

8-2021

## THE IMPACT OF RACIST COMMUNICATION PRACTICES (RCP) ON A FORMERLY INCARCERATED STUDENT BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER PRISON

George Zaragoza

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THE IMPACT OF RACIST COMMUNICATION PRACTICES (RCP) ON  
A FORMERLY INCARCERATED STUDENT  
BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER PRISON

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Arts  
in  
Communication Studies

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by  
George Zaragoza  
August 2021

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout this study I will discuss my personal experiences in the K-12 education system focusing on racist communication practices (RCP) that pushed me towards the school-to-prison-pipeline. My case is but a microscopic sample of what has been done to many incarcerated youths. Through a critical ethnographical approach, I will analyze my experiences by applying a lens in critical race theory to further explore how RCP impacted my transitions from school into incarceration and how these practices continued to follow me into higher education. This study includes an overview of the impact that punitive inhumane practices, particularly long-term solitary confinement had on a) my personal ability to grow and have access to educational resources while incarcerated, b) how these punitive inhumane practices run parallel to those that were implemented on me during K-12, c) how parallel punitive practices later continued to occur during my experience in higher education, and d) how these experiences of discrimination, criminalization, and stigmatization affected my own personal communication style and how this style of communication continues to be misconstrued and used to justify further discrimination.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must acknowledge that this would not have been possible without the support of key individuals, family, friends, and educators whose forms of communication uplifted me and gave me an opportunity to grow.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The prison system is a failure. The prison system does not resolve any of societies issues and much less any human being's problems. Instead of helping me rehabilitate it made me worse as a youth. The experiences I had while incarcerated helped establish a particular mindset. The Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) groomed me for entrance into the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). According to Prison Communication Activism, Research, and Education collective (PCARE, 2007), the prison-industrial complex threatens the country because it separates families. It places inmates far from home and limits their educational opportunities, which are sometimes even nonexistent. In fact, being in prison increases the chances of death through the spreading of sickness because of the inhumane living conditions prisoners are housed in. Stevenson (2019) discusses that in 2018, the Chronicle reported a total of 34 suicides in a criminal justice system that incarcerates 129,000 human beings for a yearly rate of 26.3 deaths per 100,000 people. The rate of suicides is alarming and illuminates a major problem within the prison system. Stevenson (2019) discusses the rise in suicides being the highest going back to 2006, and it is now more than the national average for state prisons 20 per 100,000 in 2014, as well as in federal prisons 14.7 in 2018.

The tactics that continue to oppress incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals are also covert. The prison-industrial complex has been

exposed and we know it has been used as a business that collaborates with corporations to make money from the prison population. Silva and Samimi (2018), discuss that the prison-industrial complex is similar to slavery and is an expanding industry that collaborates with for profit corporations that make money from prison labor (p. 154). Throughout the journal article the prison-industrial complex was described as a business that enforces prison labor by law to benefit the rich. Once human beings are incarcerated their freedom and many times their rights are lost as resources become nonexistent for many prisoners or very difficult for the formerly incarcerated. Throughout this project, the role of lesser discussed Racist Communication Practices (RCP) in the transition into incarceration, the extension of the incarceration experience, and the stigma carried in the transition from incarceration to higher education will be analyzed, discussed, and critiqued deriving data from a qualitative auto-ethnographic research approach. I will produce a narrative account based on memoirs of my own first-hand experiences as a Mexican American within the US divided into three main sections of my life: 1) my childhood in K-12, 2) my coming of age within the prison system, and 3) my adulthood as an educated formerly incarcerated individual navigating institutions of higher education.

The theories applied to this research derive from Critical Race Theory (CRT) as it is most relevant to the analysis and critique of RCP I have personally experienced. My experiences with RCP help demonstrate how both the educational and prison systems, continuously and proactively obstructed or

diminished the access I had to the minimal educational resources available. CRT is fundamental for the purposes of this study because it identifies institutional and individual racist practices that are also found in forms of communication.

In the three major episodes of my life I have identified as important for this study, I find recurring and parallel situations that I further unpack and analyze against a CRT backdrop in order to shed light on the quotidian racist communication practices (RCP) that helped push me away from school and into the school-to-prison-pipeline the RCP that justified the unjust practices used to keep me in prison by excluding me from the already scant educational resources available, and how after paying my debt to society, the stigma I carry has served as a basis for the RCP employed on me as a formerly incarcerated university and graduate student.

My goal is to shine light on more covert issues affecting underrepresented populations of students and with this bring forth opportunity for formerly incarcerated as well as incarcerated students. This study presents excerpts of my personal experiences based on findings of previous scholarly work discussing different aspects of the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated experience and the relationship between communication, racial discrimination, and educational access and success. I hope that the accomplishments of this research will help cement a more realistic and praxis oriented general theory of prison education that considers the impact of more invisible factors such as RCP.

Through this study I would like to inspire other scholars to continue to do research on the inhumane conditions influenced by RCP in the prison system and their relation to communication and education. The final and most important objective is to inform and motivate formerly incarcerated individuals so that they may be aware and conscious of how such communication practices can be used against them, and how to continue resisting these traps which perpetuate marginalization and strive toward pursuing education as a resource for even more opportunities and the possibility of a more equitable life experience.

This introductory chapter will now conclude with my positionality and a statement of the problem which acknowledges that both the educational and prison systems have been openly and thoroughly critiqued for their racist histories and their role in the oppression of People of Color (POC) in the United States. The educational and criminal justice systems were established by politically influential individuals as well as supported by corporations who had it in their sociopolitical and financial interest to continue to oppress POC. Chapter Two presents a literature review that further expands on the racist history of the US education system in their support of the prison industrial complex which serves as a framing for the purpose of this study. Chapter Three presents a methodology that will be further exemplified in Chapter Four through a detailed narrative, analysis, and discussion of my experiences with RCP and their impact in my relationship to education and society. This chapter also includes a discussion of how my decisions/reactions were affected and how the diverse

forms of punishment I experienced become simultaneously justified and put into question through the basic requirement of having to navigate and survive within specific power relations. Chapter Five presents conclusions, limitations, and further possibilities of inquiry.

### Positionality and Statement of the Problem

I am a formerly incarcerated heterosexual Mexican American male who spent more than a decade (way more than necessary) in solitary confinement due to the prison system's inhumane and racist practices. Prisoners can be placed in solitary based on confidentially presented information provided by prison informants which is not always carefully checked out. (Egelko 2019) The enforcement of solitary confinement as punishment is beyond questionable and it has very real and persistent repercussions in the experiences of incarcerated individuals.

This earlier experience has formed my perspective as a current graduate student who conducts research related to the prison system. I believe it is most important for people to understand that the prison system is not established to rehabilitate people. Furthermore, the prison system is an industry fed by the school to prison pipeline (McCarter, 2017) that continues to groom and disempower individuals through the prison system into a life of perpetualized marginalization.

According to the Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron 1993 study, conducted during the year I was incarcerated for the first time, the education system suspended

approximately 1.5 million students. This number expanded quickly because in 1997, the number was twice as much at 3.1 million; approximately 7 percent of the U.S public schools' population (McCarter, 2017). These numbers only demonstrate the proactive approach of excluding individuals from education, this study looks to show the existence of a less visible approach of exclusion. During my time in the K-12 system RCP was employed by teachers so I started losing interests in school and instead got into trouble due to skipping class and exhibiting other reactionary behaviors. Once I was incarcerated in the juvenile justice system, I was groomed by the criminal justice system through RCP into long term incarceration which only led me deeper into the adult prison system. During my experience in higher education, I notice a parallel implementation of RCP and my reactions to it which also turned continuing my education into an unnecessary struggle that I will ultimately win.

This qualitative study uses autoethnography as its research methodology to bring forth an uncommon, even rare, yet very valuable perspective on the prison system through my personal experience after twelve years of incarceration. I began this experience in juvenile hall, then went on to California Youth Authority (CYA), and finally ended in a California Supermax Prison before I paroled back into society. I disclose that my position opposes the practices of the prison system because prisoners are treated inhumanely and placed in circumstances that result in extreme punishment due to the inhumane conditions inmates are housed.

The constitution protects all, but the people who are incarcerated can still be locked up through the day including using shackles, as well as placed into cages when allowed outside of the cell so that they feel disempowered and dehumanized like slaves. I have experienced first-hand how the prison system is designed to make prisoners feel less than human. Prison conditions influence some prison officials to abuse power and act as if inmates are less than human beings. I would like to point out that for me personally I am not blaming anybody for my behavior before incarceration or during incarceration. Part of my position has always been taking responsibility for my own actions that I decided to do on my own. This should not take away from the importance of being conscious that my own actions, as those of many others, were also reactionary to physical and sociopolitical circumstances. I still believe that one of the strongest kinds of oppression is in the mind.

For me, it is very important to express and analyze the effects of the daily experience of being Brown and incarcerated to further our understanding of how constant and harmful the repercussions of institutional racism really are and how they exist within RCP. I can speak about what incarceration was like in 1993 which was my first experience of incarceration in juvenile hall for myself and I can also say it has not changed much, since I was again incarcerated in 2020 for a short time. Yet, it was enough for me to see that prisoners are still thought of as less than human beings.

## History of the Prison Industrial Complex

According to Smith (2012) the criminal justice system has established incarcerating people at a high rate as a cultural norm throughout the United States because race is separated into social classes. This enabled and lead to the mass incarceration of POC (p. 469). Smith's study demonstrates how a white supremacist nation has used the prison system to uphold white supremacy and authority driven by racists practices mainly against POC. This basis of inequality stems from the historical colonial division of humans into races based on ethnicity and phenotype. The hierarchization of race continues to increase privilege for those who are perceived as superior or supreme.

Historical accounts have shown that in the U.S., incarceration has existed since 1720 where the oldest prison was built in York, Main imitating European workhouse models existing since the 1500's (Hirsch 1992). The U.S. government formally established the prison system in 1891. According to Eastern State Penitentiary (n.d) the first prison established to punish people was Eastern State Penitentiary this is important to shed light on because it impacted the world with the reestablishment of slavery. According to the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction" (U.S. Const. amend. XIII). This gives a good idea of when the criminal justice system began incentivizing the targeting of POC impacting prison demographics and making prisons racially oppressive.



