternative schools. We know teachers are capable of becoming agents of social change and transformation in the education of the students they serve; therefore, it is critical to unpack the ways in which they engage in the fight towards racial justice.

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