Eastern State Penitentiary (n.d). states that the date June 19, 2020 represents the 155- year anniversary named Juneteenth – a holiday honoring the removal of slavery in the state of Texas, which successfully freed the last slaves in the United States, but slavery has been recreated through incarceration, systemic racism and police brutality. Davis (2003) states prisoners are considered slaves within the prison industrial complex. The same way slaves were treated in the south is recreated in the prison industrial complex in the form of torture and cheap labor. The strict rules imposed on prisoners by authority figures reduce incarcerated people to dependence on others for basic necessities as well as separate them from normal interactions similar to slavery.

Mass imprisonment of POC received another boost since the 1970s, right after some civil rights changes as one of the states' key procedures to maintain power over human beings (Smith, 2012 p. 469). In the book, *Are prisons' obsolete?* Angela Davis (2003) explains that as the prison system spread out, corporations became more involved in building, helping supply products, and the use of the prison workforce to gain profits (p. 12). The criminal justice system has remained unjust because it has become a successful industry that continues to expand.

According to Silva and Samimi (2018), the prison industrial complex connects to slavery as it is stated in the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment that it is justifiable for imprisoned people to be treated like slaves while employed by the prison industrial complex (p. 154). Furthermore, this connection has a history that

should not be ignored because the criminal justice system is abusing its power by enslaving massive numbers of POC. Abu-Jamal and Hill (2014), state that in the 1970s, 200,000 Americans were imprisoned. Today, 50 years later, there are 2.5 million people locked up in the prison system. In addition, approximately 7.7 million people are in some way monitored by the criminal justice system (p. 78).

Moreover, the United States has built many prisons that are used to punish people for breaking the law, most of these people are non-White. According to Davis (2003), there are a total of thirty-three prisons throughout California, an additional thirty-eight camps, as well as other institutions used to punish people. Furthermore, the prison demographics describes the unjust system as Latinos make up 35.2%; African Americans 30%; and White inmates 29.2% (p. 13). These numbers support this research because they illuminate the reality that racism still exists incarcerating human beings that are majority POC at a higher rate than White people. The criminal justice system needs to find ways to help minorities instead of hurting them. Arguably one of the ways is reducing the use of prisons.

In addition, the prison industrial complex profits from inmates' cheap labor like how enslaved people were exploited. According to Hill, Rapp, Capella, and Gentlemen (2015), inmates realize at the beginning of their imprisonment that are now controlled by a large business that profits from their long stay. In addition, imprisoned people are stripped of any belief that they can reunite with society; instead, they are identified by a number instead of a name (p. 162). I

think identifying inmates by a number is a tactic used by prison officials to put labels on them and try to make them feel more isolated from humanity.

### Race and Prison

Abu-Jamal and Hill (2014) shed light through a conversation about race on how white privilege and how white supremacy as a system decides who is white and who is a minority (p. 30). In addition, they present the fact that white privilege exists because people abandon their race to gain accesses to privileges that most minorities do not get in the United States. Furthermore, their study maintains that people are classified based on race. This is important because the prison system mainly locks up minority people with a smaller population of white inmates. Abu-Jamal states that most people would like to be white because that alone presents access to all America has to offer (Abu-Jamal & Hill, 2014, p. 28). This sheds light on the continued oppression that white supremacy systems have established.

Moreover, the prison industrial complex has established strict rules used to imprison people that are like slavery because people in authoritative positions are able to abuse power. For example, the prison industrial complex established restrictions which inmates are expected to follow daily. According to Davis (2003), inmates are treated like slaves from the south because they are forced to follow rules that were created and forcefully imposed by people with more authority than them. Additionally, inmates are separated from free society and kept in a strict environment (p. 27). This can be done to keep imprisoned people

scared and disconnected from society. This of course, has its effect on the development of an incarcerated individual who grows up within the prison system and the way that he learns to communicate.

I would argue the prison-industrial complex uses racism to dictate POC life by abusing power and privilege. Davis (2003), states people are already aware that racism cannot be allowed to determine the outcome of the world. Moreover, if we can shed light on the argument that the prison-industrial complex practices racism we might come to believe that prisons are unnecessary (p.24). This is important to understand because there are more prisons in the United States than anywhere else in the world and they are being used to imprison POC at a very high rate.

Institutional oppression expands and worsens from oppressive educational experiences into the prison walls as prisoners are often victims of racial discrimination which can result in the worst inhumane practices such as being forced into slave labor and solitary confinement, to being continuously criminalized and punished by being denied or given very limited access to education. All these experiences ultimately have a negative impact on prisoners as they gravely diminish the possibility of reincorporating back into society. It is well established through research and the documentation of personal stories that being incarcerated reduces the chances of having a professional career because of stigmas and racism. Cerda-Jara, et al. (2020), stated POC with a college

degree get fewer call backs than white people with a college degree and criminal history.

My main research questions long to identify and present RCP while using a critical race theoretical lens from which to relate my experiences. By discussing what has been written by other scholars whose ideas I support, I want to further expand on a microcosmic line of inquiry with this research project centered around quotidian and usually more invisible discriminatory forms of communication. Finally, I will discuss their impact on the complex relationship I experienced as a formerly incarcerated individual in the educational system while seeking answers to the following research questions: RQ1: How do the racist communication practices (RCP) of teachers and educators promote discrimination contribute to the push of pupils into the school to prison pipeline? RQ2: How do the RCP of prison officials and authorities continue the legacy of the school to prison pipeline and work to further marginalize and hinder a prisoner's relationship with education? RQ3: How are the communication practices of a formerly incarcerated individual affected by a lifetime of RCP? RQ4: How do educators and leaders in Higher Education perpetuate the criminalization and marginalization of formerly incarcerated individuals through RCP that serve to keep them from graduating and achieving scholarly success?

The literature review in the next chapter will present the basis from which I draw a line to further explore the interrelationships between education, incarceration, and race. I will also further define what I refer to as RCP I have

identified within the context of my own experiences. This literary review will provide a background and context to the ways in which I was perceived, treated, and spoken to and the disciplinary actions I endured as a result. RCP are the revamp and continuation of overt forms of oppression in a more covert approach that helped push me further into prison, kept me there longer than necessary, and then later served to continue the perpetuation of my criminalization due to stigma after release in my experiences within higher education.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### The Impact of Incarceration in Relation to Race and Education

Cerda-Jara, Elster, and Harding (2020) state approximately 70 to 100 million Americans have a criminal history. This represents close to one-third of the United States population, leading to eight percent of every adult with a felony connected to their name. Their research provides information about the discrimination People of Color (POC) face regardless of reaching higher education during or after incarceration, because they are often not hired by employers. According to Cerda-Jara, et al. (2020), POC who have a criminal record and are college educated get fewer job offers than white people with a criminal record who are not college educated. This illuminates on the powerful repercussions the criminal justice system imposes upon POC as a way of disempowering them as they remain jobless and unable to reinstate themselves economically in society.

Cerda-Jara, et al. (2020) sheds light on the disadvantages formerly incarcerated POC have based on race as well as criminal history. The other disadvantage for many people with a criminal history is not getting a job because of the background check in which a person's criminal history will be available to the employer. Cerda-Jara et al. (2020) talk about the problem of passing a

background check for those who do get the opportunity to be interviewed for a job in which most fail the background check and remain jobless. This is important to further explore because in my personal experience I've also failed a background check based on my criminal history and even after having paid my debt to society. Additionally, it has been found that race plays an important role in building a professional career for educated formerly incarcerated individuals who are not white. Being formerly incarcerated can lead to being jobless long term because of the negative stigma which means in many cases a college degree does not necessarily help individuals gain employment. According to Cerda-Jara, et al. (2020), individuals who have been impacted by incarceration and have a college degree are often rejected by jobs that require a degree, illuminating that the stigma of incarceration overshadows a college degree.

The importance of this in my study is that it relates to me as well as many others who have been groomed by the school-to-prison pipeline and it brings forth knowledge that can be further explored in future research. I think it is under discussed exploratory knowledge in the tradition of the view of CRT. The data provided proves that there is still racism happening today that continues to oppress POC and favor white people within education, academia, as well as the workforce. This is the kind of research that is easily overlooked because of the stigmas formerly incarcerated people receive, but it provides very important information that is valuable for future research that can create positive change.



### Incarceration and Keeping POC from Educational Resources

According to Southard (2019), when a person is imprisoned the educational resources provided to the individual do not have a strong enough impact to overcome the noteworthy obstacles created from being in prison and having a criminal record. I investigate this statement further because people in society don't realize that the obstacles that result from being in prison will most times overshadow the educational opportunity some prisoners are offered. Once an incarcerated individual is paroled back into society the criminal record will make it difficult for them to be hired at a job and in some cases, colleges can even exclude them from enrolling into classes.

According to Southland (2019), even though research has brought forth evidence that educational systems have failed, scholars do not argue that education is the problem despite problems in the educational system. Southland (2019) sheds light on the obstacles that students and teachers face in prison education. by discussing reentry programs for prisoners at the United States Penitentiary in Atlanta (USP-Atlanta) and the Second Chance Act of 2007 which provided money for an array of reentry education programs at that time. According to Southland (2019), the purpose of re-entry education programs is to enable incarcerated people close to paroling or not long ago paroled.

While discussing the importance of reentry programs, Southland illuminates the voices of prisoners in USP Atlanta prison through the debate team in which some inmates speak about the failure of re-entry programs through their

own personal experience. Personal experience is as important or if not, even more important than the information found through third person materials as it enables a more raw and honest depiction of the experience from a first-hand account and unlike most traditional research, this data comes with an immediate disclosure of where the person stands. For me in particular, I seek to further contribute to the dismantlement of the prison industrial complex through the more subtle circumstances and effects that lead to prison and the consequences that come after, beyond prison.

PCARE recommends abolition of the prison industrial complex (2007), in order to change and confront the crisis the prison-industrial complex has created, they have called upon several scholars in the communication field to assist in the criticism to eventually get rid of the prison-industrial complex. The important role the Communication field can play on the topic of educational resources that are available in prison but also in the educational field in generally, particularly one that through ignorance and unconsciousness leads students of color straight to prison. Members of PCARE (2007), stated there is no doubt that educational resources empower incarcerated students to change their mentality and create careers as well as a life that seemed very unlikely in the past. This is very important information that I will expand on through my research because it sheds light on the importance and impact educational resources can have on incarcerated individuals which can further explain why RCP would be employed to purposely keep POC away from such resources.

According to Murrillo (2021), approximately 95 percent of incarcerated individuals will finally be paroled, and the chance for them to accomplish some kind of college degree will expand bringing forth an opportunity for them to overcome some of the stigmas incarceration imposes on them. This is important information that should be further explored and taken seriously because education is a powerful resource that can give formerly incarcerated people the opportunity to be productive members of society as well as expose the prison system in the hopes of one day shutting it down. Murrillo (2021) elaborates on the powerful resource education is for formerly incarcerated people arguing that transitioning from incarceration to higher education as well as earning a college degree or credentials does bring forth opportunities in careers, economic mobility, housing, as well as healthcare to name a few resources that most likely are not available at the beginning of parole.

Studies and research conducted by educated POC as well as educated formerly incarcerated individuals will be vital to reducing the prison population and this can generate money to provide educational resources for the youth, stopping the school-to-prison-pipeline. Hewitt & Goldsmith (2020) discuss there has been positive changes that have taken place in which organizers and government leaders, have worked together in Los Angeles County; that have led to nine youth correctional facilities being shut down since 2017 as well as placed \$60 million dollars in funds to community-based programs that have helped in lowering youth arrests by 30 percent as well as youth incarceration by 50

percent. This lowers the rate of incarceration for the youth and gives community-based organizers the opportunity to work with the youth to become productive members of society instead of incarcerating them where they do not learn anything helpful.

With this study, I do not look to reform what is already in place. I believe that the only solution is to begin shutting down youth prisons, as this is a great start to what can lead to help the youth through more informed and conscious community-based programs and mentoring. This will lead individuals to become successful members of society instead of institutionalized individuals. In addition, the fact that California Youth Authority prisons have been closed with the exception of three that remain open brings forth hope that positive change is possible when organizers, activists, and government leaders understand that prisons are not the answer to create positive outcomes.

#### Elements of Racist Communication Practices (RCP) in School and in Prison

In the span of my experience, I have been able to gain a better understanding and experience the consequences that specific forms of communication and social interaction can have. I define RCP as a series of communication practices both oral and non-verbal further defined by subcategories, of which I will identify four in relation to previous academic research studies conducted in both educational and prison settings. I go back and forth to further draw out the obvious perpetuation across two institutions that

proclaim to be very different in their goals, but which ultimately demonstrate to have very similar effects when it comes to certain populations of students and prisoners.

Velez Young -Alfaro (2017), uses a critical cultural lens to investigate the experiences of prisoners who were students' and the philosophy of identity developed while in a youth prison school. This study led to exposing the cruel treatment these students received from prison officials. Under international human rights law, incarcerated juveniles should not be treated badly. Coincidentally, most of the incarcerated students in this study were POC. In addition, Velez Young-Alfaro (2017) also investigated the way adult-students associated with each other through forms of communication and social interaction. This is important to my investigation because it helps to demonstrate how communication skills can incite conflict.

If these ideas can be applied to interactions between students, they can also apply to the way institutional leaders such as teachers, prison officials, and professors communicate. Prison officials often lack this skill when working with incarcerated individuals and this lack of preparation can have lifelong effects on prisoner's lives, including the extension of their imprisonment. In a similar way, a couple Educators in K-12 and in Higher Education have also demonstrated this lack of skill when working with me, first as a young student of color and later as a formerly incarcerated student of color. Velez Young-Alfaro's use of autoethnography as a method to shed light on experiences of juvenile prisoners

in a school setting inspired this project which will share and analyze details of my individual case.

Velez Young-Alfaro (2017) also makes sure to point out the systemic racism established within the criminal justice system when they relate that some of the youth involved in the study were killed because of the color of their skin. This points to the fact that racism continues to be orchestrated by the criminal justice system. Velez Young-Alfaro's (2017), findings also include evidence of RCP as they relate the quickness with which participants announce they perceive weapons in the possession of POC, demonstrating with this a presupposed suspicion that resulted in the death of POC. They came to that conclusion from their perception of the individual through visual communication that they were not familiar with and which they perceived as keen to criminals. This is the first element of the RCP I have identified: **Communication that criminalizes and presupposes suspicion.**

According to Rubin (2014), the way students act in the classrooms is influenced by the teaching style a teacher uses as well as the communication forms and interactions between the teacher and students. Like all other students, Latino/a students have to be involved in the course materials to be successful academically as well as emotionally and spiritually involved. Rubin provides important concepts about race and the impact a teacher can have on a youth's future. According to Rubin, (2014), if this engagement that would involve Latino/a

students in course materials is not employed it is very likely for Latino/a youth to fall victim to the school-to-prison pipeline by becoming incarcerated.

The school-to-prison pipeline relates to people that live in disadvantaged communities and attend schools that use strict rules against them that often play a huge role in their criminalization and consequential incarceration. Rubin's article demonstrates that teachers play a very important role in Latino/a student's academic success based on their teaching style (2014). I would like to take this point and explore it further in relation to students who not only do not relate to a teacher's style of teaching but who are further excluded and marginalized by those who claim to be there to help them succeed. When I was in elementary school when a student couldn't relate to a teacher's teaching style they were verbally abused instead of the teacher using Communication to resolve the problem which led to the student being excluded in that classroom. Rubin (2014) states that teachers can help defeat the school-to-prison pipeline for Latino/a students if teachers can get their students to be more involved in the classroom. This is the second element of RCP that I have identified: Communication that promotes exclusion and marginalization.

Murrillo (2021) stated being a first-generation student, enrolled in the K-12 public school system had more bad experiences than good because of English being a second language as well as being the son of migrant parents from Mexico. The importance of this connection to this research is the school-to-prison-pipeline as well as RCP are used by teachers to influence students in a

way that often leads to bad behavior as well as incarceration. Murrillo (2021) illuminates that teachers verbally insulted him because of ethnicity as well as not speaking English well. This pushed him towards the school-to-prison-pipeline. This is the third element of RCP: **Communication that insults racial/ethnic identity by belittling elements of culture such as language.**

Even more important is that the use of RCP starts early in a student's life in elementary school usually which is only further justified by the students reaction which is a result of being oppressed and not an intrinsic and natural "bad behavior." According to Murrillo (2021) it was a combination of negative influences that led him to be expelled from school in the 10th grade, such as the exposure to violence in the environment. I was also exposed to violence in my environment which led me to incarceration. However, in my case I had a strong support system even early on which many troubled kids do not have. Even though, apparently it was only my decisions that led me to juvenile hall because I knew right from wrong as well as the consequences, intergenerational experiences with marginalization, racism and oppression, as well as the RCP I endured had a strong influence on what choices I actually had. I say this because in my opinion it is not the parent's wrong doings, under such circumstances sometimes kids must make their mind up and once they have done this, they cannot be stopped. Due to the factors surrounding me and the world that welcomed me with criminalization, suspicion, exclusion, marginalization, insults and belittlement of my racial/ethnic identity, my mind was made up at an early



age that I was going to live a certain lifestyle. It is a great thing that I have matured as a man and I am continuously overcoming the past.

#### Elements of RCP identified by from Prisoner Agency and Activism

This project seeks to push forth social change particularly in relation to the institutions of education and incarceration by providing an example of what prisoner agency and activism looks like and the kind of studies and proposals that we can contribute to society. I am part of an ongoing movement proposed by prisoners from different walks of life. We should be particularly inspired by the activism and agency of prisoners who have done this from within prison walls, demonstrating that such changes are not only possible, but necessary. From these movements and their response to inhumane forms of punishment justified mainly by RCP, I have collected more examples of these elements.

According to Reiter (2016) there have been changes made throughout the prison system mostly because thousands of inmates united and participated in a nonviolent hunger strike throughout the California prison system. The inmates who participated took action and demanded changes to be made (p. 119). There were three hunger strikes in 2011, 2012, and 2013, the third was the most influential because it ended the use of long-term solitary confinement and the prisoners who had been in isolation for decades were released to less restrictive prison yards. This was a great accomplishment by the prisoners and those who supported and participated in the hunger strike with them from outside the prison

especially when many prisoners were in solitary confinement for very questionable reasons.

This activism has provided some relief, but there are still many changes that need to happen. Reiter (2016) states, in California, as recent as 2015, having tattoos and being in possession of a book written by Malcolm X was considered proof by prison officials to label an inmate a prison gang member and place that inmate into long-term solitary confinement (p. 120). This includes cultural drawings of Aztec warriors that inmates in some cases received in the mail from family who have pride for their culture. In Chapter 4, I will exemplify how specific culturally relevant signs and symbols were used to further justify the implementation of inhumane practices on prisoners. This was one way in which racism worked covertly within prison. This is the fourth element of RCP:

**Communication in the form of perceiving nonverbal signs and symbols as nonverbal communication to identify those prisoners (and students) as threatening.** This was enough grounds for them to further dehumanize inmates through inhumane practices such as solitary confinement.

I experienced the torture chambers of long-term solitary confinement. RCP justified keeping me and others like me away from educational programs as punishment and instead sent some prisoners throughout the prison system to work for slave wages for the growth of the prison industrial complex. In the next chapter, the reader will be presented with the methodology that will make possible a closer analysis of all four subcategories of RCP here presented

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

This work seeks not only to demonstrate how discriminatory RCP impacted my relationship to education but more importantly, the way my own communication style was developed by these experiences with verbal abuse and marginalization as an incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individual. The lack of access to opportunities goes beyond a criminal record, it is When I earned a college degree, I was able to get a job outside of the connections I had upon parole when I did not have a college degree. This improved my chances of getting my own housing as well as being able to travel because it increased my work salary. However, these resources come with time in my opinion depending on the individual's ability to make connections on and off campus to be in a position that allows positive change such as, being in a good environment which education gives more access to.

To confirm the existence of Racist Communication Practices (RCP) and their involvement in my incarceration, the extension of my incarceration, and the stigma I have endured being a formerly incarcerated student in higher education. I will base my data collection on the method of autoethnography because I believe there is great value in the personal experiences of those incarcerated. My experiences will provide other scholars and readers in general with a better idea of how tactics including the use of RCP justified the implementation of a

systematic yet informal program that worked to keep me in solitary confinement and a recipient of other inhumane practices that were designed to destroy me while empowering prison officials and the industrial complex they represent. My autoethnographic account and analysis of my experiences are also important for future research because they bring forth a different perspective that is not very common in academia and other higher education circles.

### Autoethnography: Documenting Details of the Incarcerated Experience

#### Critical Race Theory in Context

CRT scholars are those who recognize inequality and power relationships that are used to oppress others. Thus, I am evolving into a CRT scholar because I align myself with scholars and thinkers who resist hegemonic perceptions based on ideology. I am critical toward the prison system which we have come to understand is truly a prison-industrial complex (Silva and Samimi 2018). The reason I am a critical scholar is because throughout my life as a man that identifies as a POC, I have experienced the social inequalities and lack of inclusion in education as well as the workforce based on my race.

While incarcerated I had very little to no educational resources while in other parts of the prison system others had access to educational resources daily. I've been denied work based on my past even though I've paid my debt to society and accomplished great things. I have been treated differently in higher education and have found that at times my path in academia has been made

unnecessarily more difficult by those who due to stigmatization continue to see me as a threat or as someone to be “saved” or used as a token. Experiencing the effects of the power relationships that have existed for decades between influential people who share different forms of racist practices and control institutions such as, schools and prisons among other resources have helped shaped my beliefs as a critical scholar.

I see the benefit of referencing critical race theory (CRT) as it pertains specifically to the effects of racism and the resulting social stratification. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) stated CRT movement is a collective of activists and was introduced in the mid-1970s, as many lawyers, activists and legal scholars discovered together that racism was still a reality after the civil rights movement in the 1960s and focused on creating change in regards to the relationship among race, racism, as well as power. This is important throughout this work because using CRT to explore the power relationships among race, racism, as well as power will shed light on social issues that need change. CRT brings forth the opportunity to strengthen my autoethnography because it focuses not only on understanding social situations but on how to change them.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001) CRT challenges the original foundations of the liberal order which includes equality theory, and legal reasoning, to name a couple. Delgado and Stefancic argue that CRT carefully investigates the ideas of racism, power, and policy in the legal field thus it is a relevant theoretical framework when discussing educational discipline and its

connection with race, power plays and set ups, as well as punishment as the micro extension of the macro legal field. This basis on CRT allows for parallel connections to my own experiences and the way this format of oppression plays out within micro and more intimate levels.

Communication scholars have done research on the prison system and education using critical perspectives such as Southard (2019) and members of PCARE who identify themselves as a collective of scholars to provide support to this research. Additionally, exposing the direct effects of communication will demonstrate the huge role they play in exposing the lack of rehabilitative resources in the prison system such as education for all incarcerated individuals as well as formerly incarcerated individuals. I hope the details found in this study shed light on the need to further educate K-12 and higher education educators as well as those people in positions of leadership and service within the prison system.

### Freedom and Power

The importance of freedom is often ignored by the criminal justice system because all human beings have different reactions to situations that life presents daily. I would argue this is important to understand because the criminal justice system usually has one solution and that is to incarcerate people for actions that are considered unruly. I think about my freedom often and how quickly it can be taken away because it already has been taken away from me again as recent as 2020 which is an example of how the criminal justice system continues to target

POC based on their past. Fortunately, the knowledge I have established through maturity and education has given me power to continue to be a productive member of society. Mason (n.d) stated that Michel Foucault believed that knowledge is connected to power, because knowledge can develop from power; creating it, not stopping it. When a formerly incarcerated individual is able to gain power, the world can be introduced to ideas that can bring forth positive change such as ending the mass incarceration of POC but it can also bring forth resistance and other forms of covert violence which I will further explain and detail in the next chapter.

Before introducing the reader into the analysis and discussion, I want to mention that as I wrote this thesis Covid-19 negatively impacted me as a formerly incarcerated student because life changing resources were not available. Safe spaces such as libraries were closed, and I had to get used to doing stuff online such as schoolwork. It is as daunting as it is difficult not having the same human contact I am used to having in society. When I got locked up again during my graduate career in 2020 during the Covid-19 global pandemic, I was reminded of the good feeling that freedom and power brings a human being because being in a cell that is being observed by correctional officers who do not care if the person next to you has Covid-19 caught my attention quickly as I kept my eyes and ears open and mouth shut.

I watched correctional officers take their time processing each individual for hours before I was transferred to another jail where I was processed again

and after I stated that I had no safety concerns the next morning I was still in a cell with approximately ten other people waiting to be housed. Fortunately, I was released shortly after, but this recent experience of incarceration brought back the reality that jails continue to keep human beings in inhumane conditions as well as continue to process people for petty crimes even during a global pandemic. This experience in addition to my current experiences in higher education has prompted me to take a close look and analyze those invisible ways in which a formerly incarcerated individual can continue to be deprived from their absolute life, happiness, liberty, and power.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

During episodes within my life experiences, I noticed four main recurring forms of RCP which are RCP that promotes exclusion and marginalization, RCP that criminalized and presupposed suspicion, RCP that insulted racial ethnic identity, and RCP that involved non-verbal signs and symbols. All subcategories of RCP here stated are used to create separation, marginalization, and can occur both overtly and covertly through verbal and nonverbal communication. There has been instances in my educational experience (both K-12 and later in higher education) where RCP have pushed me to think that education was not for me because the treatment I received from some teachers which started in elementary school made it difficult for me to embrace education and use it as a powerful resource as I do today. I have been very detailed in the importance of discussing RCP in the prison system. The importance of discussing my negative experiences in the educational system is that it can possibly bring forth discussion among teachers and retraining which can diffuse tension some teachers might create with students because of personal views they may impose as central or supreme.

RCP that promotes exclusion and marginalization is used to create separation and the feeling of solitude for the individual on the receiving end. For example, it made me feel as if I was not part of the class like I was invisible to the teacher. RCP that criminalized and presupposed suspicion is used to attempt to

strip an individual of freedom in the sense that they are now subjected to higher scrutiny and careful observation and made to feel as they are walking on eggshells no longer able to express themselves in a way that invites the individual to be a willful participant. For example, I felt it was better to stay quiet at times even though I had valuable feedback to share with the class. RCP that insulted racial ethnic identity in my experience is when an authority figure such as a teacher uses racial epithets to describe their beliefs on a topic at the blatant minimization of other cultures, customs, and perspectives. RCP that involved non-verbal signs and symbols relates to the way in which certain physical attributes, tattoos, head wear, clothing, and art forms which are interpreted as identity markers that merit a particular form of treatment, usually one that is punitive or suspicious. This last one is different from the RCP subcategory of suspicion above in that it is triggered specifically by objects and symbols as opposed to cultural expression in the image of the individual involved.

In addition, the strong connection that education has with the school-to-prison-pipeline in my case led me on a destructive path in society and eventually into CYA which then led me to California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation because of my own decisions that were affected and influenced by the experiences I endured. I've always felt very confident from the time I was a kid into adulthood and the experience of going from CYA to CDCR made me feel good at the time because society was a faraway thought and I was nineteen years old still very young but I had a strong mentality that was strengthened in

CYA because of all the madness I experienced that made me a much stronger individual mentally as well as physically. For example, being in solitary confinement and being very quiet listening made me a very aware person. To me at that time this meant I could survive long term incarcerated forever, if necessary, that was my mindset. The decisions I made I've taken responsibility for because those were choices I made. I get a very good feeling from this because I've never blamed anybody for my actions in my life. This means that nobody has ever influenced me or forced me to do anything that I've done in my life. However, the fact that prison officials labeled individuals based on who they associated with led me to enact survival tactics that ultimately justified the punishment of keeping me housed in solitary confinement for a majority of my incarcerated time. Some of the punishment and dehumanizing practices may have been prompted by my reactionary behavior, which was a result of the inhumane conditions imposed on inmates. I personally felt anger, disgust, and horror during this time living in solitary confinement waking up every day to different situations in the unit that didn't involve me but I had to hear based on being housed there like people losing their mind. It happened sometimes and you had to hear it as a kid in CYA this alarmed me at the same time disgusted me because sometimes those individuals would not be helped instead, they would be taken out the cell for some time then placed back into the same cell. This meant that some CYA correctional officers as well as medical staff had no interests in helping some of the inmates who needed help. I say this only from

what I had to see and hear. The fact is that prison officials often chose certain individuals to place into more restrictive confinement sometimes based on informants who may have been coerced to lie for their own benefit or survival. The use of long-term solitary confinement as I experienced not only took away my educational resources but also took away contact visits from loved ones. Nothing surprised me I was always a quiet person that minded my own business because I never talked too much anyway but this made me feel like I could not trust anybody at that time. This meant that most of the time I only spoke to people when I had to because I never knew who might be listening and making up lies that could be used against me.

The experiences I had with RCP in prison were parallel to the experiences I had in school because it created a path that led me to incarceration. Once I was paroled, I enrolled into higher education and noticed the way I was treated by certain individuals who enacted RCP was parallel to my experiences before in school and prison. My experiences made me realize that RCP has been used to keep the school-to-prison pipeline connected because many youths like myself experienced RCP in the K-12 system. The feelings I had at that time were more of anger because of being pushed away from school but of happiness as well as inspiration because I always knew I would overcome these experiences. The meaning of this is that I always believed in myself and I knew that if I remained strong the bad times wouldn't last as long as I made the effort to succeed.

## School to Prison: Racist Communication Practices in K-12

With this study I am acknowledging my own experiences with the factors identified in the school-to-prison pipeline such as zero tolerance policies, outsourcing discipline to juvenile courts, officers in schools, the higher likelihood for Brown and Black students to be disciplined, and punitive discipline policies (Nelson and Lind 2015). The RCP I received from teachers in the K-12 education system which did have a negative impact on my attitude towards school and pushed me into the school-to-prison-pipeline started in elementary school. Even though it was only one teacher who overtly used verbal RCP towards me it made me feel that racism was still accepted and was being used in the education system. The meaning of this to me as a kid was that teachers had the authority to pick who they liked and did not like as students. The impact this experience had on me was that I became less interested in school. In my experience I was never held back a grade in the K-12 education system, but the experience has always carried on with me. Even though I never allowed it to stop me from achieving my goals not everybody is like me and that is why I share this experience.

My experiences before prison that influenced how I speak, act, and look developed from the environment I spent most of my time in as a kid including the K-12 system. I will say that some of what I saw as a kid influenced me to speak, act, as well as look how I did at an early age which comes from the cultural things developed from survival tactics like putting on boxing gloves and fighting to diffuse an issue were normal as a kid in my environment. It helped me develop

good fighting skills and built good confidence because during my incarceration as a juvenile when I had conflict, I would want to resolve it through boxing which you cannot do in a juvenile detention center. I did it anyway and the outcome was being committed to the California Youth Authority (CYA). During this time as a kid I didn't know how to resolve conflict through communication because being a competitive male the environment showed me how to resolve conflict with fists. At that time, it made me feel power because I was ready to engage in combat when some kids were scared. Today I've matured and know how to diffuse conflict peacefully the way I speak, look, and act will always be shaped by my environment because that is where I grew up. What this means to me is that my character was developed from my environment as a kid because my experiences good as well as bad play a role in who I am today which is a productive member of society. This experience comes with its own requirements of historical contextualization which I will not develop further for this study.

The experiences with RCP later while incarcerated in CYA were parallel to the experiences I had in K-12 because both institutions employed a form of oppression in me which resulted in the opposite of my social development. In school being verbally abused by a teacher as a kid and incarcerated being in a cell are meant to bring forth the disempowering feelings of oppression. For example, the feeling of isolation in the classroom based on a teacher's abuse of power as well as the feeling of disgust based on the inhumane conditions of incarceration solitary confinement units. What this means to me is that the k-12

system and the school-to-prison pipeline use similar tactics implemented by authority figures such as teachers as well as some correctional officers to oppress POC. Once I entered the sixth grade, I had different teachers with varied teaching styles and I learned that based on the color of your skin, students were to be treated and talked to differently. I experienced it with some teachers. Having support from family helped me keep focused and moving forward. It is what saved me from total despair and failure. Yet, the ill ways I was treated by teachers were so powerful that they still had a negative impact on me.

Most of the teachers were OK educators in elementary school, but I was exposed to overt and systematic RCP by one teacher which did influence me in a negative way at that time towards school. I recall one day in fifth grade a white teacher called me a moron while showing gross favoritism towards white kids. It got to the point where one day during recess I jumped the fence and walked home because I wanted to get away from that classroom. The feeling I got from the teacher calling me a moron in front of the classroom pushed me away, but I still had to show up because I did not have a choice. This exposed me to further discriminatory treatment. The main feeling this interaction created was anger and isolation. This experience meant that school was not my first priority when it should have been as a kid in elementary school and that my education was being stripped away at an early age based on RCP.

I do not exactly recall what the punishment was for jumping the fence and going home but I was probably suspended for a couple days because the focus

was on the problem of me “escaping” the school and not on what had provoked my escape. This implies that there is a belief that I was presupposed as a problem child and was not given the benefit of doubt. Instead, as I was reacting to an insult to my identity and the exclusion and marginalization that came from those teachers verbal and non-verbal signs that demonstrated disdain for my presence in their classroom. In my response as a child not knowing what to do to make it stop, I got away, and was further criminalized. The meaning of this is that I was being set up by RCP at the same time now being labeled a troublemaker by school authorities.

Racism has influenced some scholars who are POC to educate others through writing such as Grollman (2017) who discusses his personal experience with racism which is worth mentioning because it sheds light on how POC are continuously looked down on during their education. Grollman (2017) states that a research assistant told students not to talk Black during one of their assignments. Those words used by an educator display the power that people think they have based on the color of their skin. As I think about that I can only imagine how that made the students feel hearing an educator give those instructions. This shows that some educators use RCP to degrade POC similar to the teacher who verbally abused me. It’s like stripping a person of their culture by asking them not to be themselves during a school assignment or by simply calling them a moron.



I discuss racism to share part of my story from the K-12 system as well as a graduate student to the school-to-prison-pipeline to inform people that racism still exists today, and it is not a good thing. According to Reynolds (n.d) numerous kids that get trapped in the school-to-prison-pipeline are from impoverished families, have learning disabilities, or background of abuse and neglect. Reynolds (n.d) discusses instead of helping these kids that would most likely benefit from educational resources K-12 could give them they are isolated ruled out and criminalized as well as ostracized by society. The K-12 system has had strong ties to the school-to-prison-pipeline mostly used against kids from lower income families which is another form of institutionalized racism. Reynolds (n.d) states the school-to-prison-pipeline is another expression to describe institutionalized racism and incarcerating poverty stricken African American school kids instead of teaching them. This is important to understand because the K-12 system teachers often contribute to these issues by using RCP which I experienced first-hand. The experience made me stronger as a man today because I understand that racism played a role in leading me to the school-to-prison-pipeline as well as I am able to inform others who can use this in the future to create change in the k-12 system.

As for my K-12 educators and institutions, instead of working with me and showing me what it was they wanted me to do to succeed, teachers treated me punitively and labeled me when I was placed with the “troublemaker kids” in seventh grade. Instead of spending more time with us because we needed the

guidance, we were further marginalized by having to leave school early at half-a-day. The meaning of this was that teachers had no clue how to communicate with their students when it was necessary instead, they were quick to label and push away from the classroom. I also want to point out that sometimes kids take insults from teachers as well as other experiences and it hardens them to the point they are not interested in school. In addition, I was a smart kid and was cognizant that the school system was set up to some extent to fail some kids. It was certainly how it felt for me, like a trap that I could not escape. With the help and support of family, I pushed through and graduated Jr. high school but was incarcerated shortly after.

My experience in school before incarceration was not all negative, in the earlier years it started good because I was an active and confident kid through elementary school as well as junior high school who was always playing sports during recess and after school which kept me looking forward to school the next day. My consciousness was developed from having the opportunity of getting a glimpse of how good the educational experience could be. I remember as a kid having a couple very good teachers who were POC they treated me great and I learned the academic material because of their teaching style which included taking the time to include every student in class room activities during class. The way these teachers communicated with me, with respect and care, was very important because I knew they cared about my academic success and they saw me as a human being. These teachers would ask how I was doing outside of the

classroom and inside the classroom which made me feel good as a kid. To me this meant that these teachers cared about their students inside and outside the classroom they did not just say it they meant it. Also, it motivated me personal to learn in classroom because there was a feeling of peace and opportunity between student as well as teacher for all students.

During this time sports were my outlet. I focused more on sports than inside the classroom these teachers knew that about me. This was important because they did not fear starting up a conversation with me that began with baseball and ended with schoolwork. In my entire experience as a child in education, only two teachers made a difference because they knew how to communicate with their students. This speaks to the importance of hiring apt teachers and educators who actually understand this about their students. Having had the privilege of at least knowing the other side of this issue is what motivates me today because I understand the importance of communication and its powerful impact. As I relate my experiences with RCP while imprisoned in the next section, I will incorporate more connections to my K-12 experiences.

#### Staying in Prison: Racist Communication Practices in Prison

It is difficult to fully separate my K-12 experience from the one of incarceration, because these overlapped. Once I was incarcerated which started in juvenile hall my confidence was high and I was always ready for a fight if necessary because I was a competitive kid when it came to combat from the sports I participated in such as boxing as well as football and my mindset was on

not being a victim . The meaning of this is that I understood that incarceration was a hostile environment and if I didn't stand up for myself, I would be a victim. I would not let that happen and it got me committed to CYA where it was very similar on a more violent level. At the beginning everything was good I would come out for school, but it was not the same as being in a regular high school because there were more restrictions, so I was not very interested. One of the main negatives was having to follow the rules correctional officers imposed on inmates such as going into the cell at a specific time and eating meals at a specific time. This meant that I started to have more animosity towards some correctional officers at that time in juvenile hall because I did not like being told when to go into a cell and when to come out by a stranger.

I would usually play cards with other inmates during recreation time. Things changed after around two weeks because I only had a thirty-day sentence which meant I had the chance to go home soon. Instead, one day correctional officers decided to start moving inmates from other units into the unit I was in, knowing that this would create conflict at that time. This was juvenile hall thus as a kid there was animosity towards some kids that lived in other sections of the county who were welcome into the unit nobody was going to say no but it did make things more hostile at times. This meant that correctional officers to some extents were setting us up to stay longer incarcerated. They used information on what we looked like, what we were wearing, and the type of artwork we had to

make this decision, using RCP to discriminate and formulate a more hostile environment for inmates.

As should have been expected, on that day fights happened, and I was pepper sprayed and placed into isolation for a few days. The fights continued among inmates and when I was allowed back into recreation time with the inmates, they knew there would be an issue with, I got into another fight. I was again placed on restriction for approximately seven days. In similar circumstances, I got into a few more fights and was placed on modified program. These practices further exacerbated relationships between prisoners. One day I was let out my cell and was walking into the unit there were two inmates I recognized who had been moved into the unit there was an exchange of words with them which led to the two inmates being assaulted and as a result I was charged with battery. This was juvenile hall and the first battle ground that got many youths such as me ready for CYA. I mean based on my mentality at that time nothing could stop me from my actions.

When I was taken to court, then I was committed to CYA at that time and I felt confident because that is all I could feel in a hostile environment that would prey on the weak. This was an environment that existed outside of incarceration, but which was further fed by the prison guards. Demonstrating weakness in such an environment is never an option.

One of the main things I remember about CYA reception facility was that inmates were assigned roommates by correctional officers which led to violence

in my personal experience because of the environment incarceration creates. The first cellmate I had was a different race I had a confrontation with this individual and there was a change of cellmates. I was then moved into a cell with someone I knew from juvenile hall and all was well. I remember seeing how traumatized some individuals were due to the circumstances correctional officers created. I only say this to give the uninformed an idea of what CYA was like from my point of view. I'm very fortunate that I remained strong and that the torture chambers did not affect me so emotionally, mentally, and physically during those times because it is a very traumatic experience that affects human beings differently if one is not able to remain mentally and physically strong it can be much worse.

The educational experiences I had in prison such as being housed behind bars was dehumanizing and attending school in a cage as punishment while placed in a more restrictive environment made me realize that RCP and torture tactics were being used with the purpose of making me feel powerless. This means being in a cell most of the day and night not by choice but because correctional officers made that decision made me feel like I was stuck there forever at times. What I mean by this is that the prison system is designed in a way that imposes psychological warfare on inmates from things like taking away meals and feeding inmates cheese sandwiches for weeks as I experienced in CYA after a riot. Turning off the water for hours based on isolated incidents which

happened sometimes in CYA while in solitary confinement where most of the inmates were kids on Taft in Fred C. Nelles and already on restricted programs.

The first time I experienced solitary confinement I was 15 years old and was in juvenile hall after I got into a fist fight with another inmate. I was placed into isolation for a few days and then let back out into regular program with other inmates until I got into another fight again. The reason why I kept getting into fights was that guards employed tactics because they knew that I would get into a fight when placed with certain people. They did this on purpose knowing I was a child attempting to prove myself and not allow other inmates to take advantage of me or think that I was weak. At that time the fights were based on being from a different part of the city I lived in and this is when my reputation in incarceration began.

The feeling of being in solitary confinement was powerful because all the inmates knew why I was in solitary confinement not by choice. I inevitably understood what the effect of this was, and soon, I saw the empowerment that solitary gave my reputation and I was setting up fights with other inmates. This was during juvenile hall. We were kids doing what we believed would build a reputation and nobody was there to stop us. This was set up by abusive adults, for us to be able to continue stuck in this path, destroying each other and ourselves. Even if these things were done and justified by the same racist practices that made them possible. They were tactics that were employed to dehumanize inmates further because these unjust practices should never

happen, and it shows that CYA staff used torture tactics to impose abuse of minors, youth while in solitary confinement.

I know this from being in solitary confinement for many years in a cell for most of the day. Even though this did not affect me mentally or physically to the point I would harm myself some inmates were less fortunate due to the pressure of RCP that were used to further destroy their minds and spirits. Furthermore, the experience of long-term solitary confinement even though I was placed there because of my actions and history it was more about prison officials abusing power by keeping me there longer than necessary as a way to send a message to other prisoners, using me as a symbol to communicate this power structure. Also being in a cell and having blinds placed on the window slid shut at times so there would be no view of the day room challenged my mind, as a tactic used on inmates. Fighting with prison officials in CYA who abused power by neglecting their job and raising their voices as if they controlled inmates are all factors that I use to define RCP. These torture tactics are RCP they are imposed on POC because most of the prison population is POC such as me. Reflecting, I was fortunate that I did not break down psychologically, emotionally, or spiritually during that time.

Due to the effects of the RCP and the punitive actions that became justified due to this reactionary machine, educational resources were nonexistent during my time at the reception facility. Educational resources would not be available until I was transferred to a CYA prison. Staff decided I would continue



serving my sentence at Fred C. Nelles Youth Correctional Facility. Once I arrived there, I was on a reception unit until I was assigned housing in the general population. While on the reception unit my time was spent talking to other inmates and working in the dining hall serving food to the general population inmates as each cottage of inmates came in and out during mealtimes. Every inmate that was on the reception unit had to work in the dining hall during that time.

Once I was transferred to the general population, I was placed in a cottage as housing was referred to. I spent the first week playing handball with inmates and going to school. The school setting, I liked because it was classrooms with other people which made a difference to me because being incarcerated takes away the experience of school in society. School was mandatory from what I remember during my time there if it was not mandatory, I always went, it was something I looked forward to. It came to an end after just a couple weeks due to correctional officers writing me up on a rules violation for participating in a riot that took place during recreation time one day after dinner. This was because of the hostile environment in CYA.

Everything changed as I was placed into solitary confinement along with a handful of others most of them went back to the cottage but me and a few others were on our way to administrative segregation in Nixon Cottage. This made me feel good because I was going to a unit with inmates I could relate to more and we had yard time without restraints at that time which meant it was not complete

isolation but it made me feel at a loss because I would not have the same educational experience. I was housed in lockup for about two weeks before I was transferred to Nixon. I recall not having a mattress upon arrival prison officials stripped all the cells of those incoming inmates. Also being stripped of all meals, a tactic prison official used for inmates that participated in group disturbances, instead we were given a cheese sandwich and milk for approximately four weeks. The feeling this gave me was anger because there was no good reason for correctional officers to use these tactics which only creates conflict. I learned quickly that solitary confinement imposed inhumane conditions that were used with the intention to oppress human beings. This means that in solitary confinement an inmate has nothing but himself if the individual can maintain sanity.

Once I arrived in Nixon, I was housed in a cell with another individual who had arrived at the same time as me. It made living in administrative segregation easier because we knew each other but after a few days correctional officers made changes and moved one of us out because they assumed we were the reason the riot happened based on the way we were embraced by inmates who were already in administrative segregation once we went out to recreation. That was not the case it was a form of solidarity to acknowledge another person that is going through solitary confinement also, but prison officials took this cultural form of communication and twisted it in order to make rehabilitation more difficult if not impossible while in solitary confinement.

Loudenback (2019) stated the DJJ leaves youth prisoners traumatized, detached and unprepared for life once placed back into society. The state has continued to be unsuccessful when it comes to helping the youth rehabilitate while incarcerated. Loudenback (2019) discusses today as has been the case for the past 100 years, the state system is failing the youth, their loved ones and their communities as well as ignoring its primary responsibility to rehabilitate the youth.

In terms of rehabilitation, I did not see any during my time incarcerated. Fortunately, I was able to rehabilitate myself because of my high self-esteem, honor, and support system. The purpose of mentioning this is that I want formerly incarcerated students to know it is possible to rehabilitate yourself through your own daily routine and a positive mindset. From first-hand experience of incarceration as a youth a teacher's style of teaching even within the prison system, is very important to a Latino student's success academically as well as to their reactions in the class. For example, in my experience as a student I have had a teacher that made sure all the students in the class were included in class discussion. This was done by asking questions and allowing students to answer than calling on students that were not answering allowing them to be heard. In addition, allowing the students to help each other when needed in this type of learning environment I did very well. If most of my teachers had provided this experience, I would have felt that education was something for me. I did not do very well academically with teachers who disliked and verbally abused me, made

accusations against me or in restricted learning environments such as when I was incarcerated. All these factors make education appear as a proxy of the judicial punishment.

For example, when I was in the California Youth Authority in administrative segregation unit the teacher would come around maybe one time every two weeks and talk to prisoners through the door about acquiring units for school. There was no human interaction and no classroom with other students. Books and academic work packets were to be done inside the cell in solitude. This was not much of an incentive to educate myself when I needed my time to strengthen my social connections and increase my likelihood of surviving incarceration and particularly when most of my transgressions were related to the environment that had been further exacerbated by RCP employed by those who were supposedly in charge of my rehabilitation.

The fact that most of the people in solitary confinement were POC sheds light on the juvenile prison system's racists and inhumane practices imposed mainly on POC. Data provided by Nicholson-Crotty et al. provides information that shows youth who identify as People of Color add up for more than 60% of the juvenile justice system and they are 8 times more likely (compared to white youth) to be locked up in juvenile detention facilities (as cited in Rubin, 2014). Once I was incarcerated, access to education was very limited and it was impossible to make it my focus because there was also a pervasive violent environment. At that time, my survival instincts kicked in and my goal was to

survive as a Brown Mexican American man while incarcerated. As a disclaimer, I would like to reiterate that I can only speak from my personal experience going into the criminal justice system as a kid. This experience was life changing and it had a huge impact on my future because while incarcerated I was challenged by racism from prison officials as well as the racial tension among ethnicities based on being in prison which is a different environment in which race plays an important role on survival.

In my experience while incarcerated I didn't view any guards as role models in CYA this is mostly because I was focused on myself as well as surviving in the general population and solitary confinement at that time my mindset was not on being mentored by individuals I did not know outside of incarceration. There were some good correctional officers, but I never got close with any of them due to me being an inmate and them being correctional officers. There were inmates I associated with, but I didn't view them as mentors either while in CYA mostly because it was always a treacherous place and one had to be strong enough to stand up for themselves. In other words, I never got too close to anybody I didn't even know from the streets. I did meet many strong-minded inmates and those are the ones I would interact with most during my time in CYA. People I consider my mentors were free in society at that time.

The limited education that was available to me in CYA was helpful because I learned from the educational material and it planted a seed in my mind to continue once I was free if possible. It started in the classroom during school

time it was a good feeling being around other people with no chains which allowed me to move around freely. I was in general population where I spent several hours in school with other inmates which was great because it was an open setting which allowed me to learn from a teacher in person. The bad part was it wasn't consistent for me sometimes it was nonexistent because of my placement into administrative segregation units. The isolation always brought me back to reality about where I was and how my mindset had to be to survive.

The times I did not experience RCP while incarcerated always came from being around the inmates I associated with because we showed each other respect. These were times spent on the recreation yard for example in CYA playing handball, lifting weights, and talking. Also, when I had the opportunity to make phone calls to loved ones. Most of the time even from the staff while I was in administrative segregation units in CYA I very rarely experienced RCP verbally because there was mutual respect most of the time. I was a quiet person that handled my problems through violence at that time not through verbal assaults from behind the cell door. There was still RCP to deal with regardless based on the environment especially in some of the administrative segregation units in CYA where some inmates would verbally insult people from behind the cell door because they felt safe behind the door. Having to listen to the insults were bad enough even if they were directed at someone else. RCP was not avoidable in CYA because even if it was not directed at you it was still heard constantly every day which can lead to conflict.

I will say that I did learn some valuable lessons such as solidarity while in administrative segregation and in the general population because some of us would end up in the general population together once released from solitary confinement. I have always accomplished most of my achievements on my own with a little help from resources I have. I personally experienced solitary confinement in juvenile hall for fighting. Even though it was for my actions the criminal justice system should have better solutions to resolve issues and prevent violent acts from occurring because all this accomplished was to further strip me from education while in juvenile hall.

These experiences also affected the way in which I relate to others, as being alone for long periods of time has been proven to create changes in the way we communicate and even think. Haney (2020) stated one of the most hurtful parts for those incarcerated individuals in solitary confinement is that they are stripped of their freedom to give and receive caring touch. This is one of the main things that had an impact on me in solitary confinement not being able to receive contact visits from loved ones which is very important because I forgot what hugs feel like from people I care about for many years.

I have to say I've always been a very strong-minded individual. Solitary confinement could never break me down to the point I would lose hope. Unfortunately, this was not the case for everyone mainly in the California Youth Authority because I was aware of some inmates committing suicide and others attempting suicide due to the inhumane conditions. These inmates were

relocated to other sections of the prison for their own safety. Also, at times prison officials did not respond to those calls of help by inmates threatening to harm themselves until it was too late. I recall one of my neighbors lighting himself on fire and not being pulled out of his cell for approximately thirty- minutes maybe longer. Thick smoke was traveling down the tier into some cells but got no response from correctional officers. When they did respond the inmate was dragged out of the cell and placed Infront of my door unconscious medical treatment was performed as the inmate was taken away for a couple weeks. Instead of helping the inmate about two weeks later the inmate was escorted down the tier and placed into the same cell. California Prison Focus (2013) discusses 50% of all inmate suicides occur in Security Housing Unit (SHU) nevertheless it houses only 5% of the prison population. The dehumanizing conditions, torture units, and lack of resources do push some prisoners to commit suicide. It is unfortunate back then in CYA there was the imposition of an ideology where only the strong minded survived and the weak were preyed on and nobody could stop that because there was no authority that cared to stop it.

According to C., C. Brooks, and D. Roush, (2014), state people that work in correctional detention centers need to be trained to deal with incarcerated people in a professional manner (p. 45). I've experienced being restrained by prison officials after the fact I was already handcuffed up after I had cell extracted in CYA. Other times I've heard inmates call out for medical attention only to be ignored for hours. The experience of being housed in a hostile environment while



incarcerated had a negative impact on me because I have a lot of pride in myself as well as culture.

Pride is part of what maintains the social ties that are so important for solidarity and survival while in prison. This was also the main trigger for my reactions and prison officials knew and understand that. If anything, being put through torture made me angry towards prison officials because they decided what deserved punishment from their own racist views and their perception of my form of communication both verbal and non-verbal in the form of prison art, tattoos, and other visuals that represent cultural pride but which are perceived only as “gang-related” or criminal. To be honest I’ve always taken full responsibility for my actions in society and while incarcerated, but the lack of ways out, minimal to no access to educational resources for all inmates, as well as the effects the inhumane conditions the prison system imposed in my personal experience need to be exposed and further scrutinized.

The RCP that some prison officials used was another conflict that was experienced in CYA and led to me physically assaulting a correctional officer after the correctional officer spoke to me in a commanding voice telling me to shut up as if he controlled inmates. This led me to solitary confinement for approximately ten months before I was able to experience general population again. I’m not boosting my actions, the point is that some correctional officers would abuse power, and this led to more conflict. It’s bad enough to be incarcerated as a youth and have to deal with correctional officers that abuse

power. I would argue this was ignored by the criminal justice system and society for many years until recently which has led to the majority of CYA's to being shut down permanently.

Rainey (2021) discuss the shutdown of youth prisons after eighty years of existence and many years of youth inmates being mistreated which played an important role in the shut down as well as using rehabilitation over punishment to help the youth prepare for the future as many that are incarcerated will be closer to home. I recall being in administrative segregation for months in CYA and the correctional officers covering the cell door window so inmates could not see out into the day room area I experienced this a few. Rainey (2021) stated as recent as 2019, the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, which is a nonprofit organization that supports shutting down state youth prisons, brought forth a report that the Division of Juvenile Justice DJJ correctional officers encourage violence, reinforce racial and ethnic hostility as well as validate institutional gang activity.

Thinking back to my own experience being incarcerated in CYA another way correctional officers abused power in my opinion was having individuals housed in administrative segregation shackled from ankles to waist and wrist with a black box to secure the wrist cuffs. At times the cuffs would be too tight but correctional officers would not loosen them. In turn, at CYA my confidence was high because I had built a reputation for fighting with correctional officers that were known to abuse power. My conflict came from prison officials abusing

power as well as the lack of reform and understanding the youth prison officials had on how to diffuse issues without using long-term solitary confinement. Communication that promotes exclusion and marginalization in my experience the way some correctional officers in CYA attempted to threaten me by speaking in a hard tone which led to fighting between me and them a couple times. The outcome was me being placed into administrative segregation and having limited to nonexistent educational resources. The fact that CYA was a different environment it was always mandatory that I stood up for myself or else I may have not survived. While in administrative segregation there was no work labor done for the prison which can be considered another resource taken away because it's possible one can learn a trade with those resources available.

I was in a CYA for inmates eighteen years old to twenty-five and I had been placed into solitary confinement for a new charge I had picked up in the general population, but the DA rejected. I was transferred up north and spent approximately two weeks on an orientation unit and got into a fight with a correctional officer which got me back into solitary confinement for approximately nine months because of a group disturbance I was in while in solitary confinement as well as an additional writeup. During this time inmates were let out to a day room to watch television for one hour but shackled from ankles to waste as well as wrists with a black box that secured the wrists cuffs. At this time, my anger was high because of the lack of reform and understanding the youth prison officials had on how to diffuse issues without using long-term solitary

confinement. When I was released into the general population again, I picked up a new charge during a group disturbance and was sent to California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR).

When I arrived at CDCR things were different this was nothing like CYA even though many prisoners there had been to CYA. In CDCR you can't act on something with violence just because you want to that can get you in some serious trouble. There is violence but there are things that happen before violence happens. At that time, I was at Tracy prison and in administrative segregation also solitary confinement with the worst of the worst inmates according to prison officials. There is recreation yard with some other inmates that associated with the same people I did while incarcerated. I did share the yard with alleged prison gang members, and because of this prison officials kept me in solitary confinement a little longer.

There were no educational programs I was aware of while in solitary confinement. A few months later I was sent to Corcoran SHU which is solitary confinement, but the concrete yard was still being used at this time which means prisoners came out to the yard together based on how prison officials classified the inmate. This is what solitary confinement was like for me during the time I spent there from CYA to CDCR. When I was released from prison, I had one parole violation and was placed into the county jail I had no safety concerns, so I was on the mainline for a few weeks. Suddenly, I was never told why I was moved to a location in the jail called the dungeon which is solitary confinement. I

can only guess that the correctional officers assumed I was influencing other inmates to commit violence while in jail which was not the case. This illuminates how the correctional officers used solitary confinement for no valid reasons. California Prison Focus (2013) discusses the U.S Courts failure to stop the torture tactics that continue in many cases for more than three decades having complete knowledge of the facts only to support prison officials in continuing SHU torture units. No human being should be placed into extreme isolation and continuously housed in solitary confinement based on the past.

My journey in education started after I was paroled from prison because in prison most of my time was spent in administrative segregation due to the practices by the California Prison System of long term solitary confinement at that time which was a tactic prison officials used to try to break individuals mentally and at that time education was a limited resource that wasn't a priority to me. Moreover, from first-hand experience of a decade in solitary confinement education was nonexistent in solitary confinement most of the time.

Fortunately, because of my perseverance and support system I did not break mentally and was able to rehabilitate myself through my own self-esteem. This is not the case for some people who experience solitary confinement. According to Reiter (2020), numerous studies illuminate findings of psychological harms caused by segregation, as well as solitary confinement sometimes leading to self-harm, anxiety, and depression, as well as paranoia to name a few however, there are some new findings that propose solitary confinement is not a

big threat to a prisoners mental health (p.556). This is something I look back on because it reminds me that not everybody had the same opportunities while incarcerated and experienced solitary confinement. Additionally, I think about the good that educational resources could have done for myself as well as many individuals that were in solitary confinement at that time. But my journey in education did not start until after I was paroled from prison.

#### Stigma: Racist Communication Practices in Higher Education

My experiences after prison have been great because I am free and able to live life as a productive member of society working and completing higher education. Learning firsthand what hard work feels like when I did construction work was uplifting and motivated me to continue working. The experience of being able to touch a woman is irreplaceable and one of my favorite experiences after incarceration. Furthermore, the experience of being able to taste food not available in prison reminds me that freedom is what I want to maintain. The negative experiences that I have been challenged with after prison such as losing a job as well as the stigma of being formerly incarcerated student facing RCP, I have overcome as I have always done through my confidence, and strong mindset. I've lost jobs, but never get discouraged I get another job within days and keep moving forward. My personal best experience after prison was reuniting with my mentor and going to work at the same time listening to words that always keep me disciplined as well as focused on myself.

My decision to enroll into community college came after several months of working and thinking about the options I had that could result in improving my life. I made the decision to enroll into community college and dedicated my time into being a successful student. I had some help from family along the way, but it was my work ethic as a student that led to my success. During my community college years, I felt it was going to be a challenge because I had been out of education for more than a decade and was unfamiliar with a lot of the course material as well as the restrictions of being on parole. I've always embraced challenges though and I learn quickly which is why I was able to re-assimilate into the community college community successfully.

The main thing that helped me achieve success as a college student is my high-self-esteem which I have had since I was a kid playing sports, I've always been able to bounce back from setbacks. The communication I had with other students has always been good because I've always been respectful towards classmates and more of a leader than a follower. Additionally, the way most professors communicated with me was with respect because I've always been a respectful student at the college level. However, I have had the experience of dealing with RCP from one teacher and some staff members throughout my higher education experience which gave me an inside look at the power that the educational institution has over students. POC that are entering higher education may be gullible about the existence of racism in the classroom. This is not to say

that they do not know racism exists, but educators have a way of manipulating students through their position of power and the language they use.

I have faced some RCP particularly from one instructor as a student in higher education both verbal and non-verbal. I understand that a student's attitude is very important because it can determine the mood of others inside the classroom. At the same time as a student the way a teacher communicates can make a student feel alienated. In this case the teacher made a comment about students that "come" to the United States to continue education saying that they did not deserve anymore resources to help them succeed. As I listened to one of my classmates respond in disagreement it quickly came across to me as RCP. The teacher could have said none of the students need additional resources making it sound as if all students had equal rights but to target students from other countries to me was wrong. I'm not saying that this teacher is a racist, but in this experience the way I responded with interest led to me being graded differently as well as me taking a disliking to the class material.

On another occasion this same educator openly accused of breaking into their office during a class session on a day that I was absent. This was not true and only brought to my attention by one of my classmates who pointed it out to me because I had thought little of it before the quarter had ended. Personally, this person's actions do not have a long-term effect on me, I only mention them because they are the perfect example of RCP that promote exclusion and marginalization still present in higher education today. One day after the quarter



had ended and grades were posted I spoke to the professor. The professor, whose door was wide open, and the entire hallway could hear said, “who has the power me or you? I could lower your grade if I want to. Is that what you want? I have the power not you.” The issue was not one of miscommunication or of misunderstanding, I was clearly informed that it was one of power where I was disproportionately at the losing end.

These are only examples to inform people that we can create change if we acknowledge these problems in the school system and resolve them together, so future students don't have these unnecessary problems that can push them even further away from an education that has cost them an entire life time, and even generations of sacrifice to achieve. The overt and obvious way some teachers respond shows the ignorance they have into resolving issues with their students that can be resolved with positive verbal and non-verbal communication.

As a student being in a classroom where the teacher used nonverbal signs to express dislike towards me it made me feel isolated and unwelcome. What I mean by isolated is excluded at times not called on when my hand was visible to participate based on my different point of view on some of the class material. Any student should feel free to ask any questions respectfully. The facial expressions showing disagreement when I responded to questions made me not want to participate, but being a competitive student, I remained in the class and continued. The nonverbal signs and symbols in my experience were difficult to see and read at first but became more visible as time passed

especially when other people began reacting in coordination with the instructor and/or pointing them out. The covert and hidden messages from the teacher made me realize that there needs to be more open discussion among students and teachers to create solutions for the future.

As for campus life was good for the most part, I have never been the type of person to pay attention to other people I was there to study and go home. There was another incident that sticks out to me. As I was walking minding my own business one night on campus a police officer for no good reason asks me to stop and flashed a light on me claiming I was involved in a disturbance. I said no I don't know anything about it and kept walking towards my housing. Incidents like this shed light on the stigmatization I faced as a formerly incarcerated student and which I overcame. The experience dealing with accusations allowed me to see the reality of racism but motivated me to move forward as a graduate student to overcome the unjust practices.

On another occasion, I recall during my experience as a graduate student an employee called the police because I asked why I was being removed from classes which I had no idea about until a couple days before it happened. I was already enrolled into classes, but nobody informed me that I was going to be removed from the classes I was enrolled in. Imagine being ignored for asking a question about your status as a student. The people in charge should have taken responsibility and explained the situation to me to resolve any misunderstanding. That never happened I was told they did not know and not to ask again. All the

offices that are there to guide students would tell me that they did not know either. The feeling I got from having the police called was disgust in the ignorance of the university employee and alienated because I had done nothing to be pulled out of classes. This was reminiscent to me of the way I was punished based on false information. In CYA sometimes we would be kept inside the cell based on false information that is used to punish inmates.

One of the main reasons I discuss these experience is because we can change this to not simply be a continuation of dehumanizing punitive practices but instead to make the future in education a better place for all students as well as understand that teachers should be educators and not biased individuals upholding and propagating their unfounded opinions and ideologies. The longer that there is separation and discrimination based on race the worse the educational system will become for future students. RCP influences exclusion marginalization among students by making POC feel excluded from educators and the educational system this is what makes it more likely for students to drop out and not graduate.

RCP that continues to be used in k-12, such as overt and obvious communication that is verbal abuse to alienate a student is very important to acknowledge because this pushes a kid away from school. During incarceration the use of shackles on youth and cages while in solitary confinement also pushed me further away from education as I lost interest due to the living conditions in prison. Also, in higher education the authority figures such as

teachers are protected by their peers thus these issues are usually ignored and not talked about in way to resolve them. The fact that teachers that use RCP are biased individuals and nothing is done about it needs to be further discussed among scholars.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### It Can Be Very Different

I hope to learn that other scholars are motivated to investigate the prison system's inhumane practices against people of color and to continue to speak out against the employment of racist communication practices (RCP) which enable and create the circumstances that make inhumane treatment such as the use of long-term solitary confinement as well as the lack of educational resources, justifiable. The hurdles I imagine I will be challenged with are being more descriptive of my experience in solitary confinement from California Youth Authority to places such as Corcoran SHU and the differences in the isolation units because some were more restrictive than others as well as communication with others and how I felt at that time based on my mindset being focused on survival day to day. In addition, the lack of educational resources in the prison system, RCP I endured during my entire life as a child, a youth, then a young man has heavily influenced the way I relate to education. I have had to fight the way that I perceived education and the way I saw myself as a student. Even during my graduate studies, I have had to endure and persist personal attacks and discrimination due to my formerly incarcerated status.

From first-hand experience of incarceration as a youth a teacher's style of teaching is very important to a Latino student's success academically as well as

reactions in the class. For example, in my experience as a student I have had a teacher that made sure all the students in the class were included in class discussion. This was done by asking questions and allowing students to answer than calling on students that were not answering allowing them to be heard. In addition, allowing the students to help each other when needed in this type of learning environment I did very well. If most of my teachers had provided this experience, I would have felt that education was something for me. I did not do very well academically with teachers who disliked and verbally abused me, made accusations against me or in restricted learning environments such as when I was incarcerated. All these factors make education appear as punishment.

I am a formerly incarcerated student and a communication scholar that has created a path for myself through education that I did not have access to while incarcerated. Additionally, my beliefs are that the criminal justice system has established itself in a way that continues to oppress POC by locking them up and systematically destroying their agency and wellbeing through the use of oppressive and dehumanizing tactics involving different types of racist communication practices.

My experience is but one example of the way incarceration impacts people, even those who are trying to do better for themselves, in a negative and dangerous way. I know this first-hand from more than a decade straight of incarceration from a youth to adulthood and then a subsequent lifetime of stigmatization and marginalization. The fact that having a formerly incarcerated

background is used against me even though I've earned my way into higher education illuminates the reality of continued discrimination that pushes some people back into the prison system.

RCP used by teachers and educators that promote discrimination as well as contribute to the push of people into the school-to-prison pipeline to me is mainly because RCP excludes people from a learning environment. From my experience once that happens a kid can become disinterested in school. Another way is by showing favoritism based on ethnicity and mocking students for not speaking English to their expectation. One of the main ways is teachers are protected by the school system more than students are when it comes to RCP in the classroom. These are a few of RCP that push people into the school-to-prison pipeline.

RCP used by prison officials and authorities continue the legacy of the school-to-prison pipeline as well as work to further marginalize and hinder a prisoner's relationship with education by limiting the educational resources for some inmates. I mean all inmates should have access to educational resources in some CYA solitary confinement units' cages were used which can make a human being feel less than human. Nobody wants to be educated poorly inside a cage while incarcerated. I only speak from my own experience other times having the choice to complete work packets inside a cell which was not motivational at all. A lot of the time education became nonexistent in the solitary confinement units which in my experience made me not even think about

education at that time. I think that the fact that education was not mandatory in solitary confinement units in CYA as it was in the general population is another way, I personally pushed away from education by prison officials and authorities.

Educators and leaders in higher education perpetuate the criminalization and marginalization of formerly incarcerated individuals through RCP that serve to keep them from graduating as well as achieving scholarly success in my experience by using verbal and non-verbal communication tactics with the purpose of making the student feel alienated from the classroom. For example, making false accusations that can get the individual arrested through overt and obvious language directed at the student. Also, giving the student a low grade to make the experience in higher education more challenging and possibly ending the educational experience based on academic probation. The usage of non-verbal communication through covert and hidden messages through body language that showed dislike towards the student.

### Implications

The suggestions I will share for the future are for formerly incarcerated as well as incarcerated students to continue to explore and expand on research that has been produced on the prison system because it can lead to change in the future. Also produce your own research because first-hand experience produces unique stories that shed light on inhumane practices the criminal justice system imposes on human beings as well as the RCP used in the K-12 system that leads youth into the school-to-prison-pipeline. Another suggestion is for the



school system to learn more about the school-to-prison pipeline and to use research done by formerly incarcerated students to end RCP practices used in the k-12 system.

### Limitations

I only speak for myself and can share some excerpts on my experiences because they are mine. Another limitation is I did not interview any formerly incarcerated students which could have brought forth their experiences with RCP if they have any. Also, I did not interview any correctional officers that worked in solitary confinement units in CYA which could have provided insight on their thoughts about solitary confinement units and RCP. Another limitation is I did not interview any teachers to get their thoughts on the usage of RCP in the educational system.

The global pandemic COVID-19 has changed some things such as the time I have to work on this thesis paper because resources are limited, and I have a job which takes time out of the day. I didn't interview any formerly incarcerated students to get their background with RCP which could have provided more personal experiences on the topic. Another limitation is not interviewing any teachers which could have brought forth some interesting information about RCP from their point of view.

### Future Research

This research paper can be beneficial in future research because it illuminates RCP that start in the k-12 system and connects to the school-to-

prison-pipeline the criminal justice system has used to oppress POC.

Furthermore, it can be used to continue to explore racism in the educational system as well as how it pushes the youth towards the school-to-prison-pipeline and grooms them into the adult prison system. It can also be a resource for future researchers to critique which can produce a different outlook on this topic.

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